

UNDERTOW.



● A. HAMILTON GIBBS

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By A. Hamilton Gibbs

GUN FODDER

SOUNDINGS

LABELS

BLUEBOTTLES

HARNESS

CHANCES

UNDERTOW

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BY
A. HAMILTON GIBBS



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PART ONE

Chapter One

As he stepped out of the door of the Pig and Whistle, Philip Hatherley Jocelyn, Master of Arts of the University of Oxford, paused on the threshold.

Dusk and a spattering of electric lights were creeping over the small country town. A thin drizzle turned it all into a minor key.

“Raining again!” he muttered. With his left hand he hung his walking stick on his right forearm. Both hands were needed for that reluctant top button of the many-times-cleaned waterproof. “Is this the thousandth or the millionth time I’ve stood here going through precisely this gesture?”

His eyes went first left, up the street, and then right, down it. He might as well have shut them, for all the difference it made. He could have recited the names, habits and character of every occupant on both sides of that street, in both directions.

He muttered again. “It’s as regular as cleaning one’s teeth, or . . . yes, by Jove . . .” for a breath he paused, then went on with a hesitant rush, as though he had dared himself to put the half-thought into actual words . . . “or going to the bathroom!”

Having said it, he tingled all over, with the sense of having deliberately flung a bomb into the middle of the High Street. He glanced quickly up and down, half expecting everybody to come rushing to the shop doors to see what had happened.

But nobody even noticed him, except the postman, who nodded as he went by on clumping feet, and all he said was, “‘Evening, Mr. Jocelyn!”

Philip Jocelyn sighed with relief. “Good evening, Digby!” he said. Then with an inner chuckle he added to himself, “Heavens, if they only knew I’d compared it all to that!”

He was indeed like a slot-machine that must perforce deliver itself as soon as the penny has dropped. Every day during the week there was the dinning of Latin and French verbs into thick heads in the fuggy classrooms of the small preparatory school; on Wednesday afternoons a brief escape, alone, over the countryside, with a sketchbook concealed in his waterproof pocket; at night, after the indifferent meal, a frantic hunt for a plausible excuse to dodge off to his room and avoid the stodgy conversation of his three colleagues, every one of whose anecdotes and ideas had been worn threadbare. Every Saturday, the silly business of cricket mercifully finished and the small boys led off to gorge themselves with tea and jam, he changed his clothes and hurried down the hill into Uxminster: then, first, a pint of beer, threepence, in a heavy pewter mug,

while he played a hundred up, sixpence, on the rocky old table in the inn parlor with any one of the citizenry who happened to be there. Nine Saturdays out of ten it was the citizen who paid, for Jocelyn had been the Pig and Whistle champion for three consecutive years. Billiards over, there came the pause on the inn doorstep, the smell of corks and sawdust still in his nostrils, and then the buttoning of the waterproof, the momentous decision as to whether he should walk up the street first and down last, saving the bookshop to the end, or whether he should go straight to the bookshop. First or last, there was a ritual to be observed,—not on any account to plunge in right away, but to stand in front of the window and savor the colors of the book jackets, note the more and more exotic use of glaring reds and blacks, yellows and greens, in cubistic contrast. Then, underneath the books, there was always a display of writing pads fitted with blotting paper, of more and more gorgeous self-filling pens that had ousted the old sober black kind clean out of the market . . . lovely things that made one's mouth water. Philip Jocelyn would rattle the change in his pocket and sigh and turn sternly away to the second but equally fascinating window on the other side of the door. There, there were pictures, landscapes in water color, lithographic reproductions of the old masters; occasionally—and it was always a breath-taking moment to see if it had gone—a pencil drawing of his own, signed only with initials and priced humbly at half a crown.

Then at last, with everything accomplished in due order, he was free to go inside. Having passed the time of day with John Sampson, the admirable old gentleman all of whose life had been devoted to the selling of books in this identical shop, Philip Jocelyn would make his way into the back room and reach the crowning point of every Saturday. Ranged on innumerable shelves, without any pretence of order, were thousands of old books, second-hand, third-hand, heaven only knew what-hand, a literary Tom Tiddler's ground, with prices all the way from a pound—the unattainable—to twopence; and at that figure even an assistant schoolmaster could add to his library.

To-night as he came up to the door of the shop and shook off the raindrops from his hat, Jocelyn was still under the influence of the mood that had made him fling his bomb. To look at, there was nothing to distinguish him in any way from the rest of what he called the citizenry. With clothes on, or off, he melted into any crowd, whether in the street or in a swimming bath. There was no prophetic note of originality in the color of either his skin or his tie. His fair hair was parted like everybody else's and brushed in the same way. His features were without eccentricity of eyebrows, nose or chin. Yet there was one element of difference which made him emerge from his otherwise natural camouflage,—the fact that when he walked along, his blue eyes showed a man who was somewhere else, not there at all.

To-night the customary thrill had gone out of the bookshop window. It didn't seem even to matter whether his last week's sketch had been sold or not. Some in-turning thought, springing from nowhere,—but all the same it had interfered with his touch at billiards—was possessing him, had already driven him to a sarcastic comment on his surroundings which was, and he knew it, merely taking out on others the measure of his own self-contempt.

Life—to him the grandest and most significant word in the language—was meant to be lived spaciously, freely, deeply. Yet all that mankind had done was to build cages for itself, and now, like the subjected wolves in the zoo, paced forever up and down, gazing ceaselessly, longingly, but ineffectually, through the relentless iron bars.

There had been Oxford; at the time a seeming basking in the exterior sun. But looked back at now, from the appalling inadequacy of thirty-five, he knew it had been only a mirage, the fostering ground of false visions dissipated at the first contact with the outside world. Like the rest, he had struggled feebly, uttered his faint protest, eyes round with refusal to believe; only at last, while his fellow pilgrims bowed their meek necks beneath the common yoke of grubbing for bread and butter, to find himself a spiritual beachcomber, assistant master in a second-rate preparatory school, to whom unfortunate little animals, whom he himself was helping to cage in their turn, said “Yes, sir!” and “No, sir!” The irony of it, when all the while there was something more, a way out, if only he could discover the secret of breaking through. The thing that he was now was not alive, in the sense of really living. He was nothing but a stale chrysalis, thirty-five years gone, and if he didn't look out he might die in his brittle casing before he had ever lived. Considered aloofly, and not as though he personally were involved at all, he knew that that would be a tragedy, just as John Sampson the bookseller, or, for that matter, Digby the postman, was a tragedy. That was the infernal paradox,—that life ordained that so few people should ever come to life . . .

Ah, well! He sighed deeply, turned his back on it all and walked into the warmth and glow of the shop.

The only people in it were three women thumbing the current novels in the lending library and a girl to whom John Sampson was showing different boxes of fancy note paper engraved with, presumably, her initials. She would have it perfumed and then write to some hefty lad on it; and he, poor fool, would dream of her body and suffer. . . .

Jocelyn knew her and the women as well. In the local interchange of bridge teas it would have been impossible to escape knowing them. As they stood there, he could see them in their drawing-rooms, manipulating teacups,

surrounded by “art” lamp shades, miniature “leaning towers”, imported on their Cook’s tour to Florence and Pisa, cheek by jowl on the mantelpiece with an early Victorian atrocity of a clock, equally atrocious collections of china perched precariously on pieces of furniture which they called “what nots”; every single thing in the room a betrayal of their pathetic desire to really break through.

To-night the mere idea of their small talk rattling about his ears, and having to smile back and say “Yes . . . no . . . really?” stirred him to another revolt. “I’ll be damned if I will!” he muttered; and, assuming a desperate hurry, he raised his wet hat to them generically, nodded to John Sampson, and dived into the back part of the shop.

In that world of old books he was safe from Latin declensions and French irregular verbs as well as from drab people who had the effect of rubbing in his own drabness and futility,—safe also from himself, for in those yellowing pages was a drug which, as surely as a pipe of opium, wafted Philip Jocelyn from the frustrated existence of Uxminster into a contact with minds which had known what he himself was vainly seeking. All his dim perceptions, his undernourished beliefs, his inert and flabby longings, were there carried to full flower. There he could find himself as he would have liked to be, as he occasionally dared to tell himself he really was, but for . . . but for what? Some lacking element that had been denied him?

He sent a frowning glance along the shelves. Twice he paused, pulled out a book, turned over the flyleaf; but each time the answering note did not seem to be there and the book went back. Then a title in French stood out. He murmured it aloud with an upward inflection of self-interrogation. “Le Roi Pausole?”

The old red leather of its binding felt soft and warm to the touch. He read the opening paragraph with a chuckle and then began to turn the pages. As the delicate drawings of startlingly arranged nudity hit him one after the other, he could feel the back of his neck growing red. He glanced up quickly to make sure that none of those women had followed him in. King Pausolus had no kingdom in Uxminster! Then he went back to the beginning and began to read, absorbed, excited, fascinated, repelled. Normally there was a great gulf between Philip Jocelyn’s mind and that kind of book, but this evening it seemed that a bridge had been flung across.

When he finally became aware of time once more, his wrist watch told him that he would have to hurry if he was going to get back to school in time to snatch a few glutinous, lukewarm mouthfuls before dinner would be declared over by the headmaster’s rising and mumbling a grace. Willy-nilly a man must

eat, even though he has discovered treasure. He looked inside the cover for the price, and groaned. It was five shillings. Desperately he fingered the change in his pocket. Would he have to count pennies all his life? Five shillings . . . it would mean cutting down on tobacco again for a month, going without that mug of beer for four mortal Saturdays! All his life he had had to cut down, stint, go without. He had had to crawl through Oxford in the shadow of penury, metaphorically lurking down side streets because he couldn't afford to do the things the others did. . . . Spaciousness, depth,—were they just empty words, high-sounding nothings? And yet, was there any worth-while thing in the world you could ever get without having to give up something else to get it? Faust had to give up his soul, Shelley his life, Romain Rolland his country. Perhaps one day he himself . . .

Jocelyn tightened his grip on the book and hurried over to the cash desk where the bookseller sat quietly going over his figures for the day.

“Look here!” he burst out. “Do you mind if I owe you for this? I'll be able to pay it off in about a month . . . even if I don't have the luck to sell a couple of sketches.”

Old John Sampson reached out a hand and took the book, glanced at the price and handed it back. “Of course,” he said. “I'll make a note of it.”

A surge of gratitude swept through Jocelyn. “Thanks most awfully,” he said. “It's frightfully decent of you. I'm . . . I'm very much obliged. Good night!”

He slid the book into the deep pocket of his waterproof, and as he closed the shop door carefully and went off with long strides up the wet street, his eyes showed that the inner Jocelyn had escaped again.

Chapter Two

THE town of Uxminster lay snuggled into a gentle fold of hills on the border of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. It could not be said to “boast” a population of ten thousand souls because the verb “to boast” is far too active. Nobody cared what the population amounted to. Most of them didn’t know. If a new house went up, or a shop changed hands, it was a subject of nodding speculation for some days and then mental inertia descended once more. What was good enough for their fathers’ fathers was good enough for them. What was the use of trying to stir people up with all these newfangled things they put in the newspapers? Did all the song and dance about India help to get Bill Carter a job, and him with his wife seven months along? Why didn’t they stop all the talk and do something?

And so, summer and winter, the only factory in the community went on turning out its prescribed number of chair legs at so many farthings a dozen, and the greengrocers sold their vegetables, and Bill Carter’s wife’s child was born, and somebody else’s died, and that girl from the linen draper’s got married to the chemist’s assistant—and high time too—and the swing door of the Pig and Whistle opened and shut with the regularity of a baby’s breathing.

The High Street had not in any sense been made. It had come into gradual being through the centuries, conforming to the line of the fold in the hill. The houses on one side were lower than those on the other. The street itself widened and narrowed, turned and then widened again. Houses and shops were mixed indiscriminately, some with bottle-glass windows whose ledges were splashed with bright-colored flower boxes, others with bulging bays; and the roof line was a crazy picturesque jumble of different heights and shapes.

There was a pastry shop and tea room called The Old Brown Cosey. Its upper storey projected beyond the lower; and if any further proof of its being Elizabethan were needed, one had only to turn an appreciative eye on the eight-inch beams that made a rich design all down its front. One of the greengrocers came next, and then the chemist, who would rather have parted with his eyeteeth than the gigantic flagons of colored fluid that threw out emerald and ruby rays when the lights were turned on at night. Across the street was the linen draper and next to him John Sampson’s bookshop; and on the opposite side again was the post and telegraph office, recognizable as such only by a brass plate nailed above the ramshackle door. Its windows were a hodgepodge of gumdrops, sticky homemade sweets, and toys. The only modern note was the movie house, the entrance to which was next to the Pig and Whistle. The auditorium had once been the inn yard, silent since the last coach had rattled out, now noisy once more with the shuffle of many feet and

the pounding of the piano which “accompanied” the months’-old films that eventually found their way there.

The only people who from personal experience knew anything of the outside world were the doctor and the vicar, their wives and daughters; plus the hunting and golf-playing occupants of the dozen or so country estates scattered over the neighboring slopes, who came swooping down into Uxminster for a brief hour to shop for the minor things they had forgotten in London.

The keynote was acceptance, to all intents and purposes apathy. Uxminster was the hub of their universe. If you were born there, you grew up and spent your life there, doing as everybody else did, without questioning, without wonder.

After ten years of it, Philip Jocelyn, an importation, had almost succumbed to its slumbrous rhythm. There was a quality of hypnosis in the untaxing routine of the day’s work, in the unperceived blending of one season into another, in the unconscious response to the instinct of safety which demands the throwing out of roots into the immediately surrounding group life. Because none of his counteracting impulses were sufficiently strong to function from within, and because, hitherto, no outside spur had come to prick him, he had settled down into it as an old hulk settles into the oozy mud left by the receding tide.

Such expressions of self-contempt as he had indulged in on the steps of the inn were few and far between, like the momentarily remembered voice of some one who had died,—some other Philip Jocelyn not quite stillborn.

Physically speaking, his range of experience was nil. He had undergone no bodily danger, no trial of muscle, even, that demands the last ounce and then the little more. He had known no illness such as takes one to the brink of the Styx and leaves an indelible imprint on the mind by establishing a new point of departure. All his days had been petty, his adventures only those timid flutterings of the mind engendered by a beautiful face in the crowd, or by the sudden vision of startlingly white shoulders seen from the front row of the pit. These, after the first moment’s ecstasy, flooded him with fear, angry fear, that made him wrench his eyes away again and again in shame and confusion. Did the woman realize what she was doing,—that by leaving her shoulders naked she made him see her whole body naked? It was more than suggestion: it was a form of prostitution; and, damn her, she had no right to make him feel like that! What was the man next to her made of, that he could go on sitting quietly as though unaware of her? Was it because he was her husband, and therefore a woman’s mere shoulders meant nothing? Or was it because . . . Oh, God, he

must stop! It was dangerous to go on thinking things like that. The flesh was something to ignore, to cover up and hide away, to have nothing to do with at any price. There was something . . . frightening about it, because it went on tugging at you. . . .

So Philip Jocelyn pulled the blinkers down over his eyes, over his mind, and took his romance second-hand, through the pages of books; satisfying his creative instinct, to some measure at least, by brief expeditions on a bicycle from which he returned with sketches of crumbling arches in Norman churchyards, a corner of a market in the Grand'Place at Caudebec, an old tumbled cottage with lilies sprouting out of the thatch.

It never occurred to him to call himself an artist; and yet beauty drew him like a magnet. He could stand speechless, tingling all over, at the sound of a chime of bells rolling over a quiet countryside, at the spectacle of a group of children splashing in a stream, the sun glinting off their wet bodies, at the stupendous majesty of a Gothic cathedral silvered by the moon. These were imperishable treasures, hoarded away secretly as a dog buries a bone, never to be talked about to any one,—because there was no one to understand these things, no one who would do anything else but laugh at him. And perhaps they would be right, after all. It was no part of a man's job to be moved by things like that. All the men who got to the top of the tree, who had their photographs in the magazines, were essentially masculine. They rode to hounds, or shot lions in Africa, or rose up in court and dominated juries by their intensive maleness. None of them seemed to be cursed with his strain of weakness, of . . . of femininity. Was that the word? Was it weakness or femininity which made him want to risk sharing his sense of beauty with some one, which made him desire to talk to some human soul as he had never talked, without self-consciousness, to—yes, by Jove—to throb at the touch of a warm hand clasping his own and come rushing out at last into that unknown wonderland of sympathy and understanding which, after all, only a . . . a woman . . .

Even in the darkness—and he could never have made the confession in daylight—he felt his whole body begin to burn as he went marching on up the hill that Saturday night, his newly bought book banging against his leg with every stride, his back to the lights of Uxminster, his face towards those of the school. The school. . . . He suddenly stopped in his tracks, making an odd sound in the back of his throat as he stared up at its square ugliness, almost as though seeing it for the first time. "I wonder," he muttered, "if it really is a school, or not, after all, a prison?"

Chapter Three

THE school building was of brick,—not the warm red that takes on mellowness with age, but a nondescript, musty, yellow-grey, such as one associates with institutions, homes for the aged, reformatories. Not even a Virginia creeper covering most of the south wall could temper its unloveliness.

In shape the building was a double L. The center consisted of classrooms, dormitory and refectory for the boys. One wing, which had its own entrance, was given over to the apartments of the Headmaster, Mr. Hemingway, his wife, the matron, the chapel and the sickroom. The other wing had a gymnasium on the ground floor, and over it the bedrooms of the three assistant masters who all shared a common bathroom at the end of the passage. Their windows faced the opposite L, so that it was only by leaning out that anything green was visible,—a group of elms, and through them a stretch of ragged grass that was the football field in winter and the cricket field in summer. If they didn't lean out, their view was nothing but the bilious brick.

In the last analysis, the school was Mrs. Hemingway's. It was her brain which had conceived it and her money which had bought it when, for Heaven knows what reason, she had met and married the figurehead of the school. Whether it was through boredom, or a lust for power, or whether she had been really attracted by him as a younger man, it would be hard to say. She met him when he had been down some years from Balliol and, armed with a first-class honors degree, was in the full flush of pedantic English at Cheltenham school. He might have remained there if she had not looked upon him with a favorable eye; and if, also, it had not been common knowledge that her financial position was most enviable: for she was, even then, an ample maiden with what are called billiard table legs, necessitated, presumably, by her volume of buttock and general girth. Without the checkbook, her will power, indomitable as it was, might not have achieved success: but Balliol has long been famed as the Alma Mater of illustrious politicians, and it is the part of a politician not to overlook the beckoning finger of opportunity. James Truslow Hemingway said "Yes," and with that one brief monosyllable hoisted himself up all the intervening rungs of a long and arduous ladder. It had been in some deep recess of his mind that he might sit back and enjoy the spectacle of life with dignity and benevolent neutrality. But beneath the all too generous flesh of his lady lay a driving force that in another frame might have ruled nations. She turned it upon her academic windbag, her good-looking phrase-monger,—and the school at Uxminster came into being; and while her better half most picturesquely, and not without a certain megalomaniacal enjoyment, disported his M.A. gown and his Latin tags among the boys, it was she who procured the

boys, who laid down the rules, who saw that they were obeyed, who hired and fired the less fortunate fag-ends of scholasticism of whom Philip Jocelyn had stuck it out the longest.

On this particular evening, as Philip hurried through the school door and stepped into the economically lit hall, cold and gloomy, with a stone floor, the usual food smells came at him like an offence, tepid and slightly sour. From the corridor that led to what the Headmaster insisted should be called the refectory, came the subdued vibrating hum of a human dynamo,—the clamor of a hundred spoons digging into a hundred plates, restless young feet kicking the supports of long benches, shrill voices all talking at once. . . . Nice youngsters, thought Philip, poor little devils, planted there by shirking parents who, fooling themselves that their children were receiving an education, thanked their gods that they were relieved of damned little nuisances around the house. They neither knew nor cared that many a pillow was wet with tears night after night, that the iron was entering into their small souls. . . . It would make them manly, forsooth! God, if ever he had a son, there would be no preparatory school in his life!

As he stood unbuttoning his raincoat, Philip sighed. In his mind's eye the picture into which he was about to plunge was indelibly engraved. As soon as he opened the refectory door, the smell would be worse and the clamor would become a frightful din. Eyes would be raised from the tables along the walls, the boys would nudge each other and giggle, and from the door he would see the Headmaster's fantastic eyebrows go up while he walked the length of the room to make an unnecessary apology. . . . Those eyebrows! If some Delilah were to cut them off, the school would have to close. They were a part of his capital. He made play with them, used them as marks of exclamation, quotation marks, dashes and parentheses. Probably he practised with them each morning before the glass, like an actor rehearsing the smile that is to captivate the flappers. . . . Unfortunately there was little chance of a Delilah with a pair of shears. Mrs. Hemingway was too alert. . . . If ever the Head knew that "Le Roi Pausole" was within the four walls of the school—presuming that he had ever heard of it—his eyebrows would go up so far that they would probably stick; he would be permanently disabled. . . . The idea made Philip chuckle as he put his coat and hat on a peg. "It tempts me to show it to him!" he muttered. "And I swear he would want to borrow it at that!"

All the same, he arranged his coat so that the pocket containing the book hung inside, invisible.

Then he strode down the corridor; and, as he pushed open the refectory door, received the familiar nauseating smell full in the face. Without a flicker of expression he ran the gauntlet of the boys' tables, catching here and there a

quick excited whisper: “Old Jocelyn late again! Watch him get it now from the Head!”

By the time he reached the high table where the masters ate, commanding the room, there was a faint smile around his eyes. Those kids were right. He would “get it” in one way or another. The Head never missed a chance. . . . He paused behind the Headmaster’s chair and mumbled the accustomed formula, “Sorry to be late, sir!” Then he passed on and sat down next to Davies-Jones, the “math” master, who, as usual, was inhaling his food, solids as well as liquids, beneath a difficult moustache.

As was the custom, each course when it came had been left at the unoccupied place. The soup was stone cold, scummy with floating globules of iridescent grease. As he pushed it silently away and pulled a plate of meat and vegetables towards himself, he glanced at his neighbor to see how far they had got. Jones was sawing with a spoon at a rubbery suet pudding decorated with a trickle of thin red jam. Philip looked away quickly before it made him sick; and then, in some ways mercifully, his attention was caught by the unctuous voice of the Headmaster.

The “Head” was leaning forward with what was intended to be a whimsical smile. “It is, I presume, a fair assumption, Mr.—er—Jocelyn, that your somewhat tardy advent was occasioned by your recognized devotion to the billiard cue?”

A sycophantic grin appeared on the faces of the two other masters. Philip hastily swallowed a piece of underdone beef. . . . Damn the man! He was always trying to keep tabs on everybody. “No, sir,” he said. “I didn’t play to-night.”

The bushy eyebrows were raised and lowered twice. “Indeed! I was unaware that our fair city of Uxminster offered other dissipations,—saving only the ubiquitous cinema! And I can hardly be discourteous enough to entertain even the thought that one of your caliber would indulge in what one might reasonably call ‘housemaid amusement’?”

Philip could feel himself getting angry. As a rule he swallowed it, but to-night that feeling of unrest made him choke with rage. The man wouldn’t “entertain the thought” but he deliberately put a question mark at the end of his sentence, all the same! And then too, “our fair city of Uxminster!” That might go well with visiting parents, but not night after night to them! “You’re quite right, sir,” he snapped. “I wasn’t with the housemaids. If you must know, I was doing nothing more exciting than browse among the old books at Sampson’s.”

Mr. Hemingway smoothed the folds of his M.A. gown. “Ah!” he said, and nodded with satisfaction at having made his point. “What is it our Horace says

. . . *Haud ignara ac non incauta futuri*. . . Of course, friend Sampson's collection can hardly rival the Bodleian . . ." He paused to savor the too ready snicker from his two underlings. "But, after all, if you will permit me a mixture of metaphor, lilies may be found on dunghills."

The "math" master choked. Food was egurgitated from beneath his moustache.

The "Head's" eyes grew round. For a moment he was undecided as to whether to take it as a compliment to his wit or whether it was a local misfortune that had befallen his Welsh colleague. He decided to ignore it; and so, glancing from right to left, as always, said, "Well, gentlemen . . ." and picked up the small wooden mallet which was always laid with his dessert spoon and fork. With it he rapped smartly on the table, thrice.

The shrill voices trailed off into silence. Every face was turned towards the high table. After a due pause, so that his features might shed the alertness proper to social intercourse and take on the solemnity becoming to prayer, the "Head" rose to his feet. Masters and boys rose with him. Every head was bent. Then the sonorous voice of the Headmaster rolled down the room. "*Benedicus benedicat!*"

Not speaking, as was the school rule, but far from silently, the boys filed out of the refectory, along the corridor, and into their respective study rooms.

No longer hungry, but certainly ill-nourished, Philip followed them out. It was his turn of duty that evening. The hardship was not in going without such a meal—he would brew himself some cocoa later—but in being denied tobacco until the end of the evening study. Oh, well, it was all a part of it. . . . But at the hatrack he paused. "Le Roi Pausole" was swiftly tucked under his arm,—like a file smuggled in to a prisoner.

Chapter Four

BY PURE reasoning, an idea once admitted becomes a fact. If, for instance, we grant that violence ought not to exist any more, then there is, inevitably, no longer any violence. The problem is resolved into a simple matter of time.

By the same process, once doubt had entered into the mind of Philip Jocelyn, he ceased to be a hulk on a mudbank. In principle, if not yet in fact, the lusty breezes of the open sea were already upon him. Evidence of it, at first, was nonexistent. Outwardly there was no difference in him. He conformed to the routine of the school as though unaware of the alteration of its status in his mind. He handled the small boys with the usual mixture of firmness and kindness. He ate the unsucculent meals with the same deliberate inattention. His goings and comings to and from the town—except in the matter of doing altogether without beer and cutting down on tobacco until the book was paid for—were as gently inconspicuous as ever. The days slipped by, meaningless and alike as recurring decimals. And yet, when the name of the month had been altered on the calendar, and he went down to the bookshop one Saturday night with three new sketches in a folder, it became evident that one, at least, of the prison bars had been filed.

Old Mr. Sampson nodded thoughtfully as he looked the drawings over. “It seems to me,” he said at last, “that you’re improving. There’s a firmer touch here than usual.” He looked up with a smile. “I think we might almost put your price up to five shillings.”

Philip Jocelyn blushed with pleasure. “Good lord,” he said, “do you . . . do you really think so? I mean, not about the price, but the . . . the improvement?”

Mr. Sampson removed his glasses and wiped them on a white handkerchief. “You’re getting your effects with fewer lines. That’s what tells. In fact, if this shop were in London, I think they would fetch ten shillings. But of course, here . . .” He shrugged his shoulders. “One of these days it might be worth your while to go to London. I could give you a letter to a colleague of mine, if you like. At least, you could show him some drawings.”

“That’s most awfully kind of you,” said Philip. “By Jove, it would be wonderful, wouldn’t it, if . . .” For a moment his eyes were alight. Then he broke off, almost as though he had taken himself by the collar and pulled himself back. It was perfect rot to imagine that he could ever do anything halfway decent. Old Sampson was damn nice, but did he know anything about art? One had to study, to sweat blood. It was ridiculous, out of the question! . . . But if these things would fetch their humble five shillings, it was at least a pace forward.

He gave a laugh and met the old gentleman's eyes. "I'll keep on working, Mr. Sampson," he said, "and if ever I can feel that I deserve that letter, I'll come and ask you for it. Believe me, I'm tremendously grateful to you for even suggesting it."

"That's all right," said Mr. Sampson. "Don't let me hurry you. But whenever you're ready, it'll be forthcoming." He put on his glasses again and tucked the handkerchief back into his breast pocket. "By the way," he added, "I've engaged a new assistant. She's my niece, incidentally, and has been getting a business training in a bookshop in Winchester. You must meet her. Come over with me and I'll introduce you."

With the sketches in his hand he led the way across the shop. His pace, however, was unable to keep up with Philip Jocelyn's glance. All that could be seen of the girl was the top of a head, dark, bobbed and curly, and a pair of foreshortened shoulders, bent over a counter strewn with Christmas cards,—much, thought Philip, as a slim boy herald might have looked as he went down on one knee to adjust his lord's spur.

Mr. Sampson caught her attention. "Millie!" he said. "I want you to meet Mr. Jocelyn. Mr. Jocelyn, Miss Millicent Sampson."

For no reason that he could analyze, Philip Jocelyn was conscious of a pang of disappointment as the girl straightened up. The curly bent head had held such an infinite suggestion of beauty; but the face under it did not fulfill it. She looked rather pale, as though she had anæmia and wanted feeding up. . . . He had got as far as that when she smiled at him and held out a long thin hand.

Almost startled, Philip took the hand. It was as though she had suddenly come to life. The smile changed her completely. It was so friendly and appealing, so honest and straightforward, so . . . what was the word?

"How do you do," he said eagerly. "I'm so glad you've come here." Good lord, what on earth had made him say that? She'd think he was a perfect fool. Cover it up, quick! "It's . . . it's really awfully picturesque if you . . . if you care for that sort of thing." He came to a fumbling halt, as conscious of himself as though he had caught one foot in the other and sprawled in front of her. And then, suddenly, he realised that he was still holding her hand. He dropped it abruptly. With a prayer of thanks, he heard Mr. Sampson begin talking again.

"Mr. Jocelyn's up at the school," he said, "and here are some of his sketches that we are going to sell for him." He spread them out on top of the Christmas cards.

"Oh, please!" murmured Philip. He fingered his tie nervously, wishing to heaven that the old man had left the sketches on his desk; and yet fiercely glad

that he had spread them out before the girl. At least, they gave him a sort of standing. If only she liked them! If only she had a sense of drawing, not of what he had tried to do, but simply of drawing, of art, of things beautiful! Could one expect that of anæmia, and Winchester? Of course not, absurd! And yet, dear God, let her! I don't know why, but I beg You to let her! She . . . She's . . .

The girl looked up from the drawings and fastened earnest eyes on Philip.

"I think they're very pretty," she said, "very pretty indeed!"

Her last word seemed to drop echoing down into an æon of silence. They stood there inanimate, unreal, like figures in a moving picture when the film jams. . . . Fool! He ought to have known. "Pretty." . . . That was all she had, poor little thing! Oh, God, it wasn't fair! They had taken something away, cheated him, pushed him down into it again, down into . . .

At last motion was given back to him. He passed a hand over his face. What on earth was the matter with him? Had he gone crazy? Who was she, anyway? He'd never seen her before in his life; how could it possibly matter what she thought, or didn't think? This idiotic feeling had just swept over him like a wave of grippe or something.

He gave a laugh and moved abruptly. "Oh, do you really?" he said. "That's awfully kind of you. . . . Well!" He turned to Mr. Sampson. "I'm afraid I must be running along. I have some work to do at school to-night. Good-by."

He nodded vaguely in the direction of the girl, and then in four strides was across the shop. At the door he jammed on his hat and went out. The grinding of cart wheels and tingling of bicycle bells assailed his ears, stirred in him a sense of hostility. With a scowl at the people on the pavement who prevented him from walking fast, he stepped into the road. . . . Picturesque, eh? A mud heap. The abomination of desolation! And in all this mob who littered it there wasn't one, not a single one, who had evolved beyond the word "pretty"! . . . It was a confounded nuisance that Sampson had brought his underfed niece! Every time he went into the shop now, he'd have to contort his features into a smile and say some inane thing! The place was ruined! Why the devil hadn't she stayed in Winchester? And, damn it, for a moment she'd . . . she'd got under his skin, made him make a complete and abject fool of himself! "Pretty" . . . Great God!

He flung in through the door of the Pig and Whistle, into the smell of corks and sawdust and corduroys and heavy shag tobacco. At least it was warm and there were many voices and the inviting click of billiard balls.

The barman caught his eye. Philip nodded. By the time he reached the bar, the tankard was ready for him, foam-tipped, cold.

The barman gave him a friendly grin. “Nice night, Mr. Jocelyn!”

Philip uttered a sarcastic laugh. “Yes,” he said, “a hell of a nice night! . . . Oh, well. . . . Good health!” He raised the bitter beer to his lips.

Chapter Five

ON Sundays the boys had to be marched down the hill to church. Although they were nothing but restless little animals, indifferently washed behind the ears, on whom the solemn prayers intoned by the vicar made less impression than the brisk chirping of a sparrow which had built its nest in one of the church windows, nevertheless the rules of society and the school both demanded that the habit of having their souls saved should be forced upon them at a tender age. From eleven to twelve-thirty each Sunday, therefore, while their soft haunches became numbed upon the iron-hard seats, they fidgettingly endured, with neither complaint nor comprehension, this continuation of, perhaps, unconscious sadism on the part of their elders and betters.

On this particular Sunday the only pleasant feature about church from their point of view was that it was "old Jocelyn's" turn of duty,—and old Jocelyn was "pretty decent." He didn't nag a fellow for eating sweets or even going to sleep during the service, provided you didn't snore and woke in time to stand up when the rest of them did.

From the consideration of their salvation, however, it was well that they had no idea of what was passing through the mind of their teacher as he sat there, chin in hand, a very model of religious attention while the vicar's bowdlerizations of other men's repetitions of still other men came rolling in waves of empty sound from the pulpit.

Philip Jocelyn's mind was fastened upon Millicent Sampson. She was sitting just over there, beside her uncle, and out of the corner of his eye Philip studied the contour of her chin, the curl of hair beneath the curve of her hat,—a black hat of that nice soft velvety stuff, rather jaunty too. There was something about the girl . . . or was it, after all, to do with himself? No, because none of the other girls in the town. . . . Then perhaps it was some sort of chemical reaction which, in juxtaposition to himself, this Sampson girl had brought about. That seemed the only plausible explanation when you thought about it; because, physically, she wasn't at all the kind of girl that he would have expected to think about twice,—not a bit good-looking, and yet, in spite of that, she was . . . disturbing. Yes, disturbing!

The thought of her, the visualization of her, he had to admit, had pursued him all the preceding evening like a pleading wraith, like a stray mongrel puppy, large-eyed and slinking, at whom one throws stones half-heartedly, with a sneaking feeling of compassion.

Stray pup? He frowned thoughtfully. Wasn't everybody, more or less, a

stray pup in this life, looking for the unattainable? Why throw stones at her for an unfortunate word? It was nothing but damned intellectual snobbery, perhaps simply wounded vanity . . . and after all anæmia wasn't her fault. He'd behaved like an outsider, going off like that last night! She'd be more than justified if she never spoke to him again. The thought stopped him, pricked him to a reluctant admission of the superficiality, the untruth, of his beatings about the bush. "No, by Jove!" he said to himself. "I'll make her speak to me again, just to see . . ."

Throughout the rest of the service he became as fidgetty as any one of the boys. He kept on looking over at her with a sense of anxiety; and began to plan the best way of getting his infernal kids together and marching them out so that he might synchronize with her exit. If she got away without his speaking to her, it might make all the difference somehow. You could never tell about these things. Some psychological hardening might set in, some obstacle might arrive from nowhere, something might happen to either of them,—and then the moment would be gone. The organ had barely crashed into the opening chords of triumph at the conclusion of the service before Philip Jocelyn leaned over and tapped the end boy in the pew on the shoulder. "Lead on," he said, "and form up in the road outside the churchyard!"

He sat in his own seat waiting, till the last boy was on his way down the aisle, and then, with an assumption of great politeness, let the knot of grown-ups behind the boys proceed first. The maneuver was successful. As he bent down to pick up his stick, purposely forgotten, he saw Mr. Sampson and his niece rise and pass out of their pew into the aisle. By the time he had rattled the stick once or twice unnecessarily and straightened up with it in his hand, they were almost level with him. As though surprised, he raised his eyebrows, nodded and waited for them.

"Good morning!" he said, loudly enough to drive his words through the roar of the organ. "Lovely day!" His eyes were on Mr. Sampson, but, without waiting for an answer, he moved them and looked into those of the girl.

Millicent smiled. "Good morning, Mr. Jocelyn," she said.

Once again her smile had its effect. Philip's anxiety was not only dissipated but into its place there sprang a feeling of expansiveness, of self-content, not entirely unmixed with tolerance. By all rights she ought to have been angry with him, to have given him a nasty dig for the way he had behaved last night. Any woman of brains would have done so,—any woman, that is, not so anæmically inclined.

"Did you enjoy the sermon?" she asked.

Philip Jocelyn shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't even hear it," he said. "I

was too busy thinking about . . . something else. Did you?"

Millicent shook her head. "I suppose it's a dreadful thing to confess, but I only prevented myself from going to sleep by the most heroic effort of will."

Philip nodded approvingly. Really, she wasn't so bad after all. He leaned towards her and lowered his voice. "The vicar's an awfully nice old thing, but one has to admit that he approaches the senile. Twenty years ago, perhaps, there might have been something to bite on in his sermons, but now . . ." He spread an expressive hand; and then, as he observed that the door was only a few paces away, he went on hurriedly. "Look here, I sha'n't be able to stop and talk because I have to lead my infants back to school. But I shall be free in the afternoon. Won't you come and have tea with me?"

Millicent glanced at him quickly, plainly taken by surprise. For a moment she hesitated. Then she said, "Thank you. I think it would be very nice."

"Do you really?" said Philip. "Then let's meet at the Old Brown Cosey at four-fifteen?"

"Very well," she said.

All unconsciously, at her agreement, Philip Jocelyn ceased to look so exactly like an assistant schoolmaster. His shoulders became a shade squarer, his tread firmer, his grasp on his stick tighter, his whole aspect perceptibly less sloppy. The change was suggestive of an old three-master rolling along in mid-ocean under dirty canvas, with peeling paint work, suddenly breaking out a string of colored bunting at her masthead.

"That's delightful!" he said. "I shall be . . . looking forward to it." He held out his hand, desiring the feel of those cool fingers again, if only for a moment, because . . . well, hadn't they struck a sort of bargain, and . . . oh, damn it all, why not . . . just because he wanted the feel of them, even if they were in church.

When she gave them to him he became self-conscious. She might be guessing what was in his mind. In a rush of panic, he said, "I must really dash after the boys. Good-by. Till four-fifteen."

He edged sideways past the remaining people between him and the door; and when he gave the boys the order to march there was a new snap in his voice.

Chapter Six

THE interior of the Old Brown Cosey lived up to its Elizabethan exterior. Downstairs, under the beamed ceiling, was devoted to the sale of buns, cakes, jars of marmalade and honey; and was fragrant with the whetting smell of freshly baked bread. In the far corner a broad winding staircase led up into the tea room, oak-panelled, discreetly dim, arranged in many corners and cubicles. The windows were hung with chintz. The walls had here and there an antique sporting print. The red gleam of well-polished copper lit up the wide mantelpiece above the open fireplace. Each table had its glowing bowl of flowers; and one, against the wall, was covered with all the weekly and monthly magazines. The two girls who “waited” wore old-fashioned caps and aprons. A large black cat, sleek and well fed, moved delicately beneath the tables, or, curled on a chair, received homage with indifferent eyes.

Little by little the reputation of the place had gone beyond the boundaries of Uxminster. Passing motorists, on their way to and from London, had discovered it as an excellent spot at which to pause and get a bite. American families stepped immediately to the other side of the street and took its photograph, only to discover when they went inside that there were free postcards of it obtainable. Hundreds of these had been mailed to Boston, New York, and points west.

When Millicent came up the stairs that afternoon a few minutes before four-fifteen, there were already one or two couples having tea. She had not been there before, and as she stood, hesitating, a waitress came up with a smiling “Good afternoon!”

“Good afternoon,” said Millicent. “I’m waiting for . . .” What should she say? Mr. Jocelyn? Perhaps they didn’t know him. A friend? She could hardly call him that. . . . There was only the slightest pause before she ended up her sentence lamely with the word “someone.”

The waitress nodded. “Then perhaps you’d like to sit down by the fire,” she said. “You’ll find chairs there.”

“Thank you,” said Millicent. What a fool she was not to have come later. With hot cheeks she went over to the chairs by the fire and picked up the first magazine. She didn’t read it however. Once seated, the chair became, in a sense, hers. She was immediately less conspicuous and therefore more at ease. She opened the magazine on her lap and, after a moment, let her eyes venture on a voyage of exploration around the room, broken at each new sound by a recall to the stairway.

It was little more than a minute or so before he came leaping up, two stairs

at a time. He saw her almost before his hand had left the banister and he smiled as he went across the room. "How nice of you!" he said. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting?"

Millicent rose, shaking her head. "I barely had time to sit down before I heard you on the stairs."

"I should have been here at least five minutes ago," said Philip, "if I hadn't happened to run into the Headmaster just as I was leaving, and he insisted on talking."

"Yes, I know," said Millicent. "Things like that always happen just when you don't want them to, don't they? But you're not really late, at all. I was early."

As they stood there looking at each other, a sense of frustration came over Philip. It seemed to him that a fog of inanity was settling down upon them. Neither he nor she had come for that. They had come, indeed, to escape that, to embark together on a voyage of mutual discovery. What did "late" or "early" matter? What was the point of being rooted like a couple of idiots, mouthing imbecilities? "Well," he said quickly, almost angrily, "here we are, anyhow. Let's choose a table. . . . Would you like this one near the fire?"

The place that he indicated was a recess for two made by putting a couple of high-backed pews with cushioned seats at right angles to the wall. By sitting against the wall the cheery crackle of the fire would throw a glow on their faces. It was almost like being in a tiny room with the fourth wall down.

Wondering a little at his sudden gruffness, Millicent smiled. "I hoped you'd pick that one," she said. "My idea of luxury had always been to have a log fire,—just to sit and watch it burn." She took off her overcoat and dropped it on the pew seat, edged around the table and sat down facing the fire.

"She's wearing the same hat that she had in church," thought Philip. "It's nice, but it'd be so infinitely more in the picture if she'd take it off. That jolly wave in her hair. . . . I wonder if I dare ask her. . . ." He dropped his overcoat on top of hers and placed himself at right angles to her, so that he could look at her when she talked. "Aren't you . . ." Good lord, why shouldn't he ask her? "Aren't you going to take your hat off?"

Millicent's eyebrows went up. "My hat?" she echoed. "Why on earth should I? Don't you like it?"

"Yes, I like it awfully," said Philip, "but I . . ." He groped desperately in his pocket for his cigarette case . . . "I thought you'd be more comfortable, that's all." You coward, he said to himself. You colossal ass!

Millicent's eyes fastened upon him interrogatively. Could it be that . . . Her

eyes changed their expression. After a breath of hesitation she pulled off the hat with a quick gesture, shook her head so that the curls became loosened, and then patted them with both hands. "There!" she said. "Do you like that better?"

As Philip looked up and saw what she was doing, his face lighted. "I hoped you would!" he said. "It makes all the difference really. With your hat on, it was so . . . so formal, somehow. And besides, your hair . . . Er, won't you have a cigarette?"

Millicent ignored the case he held out to her. She tried to meet his eyes and failed, dropped hers and asked, "What about my hair?"

Philip took a deep breath and made the plunge. "Well, if you must know," he said, "I think it's perfectly lovely. It's so absolutely alive, so soft and deep. When you touch it with those white hands of yours, they seem to disappear in it and . . ." He broke off, seeing her cheeks begin to flame. "Good lord, I hope I . . ."

With a catch in her throat, Millicent interrupted. "No, don't unsay it. You . . . you surprised me, that's all."

Philip's confusion was as great as hers. He turned away, leaned out of their recess and began peering in all directions. "Where on earth is that confounded waitress?" he muttered. "Does she think we don't want any tea? . . . Ah, here she comes!"

As though the waitress were an ally bringing overwhelming numbers to cover his retreat, he turned and faced Millicent once more,—to become immediately aware that their relationship was on a wholly different plane from the sterile moment of their meeting. In these brief minutes they had established an identity: they already had, as it were, a past,—the link, the memory, of a shared emotion. To his own surprise, the confusion began to ebb out of him. He felt comfortable with her, a warming sense of familiarity.

He laughed. "They have the most succulent toasted buns here," he said. "Don't you think this is just the moment?"

Millicent smiled back. "Nothing else would taste quite so good." She took his cigarette case in her hand, held it for a moment studying his initials engraved in the corner, and then extracted a cigarette. "This looks as if it had seen service," she said.

Philip struck a match for her. "Rather! My father gave it to me on my twenty-first birthday. I've used it ever since."

The waitress appeared at his elbow with a tray on which were tea, sugar, cream and cups. She laid it in front of Millicent and said, "What would you like to eat?"

“Toasted buns, please,” said Millicent.

As the girl departed, Philip’s eyes were still smiling, at ease. “By Jove,” he said, “I maligned her. I thought she’d forgotten all about us.”

Millicent took the large teapot in both hands. “How do you like your tea, Mr. Jocelyn?”

Mr. Jocelyn! . . . damn it. It put it all back again on an Uxminster footing,—“at home first and third Wednesdays”, suburbia rampant! Much better have called him nothing at all, simply said “How do you like your tea?” . . . She was waiting, the pot poised. “Oh, excuse me,” he said. “Strong, one sugar and lots of milk, please.” As he watched her pour it, he went back to his thought. Mr. Jocelyn . . . Miss Sampson,—how futile! He didn’t think of her as Miss Sampson. He thought of her as “you” or “she.” That “Mr.” was like a barbed-wire fence. Everywhere you turned there was always another one of those damned contraptions to rip you. . . . Surely they didn’t need to rip each other. Perhaps, if he pointed it out to her, she’d be willing to pull it down . . . like her hat. . . . “Thanks most awfully,” he said, taking the teacup she held out to him. To take a teacup from a woman! How ordinary a gesture it sounded. And yet it was a miracle, a respite from isolation, from hardness and indifference. It implied gentleness, not barbed wire. It carried with it the suggestion of a grand piano with music on it, of soft lights and an armchair, of familiar rooms upstairs, of sounds in the background that required no translation because their regularity had made them a part of one’s fiber, impregnated with mutual knowledge and growth. . . . He looked up at her as he stirred his tea. The fire was sending gleams through her hair.

“Do you know,” he said, “I’ve got a strong feeling that this is really about the millionth cup of tea you’ve handed me, instead of the first? I suppose it’s got something to do with what they call race-memory,—you know, a sort of projection of an habitual gesture of all one’s ancestors from one’s subconscious into the present moment; but still entirely personal to you and me. And yet, the odd thing about it is the helplessness of it all, the feeling that it is all entirely out of our control. What I mean is that for the last ten years I’ve been vegetating here, and you, presumably were in Winchester. Until yesterday you and I were unaware of each others existence; and now here we are this afternoon together as if the rest of the world didn’t exist. . . . What made me ask you to tea? And what made you come? And, more importantly still, even if you don’t know the answer, are you glad you did come?”

Millicent leaned back with a laugh. “You really are a most extraordinary person!” she said. “You ask a girl to tea, tell her she has lovely hair, then say you don’t know why you asked her, and on top of that demand to know if she’s

glad she came! I begin to see why my uncle said you were not a bit like the other masters at the school.”

A frown came over Philip Jocelyn’s face. To be reminded of the school at such a moment! Was the girl completely out of key?

Millicent saw the change in his expression. She went on quickly. “I can answer your last question though. I am glad I came!”

“Good!” said Philip. “All the other things don’t really matter.” He drank his tea in two gulps and held the cup and saucer out. “May I have some more? Heavens, here are the buns and we’re letting them get cold. I didn’t even notice that the girl had brought them. Let me pour the tea while you eat.”

“I don’t think you’re to be trusted with a teapot,” said Millicent. “You’d spill it all over the tray.”

Philip laughed. “If you could see me negotiating cocoa on a spirit lamp in my room any time after midnight, you’d have to take that back.”

“After midnight?”

“Rather!” said Philip. “That’s the best time of the day, the only time I get to myself. You see, I have to correct the boys’ work after dinner and that takes me till about ten. From that time on I cease to be a nursemaid. I can think what I like, write what I like, read what I like,—and cook cocoa at any hour I like. You’re a night bird too, of course?”

Millicent shook her head as she handed back the cup refilled. “If I weren’t fast asleep by eleven every night, I should do nothing but yawn all next day.”

“Oh? . . . Really?” Once more that sense of jolt. It was strange how they seemed to get along swimmingly for a while and then, suddenly—flop! Like a plane going into an air pocket. Was it because they were just beginning to find out about each other, and therefore the flops seemed to be emphasized, or was it something more basic? . . . No, that was absurd, out of all proportion. Besides, if there were flops, they were more than compensated by her . . . how should he put it? . . . by the sheer magic of womanhood,—the droop of her body, the curve of her throat that had all the softness of velvet. . . . Books were an anodyne, a release to the soul. They took you out on wings, gave you the freedom of all cities. But in comparison with this, they were merely the residue of some one else’s experience, largesse to the mob. This was your own, most privately your own, and every time she touched her hair or smoothed down her skirt with those white hands gave you something that no book could give,—a feeling of wonder, almost of awe, of impending spaciousness and depth, of being touched for a moment by life. . . .

Her laugh, rather oddly pitched, broke in on his thoughts. “May I have one

more cigarette while you finish your dream? Then I must go.”

Philip came to with a start. “Cigarette? Oh, good idea.” He began to grope in his pockets for the cigarette case.

“It’s on the table,” said Millicent shortly.

“Oh, of course,” said Philip. “Here!”

Millicent’s eyebrows went up. “Do you often get . . . bored like that?”

“Bored?” Philip blinked with surprise. “What on earth do you mean?”

Her only answer was to pick up her hat and pull it on, extinguishing her hair. Then she reached out for her coat.

Every gesture made it all too clear that he had offended her, piqued her small vanity. He wanted to laugh, because it was ridiculous, because she was so far from understanding. He wanted to tell her so, roughly; but some inner need took fright and drove him leaping in. “Oh, please!” he said. “Don’t go! I’m most awfully sorry I went off like that. It shows you what an ass I am. But I . . . I took you with me . . . really! I was thinking about you, all sorts of things about you. Won’t you put down your coat and give me just one more cigarette?”

For a definite moment the muscles of her arm remained rigid,—a moment which stretched itself out before them like a fork in the road. And again an inner prompting made Philip speak. “It’ll mean so much,” he said, wondering at his own voice, at the choice of words which was not his.

Visibly the hard arm became soft, dropped away from the coat and relaxed at her side, palm upward upon the leather seat.

For two pounding heartbeats Philip remained staring at that submissive hand, struggling to call back his imagination which went leaping ahead. “Very well,” said Millicent. “You shall have your one cigarette.”

He looked up quickly. She was smiling at him,—as though she hadn’t been annoyed at all, as though it was just a trick. Damn it, was it a trick? Ought he to get angry and tick her off? . . . His eyes became caught at her throat. He nodded, almost humbly, and said, “Thank you!”

Chapter Seven

THE word that presently ran up and down the High Street of Uxminster varied in phraseology with the different social levels. In the Pig and Whistle it was as simple and direct as the sawdust and the spittoon. "Jocelyn's got a girl!" There was a snicker. Eye went to knowing eye. Whereupon the bartender, arbiter of everything from bets to forcible ejections on Saturday nights, rescued the topic from possible ribaldry and set his royal seal upon it. "For crissake why not? 'E's all right, see!"

At the linen draper's another angle was revealed. The blonde girl with the glasses and adenoids remarked with bitten-off words, "That Millie Sampson's got a nerve! She'd ought to have gone into the movies. Thinks she's a proper Pola Negri, she does. Only 'ere a month and Mr. Jocelyn's fair moonstruck about her!"

Whereupon her darker colleague smiled icily. "Reely! Why don't you go and get a job in the bookshop yourself? I'm sure you could show her up!"

Farther along the street where a brass kettle simmered on the hob and one gentle voice asked, "What are trumps, my dear?" the answer was a little laugh. "Hearts, appropriately enough. I was just asking Mrs. Jennifer if she'd heard about Mr. Jocelyn and Mr. Sampson's niece. Altogether a romance, I'm told. It seems too bad that one of our own girls . . . But then, these things are never made to order, are they? And she seems to be quite nice!"

All unconscious that the case of Millicent and himself was considered a *fait accompli*, and that the peal of not too distant wedding bells was in every ear, Philip Jocelyn had barely made the first step towards analyzing his own emotions.

In the classroom her face got between him and the blackboard full of irregular endings of verbs—that much he recognized—although it was not her face as it actually was, but as it seemed to him, colored by his idea of her. The real Millicent was as unknown to him as an iceberg sighted by a ship five miles away. She was indeed the girl who worked in her uncle's shop, who had had tea with him, who had twice been out walking with him over the countryside, who greeted him evening after evening when he went into the shop; but she was a Millicent overlaid with Philip's imagination, a lay figure onto which he had draped the tissue of his desire, a woman almost wholly of his own creation. And, in the manner of every artist looking upon his finished canvas, he was not satisfied with it.

In the seclusion of his monastic room, in which he could tramp only six paces between the bookshelf and the bed, and seven and a bit from the door to

the table under the window, Philip Jocelyn went up and down for many nights, trying to grasp what had happened. All his inhibitions prevented him from getting straight down to bedrock and admitting that he was in love. Perhaps he wasn't, but like a frightened horse he balked away from such a cataclysm. He was willing to admit only that he was "interested in her", that she was "attractive", that she was "in his mind a good deal"; but as to being in love, that was ridiculous. She didn't know anything. She was always saying or doing something at precisely the wrong moment, which was as exasperating as if one had suddenly touched a nettle. And yet, it was true that Uxminster was no longer Uxminster. The sleepiness, the aimlessness, had gone out of it. Every day now had an objective,—to go into the bookshop, with or without an excuse, and see Millicent for a minute or two, just see her. It didn't matter if she was busy with customers. In fact, in some ways it was better when she was. Then he could watch her, while he passed the time of day with old Sampson, and go on to the Pig and Whistle all keyed-up for a game of billiards.

As he started the water for the midnight cocoa on a small spirit lamp on the washstand, and went to the cupboard for the condensed milk and sugar, he frowned to himself. "Why does she irritate me so when I'm with her? I've seen her practically every day for a month, so I know her now, know her really well, and yet . . ."

He came back, milk in one hand, sugar in the other, but as he put them down on the washstand, a flood of color came into his face, as though an answer had suddenly descended like a revelation.

"My God!" he murmured.

Clasping and unclasping his hands behind his back, he resumed his pacing. Could that be it? In what book had he read the theory,—of subconscious antagonism between the mutually attracted male and female who had not yet mated?

For many minutes his mind was sidetracked from the personal equation while he groped to remember when and where he had read it. As a rule, he flattered himself, he kept his reading fairly well classified in his mind, could dig in when called upon and produce both author and title together with the desired quotation. To-night, in his condition of perturbation, the nearest he could get to it was a muttered "one of those German psychologists."

Then, timidly, he came fluttering back to a hesitant consideration of the theory in relation to Millicent and himself. The question of attraction was undeniable, already admitted; and therefore the theory might certainly explain a great deal, if the word antagonism could be interpreted as what he had called

irritation. Would that all disappear if . . .

He stopped. The word mating was so curious. Its definition might suggest companionship, marital or not—after all, the working man called his assistant “mate”—but it also had the more significant connotation of dominance, of crushing. For instance, one mated one’s opponent’s king at chess; in other words, you defeated him, smashed him. Mating was therefore preëminently to conquer,—which explained the theory of antagonism, the one for being withheld, the other in recognition of eventual submission. It became therefore a brutal word, given a false glamor by the poets. How could one be willing to use it in regard to a girl like Millicent, any girl indeed? . . . But, leaving the word out, it certainly looked as if the theory fitted in with the facts. It was more than probable that . . .

A sound of hissing and crackling penetrated to his consciousness. The water was boiling over on to the flame. He hurried to the washstand and rescued it. Then he put three spoonfuls onto the cocoa in his cup and began to mash it into a liquid paste. When it had assumed the desired condition of smoothness, he slowly added more water, stirring all the time, until the cup was full. Then he took up the can of milk, punctured with two holes in the lid, and squirted a trickle into the cocoa. Finally he put in a lump of sugar. . . . Where was he? Something was more than probable. . . . Oh, well, it didn’t matter. The whole point was that he had put his finger on the probable root of that aftermath of emptiness. Which being so, what next? . . . With an accustomed hand he carried the brimming cup to the table, short-stepped, concentrated; but, as usual, was unsuccessful. His cocoa slopped over into the saucer, half filling it.

“Damn!” he said; and then chuckled. “How she’d pull my leg if she could see that!”

Gingerly, and with precautionary blowings, he imbibed a teaspoonful at a time until the lowered level permitted him to pour the overflow back in to the cup.

Then he sat down in the armchair and began to fill a pipe, a curved cherry wood, which invariably snorted and gurgled and which cost him half a box of matches every time he smoked it. Once, on the plea of economy, but actually as a herd-minded gesture—everybody seemed to be flashing them about—he had invested in a lighter. After wrestling with it ineffectually for a trying period of three weeks, he had formed the opinion that they were nasty messy gadgets, entirely beyond the scope of anybody but a mechanical genius. Instead of throwing it away, however, his years of lights-turned-down made him put it carefully in a drawer. After all, it was as good as new, and some day

it might come in useful, as a Christmas present, for instance, to some one who could work the stupid things. He struck a match. The pipe began its stertorous wheezing, from time to time he swallowed a mouthful of cocoa. Presently he muttered, "I'm thirty . . . let me see, five . . . good lord, nearly six! Am I a damn fool if I . . . She can't be a day over twenty-seven . . . but after all she does come out with me. I suppose if we . . . I mean, I suppose if I moved out into a cottage, they'd raise my salary a bit. One could get a cottage for about a pound a week. And then, the drawings would bring a bit extra. That, and the few hundreds I've got saved away. . . . Hardly a palace, of course, but we could grow some flowers, and I could take my shelves for the books. . . . My God, just think of it! Swallows rocketing, the sun just dropping behind the hill, that swooning stillness of summer, and she and I . . . working, feeling, growing, suffering sometimes, but always for one another. That would be living, really living . . . wouldn't it?"

As he drew the picture, he had unconsciously clasped the cup in both hands, staring down into it unseeing, sipping as he paused at each new angle of thought. But finally, when the last line had been put in, he squirmed as the after-twinge of doubt shot through him,—that same after-twinge, fear in disguise, which had clogged his footsteps all through life. This time, however, there was a greater urge in opposition. He raised the cup and gulped down the last mouthfuls as though in a fever to get rid of it. "Damn it, it would!" he insisted, and slammed the cup down on the table, as though slamming doubt on the head. He struggled up out of his chair, knocking his pipe on to the floor as he did so, and catching his foot in his dressing gown. His cheeks were flushed; excitement came into his eyes.

"By God," he said, and ran a hand through his hair, leaving it all straggled, "I'll tell her . . . I mean I'll ask her to-morrow!"

Chapter Eight

THE wintry fields were bleak and unkindly. It was not actually raining, but one of those heavy mists made everything as wet as if it were. The hedge on either side of the road dripped gently and there was a monotonous incessant patter of drops from the naked branches of the trees on to the soddened decaying leaves below. Here and there, a distant crow barked irritably and went off on heavy blue-black wings as Philip and Millicent came crunching side by side along the muddy gravel road. The collars of their rainproofs were buttoned under their chins. The end of an orange woollen scarf, sticking out at Millicent's waist, made the only warm spot of color in that lugubrious landscape.

The weather and the desolation of the countryside would have affected any but English people. These two hardly noticed it. They had grown up with it, knew nothing else, were a part of it all; and had started out from Uxminster completely undeterred by the lowering sky. They had planned to walk over to Little Kimble, three miles away, and have tea in the inn there. What did a possible wetting matter; and besides—Philip risked a glance at the girl's face—somehow or other, when they reached the inn, he'd got to . . . to tell her! His mind was made up! He caught his breath and swallowed, drily, the palms of his hands all sweaty.

Striding along in her thick-soled brogues—the kind whose split-ended tongues flap over the instep—Millicent's skin was rosy in the cold air, like a ripening peach that has acquired the first suggestion of a blush. A curl had apparently worked its way to freedom from beneath the blue beret and was rioting at the side of her face. Apparently a little excited at being “taken up” by Uxminster society, she was well started in a description of a bridge party at Mrs. Jennifer's. This Jennifer bridge made her third invitation now and she began to feel that she really belonged. They had been awfully nice, and although, of course, it was entirely due to her uncle, didn't Mr. Jocelyn think that it was a little bit for herself too?

Hardly aware of what she was saying, Philip caught at the final words of her question and grunted the right answer. “Of course,” he said, and then the monologue began again. . . . His mind was made up! But was it? How could one possibly know whether to go forward or backward? Once he . . . told her, that is, asked her, all his boats would be burned. It would be irrevocable, final. Why was he doing it? What magic was there in this girl that drew him on? Why did the mere consciousness of her walking beside him with that spot of bright orange and the faint smell of jasmine, make him feel as contented as a kitten full of milk and at the same time as discontented as an outcast? Why did her chatter about that inane tea fight exasperate him if he paused to analyze it,

and yet give him infinite peace merely to hear it, and see it, come out of her mouth? She was there, beside him, alive, warm, feminine; and it was good, wonderfully good. . . . What was the use of boggling, of funking it, of pandering to that damnable questioning which always made him try and see all round a thing and out the other side? Wasn't it better to make mistakes than make nothing at all? It was like standing on one foot forever, afraid to put the other down because something might happen. It was damn silly! He was sick to death of it!

Without the slightest warning he changed his stick to the other hand so that the one next to her was free. With it he seized her hand. "Stop talking for a minute, will you?" he said. "I want to say something to you!"

Startled by his sudden interruption, which sounded very like a command, Millicent was even more startled by the capture of her hand. Except when shaking hands at meeting or saying good-by he had never touched her, not even by accident. That was one thing she had always hated about some of "the boys" at Winchester,—whenever they helped her on with her coat after the movies they deliberately slurred a hand down her shoulders or touched her waist on the pretext of "helping" her through traffic. It was beastly. Mr. Jocelyn wasn't like that. . . . But now . . . he was holding her hand so tightly it almost hurt . . . not quite, but still she couldn't possibly pull it away . . . not even if she wanted to. . . . Suppose some one was watching them!

Her heart was banging against her ribs. She turned her head quickly to make sure that no one was seeing them from behind. Then, as her head came back, she snatched a look at Philip Jocelyn's face. He was staring in front, white and set. . . . So it was that! . . . For a moment her mind slipped away. She saw herself after the movies one night, struggling on the doorstep of her home with a tall dark boy whose arms were like ropes around her body and who was desperately trying to kiss her lips while she arched her body backwards and wriggled like an eel, hating him, ashamed. He was saying things, jerkily, and his voice was thick, like treacle, terrifying because of what it did to her inside. . . . She came back with a shiver to the muddy road, the empty fields, and Mr. Jocelyn—Philip!—and felt oddly safe. She obeyed his order and said nothing, marched along in step, her hand in his, a queer little smile at the corners of her lips.

Like an inexperienced diver forcing himself to go off the highest platform, Philip was poised on the edge of action, frozen-lipped, his heart pounding, his mind a blur, self-conscious to the point almost of the elimination of Millicent. The feel of her hand . . . or was it his own? . . . was entirely different. He might have been grasping a hot coal.

She's thinking what an ass I am! She's right. I am an ass, a colossal ass! Why the devil can't I say it and be done with it? . . . "Look here!" he said aloud, and felt a desire to laugh because his voice was so absurdly unlike his normal tone, "look here, I know you think I'm a perfect fool because I go mooning off all the time, and as a matter of fact I entirely agree with you!" He laughed excitedly. "But I happen to . . . to be in love with you, do you see? If the . . . if the idea doesn't strike you as altogether preposterous, do you think you could . . . could possibly . . . marry me?"

He stopped and was appalled at himself. What a way to put it! What inadequate drive! Why hadn't he said that he wanted to put his head on her breast and forget everything, all the drabness and nothingness; that to be loved by her would be to come to life, to emerge from the shadows, to stand upright. . . . Why had he been bound instead by that school-mastery blither, that eternal funk of saying anything real? It was another failure to chalk up, in line with the futility of his whole existence, with the . . .

He felt a tug at his hand. For the first time he dared to look at Millicent and saw her eyes. There was a glow in them.

"I don't think it's as preposterous as all that," she said.

Philip blinked. "Then perhaps . . ." Her meaning began to break through. He stopped and jerked her to a standstill, stood there in the mud and mist, staring down at her. Her breath went floating away in a series of quick tiny clouds,—his own too, but that didn't matter. There was something wonderful about hers. . . . He put out his other hand to touch her, then drew back. "You're . . . you're not making fun of me?"

Millicent smiled. "Do I look as if I was?"

Philip gasped. "Then we . . . I mean . . ." He gave a queer throaty laugh, bent forward stiffly and touched her lips with his own. . . . "My God!" he muttered. Then awkwardness dropped from him. His arms went around her and he kissed her mouth, her cheeks, her eyes. "I love you . . . I love you! . . . I've been waiting for this all my life . . . I didn't know . . . Millicent!"

At first Millicent clung to him, pressed herself to him, but presently her eyes went up and down the road. She tried to push away from him. "Oh, Philip! You mustn't! Somebody might see us!"

But Philip held her tightly, threw his head back and laughed. What did these things matter when you were standing on Parnassus? This was his moment at last and nothing could cheat him of it. This was depth and spaciousness, enchantment and wonder, the whole world a raging fire, and time was standing still for them. . . . "What do I care? Let them see us! Isn't love the most achingly beautiful thing there is? They would envy us, the poor

devils!”

“Yes, but Philip. . . . Really!”

Philip looked into her eyes. There was something there he must find. “Don’t you feel it too? Aren’t you soaring into the blue? . . . Look, there’s not another human soul within miles. We might as well be on a desert island with only palm trees and rocks. We might be, we are, the only man and woman left in the world! Kiss me!”

“That’s all very well,” said Millicent, “but this is a main road and a motor may come tearing along at any minute!”

Philip could feel her muscles begin to get hard. A shadow came into his mind, into his eyes. He shook his head to try and get rid of it. “All I ask is one more kiss!”

Millicent smiled. She was all soft now. “One, then!” she said. “It’s a bargain!” She reached up and pressed her warm lips to his.

The perplexity remained in Philip’s eyes. A bargain. . . . Did love bargain too? Slowly, wonderingly, he took his arms away from her. Were they trying to cheat him, after all? She was so terribly far away. . . .

Chapter Nine

JOHN SAMPSON got up from his desk as Philip Jocelyn entered the bookshop and went to meet him. Instead of the usual friendly nod and quiet “Good evening”, the old man held out his hand. “My dear boy,” he said, “Millie has told me. I’m very glad,—if a little surprised.”

Philip could feel himself redden. What was one supposed to say on an occasion like this? “It’s awfully kind of you . . . Really, I . . . I . . .”

The old gentleman ceased pumping Philip’s hand up and down. “I can only believe that you’ve weighed this step most carefully. It’s a fine thing for Millie, a remarkable thing. I’ve written to my brother and his wife to tell them. They’ll be coming over to meet you and I am confident that they will feel as I do.”

Brother and his wife? Philip blinked. Good lord, what was all this? The old man; yes, of course. He was her uncle. But these others. . . . Heavens, they were her father and mother. He’d never thought about them. They hadn’t existed. It would mean an appalling lot of handshaking and blither of that sort. Lord! . . . Where was Millicent, anyhow? His eyes went round the shop.

John Sampson smiled. “She’s upstairs. I told her to go up early. She’s waiting for you. . . . My boy, there’s one thing I want you to remember always, that fundamentally she’s a good girl, very simple and kindly. She hasn’t had the advantages of an education such as you have had, but you’ll find that she has all the qualities for making a good wife.” He held out his hand again. “I hope, indeed I’m sure, you’ll be very happy.”

There was a genuineness about the old man’s solemnity that touched Philip. He felt all lumpy in his throat, smiled and gripped his hand hard. He had always been so friendly, and now, by Jove, he knew, he understood. They had become partners, allies, as it were, as though about to undertake a crusade together. “It’s wonderful, isn’t it?” he said. “I feel as if I’d never understood anything before. The focus is entirely shifted. All the perspectives are different. I . . . I don’t know where I am.” He gave a laugh. “But anyhow, you can rely on me to do my damndest.”

John Sampson cleared his throat and patted Philip’s shoulder. “I know. I know,” he said. “And now don’t waste precious moments by talking to me. Go upstairs. I shall see you at supper. We’re counting on you to stay.”

“I should love to,” said Philip.

John Sampson beamed. “You’re one of the family now, you know. . . . This way up. I’ll show you.”

It amounted to promotion. Philip had never been above the shop before. He found himself being ushered through a door between the old book department and the main store. A staircase faced him which led up to another door.

“All you have to do is to tap and she’ll open it for you.”

“Thank you,” said Philip.

He went up, two at a time; and then, hand poised to knock, his heart in his mouth, stood listening. She was singing in there. Suppose it had been the cottage . . . and he was returning home after school? She would be singing like that waiting for him. . . . God, I thank you. This at last is real. All my days and ways have been bound in ego. Now I can pour out all that I have, all that I am, on this woman whom I love, who is to become a part of me, and I of her. You have brought her from Winchester that we may search together. . . .

The singing had stopped. Suddenly the door opened. Millicent stood there round-eyed. “What on earth . . . I knew it must be you coming up. What are you standing there for? Why didn’t you knock?”

Philip put a finger to his lips. “Ssh! . . . Won’t you go on singing? I was . . . just listening.”

Millicent laughed. “You old silly!” she said softly. “Come along in.”

Philip went into the small living room, hat in hand, as though setting foot within the high altar of the cathedral at Rouen. He stood for a moment looking at her. When he spoke his voice was almost a whisper. “Look . . . I’ve brought you a pledge, a symbol. It is the forerunner of that other circle which . . .”

He broke off. His fingers had been groping in the pocket of his coat. But they did not come in contact with the little box that contained the ring. Greatly perturbed, with beads of sweat breaking out on his forehead, he dropped his hat to the floor and began feeling wildly in one pocket after another. Heavens, if it were lost! It was not the fact that he had cashed the biggest cheque that he had ever written in order to buy it. That was completely insignificant. His imagination went rioting. The ring, as he had said, was a symbol. The loss of it was equally symbolic, possibly prophetic—as though their happiness might be lost with it.

Millicent smiled, the picture of calmness. “Wait,” she said. “You’ll never find it like that.”

“Oh, God!” cried Philip. “It’s gone. It’s not there, I tell you. It must have dropped out of my pocket on the way. I know I had it with me. I distinctly remember it sitting in the middle of my table and I picked it up and put it in . . . this pocket.” He suited the action to the word and dived once more into his right-hand pocket. A look of agony followed the gesture. “I’ll never forgive

myself!" he said.

Millicent stepped up to him. "I don't believe you've lost it at all. Let me find it. It's in a box, I suppose. . . . Now stand still and don't move. I'm going to search in every single pocket." She began with the right-hand coat pocket. "Well, it certainly isn't there." She stepped around and tried the left. "Nor here. . . . Now your waistcoat." Her slim fingers investigated each one of the four waistcoat pockets. She bit her lip. There came a touch of crispness into her comment. "It seems to me you really are careless. . . . Now how about the inside of your coat?"

Philip shook his head miserably. "I never keep anything in there except drawing pencils."

Millicent jerked his coat open. "We'll see about that," she said shortly, and thrust a hand down. "Ah!" Her face relaxed. "This must be it." She brought up a small cardboard box and stepped back in triumph.

"Thank heaven!" said Philip. He took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

All sparkles, Millicent whipped the lid off the box. "Ooh! . . . It's a darling! I hope it's the right size. . . . It is!" She held her hand out and looked down at the ring gleaming on her finger. "How did you know it would fit? Not from previous experience with other girls, I hope. . . ." She laughed, but there remained a hint of question in her eyes.

Philip dropped his own eyes to the floor. He didn't want her to see what she had done. Of course, she didn't really mean it. It was her idea of humor. But what a frightful thing to say, to think. . . . It was all his fault. If only he hadn't lost the ring, he could have put it on her finger as he had planned to do, instead of her grabbing it and putting it on herself. But he mustn't blame her. On no account must he blame her. It was he who was such a clumsy fool that he had spoiled everything. . . . He felt her arms slide around his neck, and then her soft lips found his. . . . Ah, he needed that! It washed all the rest away. It was forgotten already. She was back again.

Before he could hold her to him, she withdrew herself. "There!" she said. "I think the ring's lovely and I'll always, always wear it. . . . And now I must dash out into the kitchen, or else the supper will be spoiled. You've got to stay to-night. Did Uncle tell you?"

Philip took a deep breath. She went so quickly from one mood to another. It hardly gave him time. . . . He nodded. "Can't I help?"

Millicent shook her head vigorously so that the dark curls flapped from side to side. "I'm going to show you what a marvellous cook I am! You sit

down and read the paper, and in a little while you'll see."

She threw him a smile. Philip followed her with his eyes until she disappeared into the kitchen. . . . If only he hadn't lost the ring! He shook his head, sighed; and then, instead of sitting down, he began to move around the room. He only got as far as the first bookcase. Lovely bindings caught his eye and, before he knew it, he was sitting on the floor, surrounding himself with growing piles of all the editions that he had dreamed of and never been able to afford.

Presently he smiled and muttered, "If I'd only known it, I'd have become a bloated bookseller instead of a measly schoolmaster!"

Out in the kitchen Millicent broke into song once more; but it was no longer the spontaneous outburst that it had been when she was alone. She was doing it for Philip, doing it to be admired; and in consequence it took on a quality of insincerity which defeated her object.

Philip didn't even hear her. His sense of touch, as well as that of vision, was being satisfied as he went slowly from one book to another. He was so absorbed that the opening of the door and the entrance of John Sampson didn't make him look up.

But the old man chuckled at the sight of him. "Ah, my boy, so you've discovered them for yourself, eh?"

Philip's head came up with a jerk. "Hullo! It's you. . . . By Jove, I've found myself full of envy, hatred and all malice. They're wonderful."

John Sampson nodded. "They represent my life," he said simply.

Philip remained looking at him intently, as though he had never really observed him before. Then he said, almost to himself, "You too, eh?" So here was another man who, for the one worth-while thing, had made the sacrifice of everything else. . . . What would his own sacrifice have to be for Millicent? Would it be moral, physical, or both? And hers for him? Must she be called upon too? Perhaps he might be able to save her, take hers upon himself, do double duty, as it were. . . .

John Sampson put his head in at the kitchen door. "What about supper, Millie, my dear? Philip and I are getting as hungry as hunters."

Philip's eyebrows went up. "Philip" eh? He looked across at the old man.

"Good," he said. "That tears a wall down. Suppose I align myself with Millicent and call you Uncle John?"

John Sampson beamed. "Of course," he said. "Of course. We're all pulling together now."

Millicent's high voice came floating in. "Philip, you can come and help me carry dishes now. Supper's all ready."

"Coming," said Philip. He scrambled to his feet.

"Don't bother about the books," said John Sampson. "I'll look after them."

"Thank you," Philip left the old man on his knees, carefully replacing them volume by volume, and hurried into the kitchen. Millicent was wiping her hands on a towel. She looked flushed, glowing from the heat of the oven,—adorable, thought Philip. He went over to her and said in a stern whisper, "Lift up your chin!" As she did so, surprised, he bent down and kissed her moist throat.

Millicent stepped back quickly, even more flushed, a look half of excitement, half of embarrassment in her eyes. "Don't!" she said. "You mustn't be . . . silly, like that."

"Silly?" echoed Philip. "But, good lord . . ." His outstretched hands dropped. It felt as if something had shrivelled up inside him.

Millicent wouldn't meet his eyes. "Here!" she said curtly. "Take this in," and put a large dish with a leg of lamb into his hands.

Philip carried it into the other room and plumped it down on the table.

"Ah!" said John Sampson, rubbing his hands. "That looks good."

"What? . . . I mean, yes, of course. Magnificent!" Philip turned away abruptly and went back into the kitchen. Without a word to Millicent, or a look at her, he picked up two vegetable dishes and carried them away. . . . Silly? . . . And then there had been that frightful thing she had said about the ring. What did it mean? What queer barrier was there? Why should she be ashamed of having her throat kissed . . . her throat! Was she merely one of those stupid prudes. . . . No, take that back! He didn't mean to think that. It had escaped before he could stop it. Perhaps it was because the old man—Uncle John—was in the next room. The "Uncle John," coming as glibly, brought a twinkle to the edge of his eyes. It helped him. After a moment he shrugged his shoulders and muttered, "Of course, that was all it was." He went back for the plates. She was dabbing on powder in front of a mirror. "I'm awfully sorry, Millicent," he said. "I didn't mean. . . ."

She swung around and flashed a radiant smile at him. "No, no!" she said. "You were . . . perfectly right. . . . Now we're all ready for supper. Come along!"

And she hurried out into the dining room, leaving him to follow with the plates in his hand and in his head a whole set of new elements to the equation.

Chapter Ten

THE meal was an odd one. It seemed as if all three were conscious of strain.

Whether it was on account of Uncle John's presence or whether it was because he was still trying to puzzle out Millicent's attitude, Philip found himself totally unable to make conversation with her. . . . So he talked books with her uncle, until she, unable to join in, called attention to herself with high laughter. Thereupon both men, with innate sympathy perhaps, did heavy spade work to unearth a subject in which she could be at ease with them. But apparently her one desire was to show Philip off to her uncle, to exhibit the captive of her bow and spear.

John Sampson, sensing the discomfort behind Philip's reluctant monosyllables, endeavored to compensate by plying him with further large helpings of food; and at last rose with relief from the table and produced a bottle of port and a box of cigars from the sideboard. "Millie, my dear," he said, "let's have some coffee to-night, as well. This is an occasion and we should be foolish not to make the most of it."

"I've thought of it already," said Millicent. "The coffee should be ready now. I'll just clear the dessert plates away, and then we can luxuriate in comfort. . . . No, you sit still, Philip. I'll do it. It won't take a moment."

John Sampson held out the cigar box. "Try one," he said.

"Thank you," said Philip. "I hope they're not too strong though. It's a long time since I've smoked a cigar."

"These wouldn't hurt a baby," said John Sampson. He poured out three glasses of port and put one at each place. "There!" he said. "We'll drink a little toast. I like to keep up the old traditions. Think what a speech Mr. Pickwick would have made to-night!"

As he said it, Millicent returned with coffee and cups on a tray. "Good heavens, Uncle John," she cried; "surely you don't mean to give us one of your Dickens' impersonations! I don't think we could stand that,—could we, Philip?"

Philip's eyebrows went up. "My dear," he said quietly, "your uncle is a man of parts. If he's in the mood to out-Pickwick Pickwick, I should be charmed and flattered to hear him. But as you don't feel like it, I know that he hasn't the slightest intention of doing it."

At this answer, a twinkle appeared in John Sampson's eyes. After one quick look at his niece, he began to make a great business of lighting his cigar. He nodded, coughed, blew out a billow of smoke, and said, "Not the slightest!

Not the slightest! All I'm going to say . . ." He picked up his glass and looked to see that they had theirs . . . "is that I congratulate you both and drink to the success of your great adventure. Millie! . . . Philip!" He touched each glass in turn, waited until they had also touched glasses, took a sip and sat down.

Millicent went round and kissed the top of his head. "Thank you, Uncle dear. That was much nicer, wasn't it, Philip? . . . And now," she went on, as though having successfully relegated the unimportant to where it belonged, "and now I want you two literary men to put your minds to work on the announcement. I'll get a pencil and paper, and you can both make suggestions."

As she went to the writing desk in the corner, Philip looked at John Sampson as though in search of his ally. But the bookseller was studying the end of his cigar. So Philip watched Millicent as she walked back to her chair and placed a sheet of paper by her coffee cup.

"Well," she said, "I'm all ready."

"Announcement of what?" asked Philip.

Millicent laughed and flashed her ring at him. "Of our engagement, silly!"

Philip ran a hand through his hair. If only she wouldn't use that word. "Silly" was the sort of word a couple of washerwomen might use at badinage. He pushed it aside and went on. "But that's a sort of public proclamation, isn't it? What on earth's it got to do with anybody but you and me and Uncle John?"

Millicent looked at him, round-eyed. "Why, how stupid you are. All our friends have got to know, haven't they?"

"Have they?"

"Of course. What do you suppose the Jennifers and all the others would think when they saw me wearing this ring?"

Philip was frowning. "Yes, but that sort of thing gets about, doesn't it? Surely you don't have to go shouting it to everybody?"

Millicent smiled. "Well, evidently you've never been engaged before! What we have to do is to invite all our friends to a tea for the specific purpose of announcing our engagement to them, and then it's reported in the newspapers."

Philip groaned. "Good lord, how perfectly ghastly! It sounds to me like some primeval performance of an African tribe. Do you mean to say we have to pander to all the old hens of this village just to give them something to cluck about? There's something almost indecent in it. Don't you see? For heaven's sake, can't we forget it and just carry on?"

Millicent dismissed the appeal with a gesture. She turned to her uncle. "Now I ask you! What can one do with a man like that?"

John Sampson shrugged his shoulders. "The trouble is, I entirely agree with him. . . . But, my boy, you've tied your own hands. The laws of the Medes and the Persians, you know!"

"Yes, but . . ." Philip broke off abruptly. What he had on the tip of his tongue was, "To hell with the Medes and the Persians!" He swallowed it with difficulty. To him there was something revolting in the picture of them all turning out to peer and snicker at Millicent and himself, like a lot of Peeping Toms. It verged upon the horrible peasant custom in France of putting the bride and groom to bed. Didn't she see that? Or did a woman look at these things from a different angle? . . . He turned to her, leaning forward. "Tell me, Millicent, are you yourself in favor of this announcement?"

Millicent answered without hesitation. "I don't see anything so extraordinary about it. It's just the usual thing, that's all, like inviting people to your wedding or announcing a birth. There are columns of it in the papers every day."

Philip nodded thoughtfully. So women were different. He might not, when they were decently alone together, kiss her throat. There was something immoral in that apparently; but he must stand up beside her in public and have it blurted out that they loved each other. Strange reasoning! A sense of values that didn't have any relation! And, judging from the uncompromising manner with which she insisted upon this announcement, a man didn't count in these tribal matters. The woman took charge. The woman? Could he generalize like that? Was he up against some basic law of womankind, or was it Millicent, the individual, who for the first time was allowing glimpses of adamant to show? In point of fact, now that he thought of it, it was not the first time either. She had made herself like a piece of granite after he had proposed to her, had bargained to get her way. And out there in the kitchen before dinner, it had been the same thing. . . . And yet, after all, why not? She was entirely justified, more so than he was, because she really believed in these things, while his objections were mostly philosophic. She saw her world in terms altogether different from his. She saw Uxminster as a social center and was jealously concerned with such opinions as Jennifers, Trumbulls and the rest might form of her, of them both. In a word, she belonged to them; hence the pattern of her mental behavior. In a sense, it was as secure, as finished a piece of work, as the rock of Gibraltar. You could rely on it always to perform in a certain way under certain conditions. You could always come back to it and know that you'd find it the same.

He looked across at her with a little smile. “All right, old Reliable!” he said. “I surrender. This end of our show is in your province. You have an instinct for it. You run it just as you want to. And if I can’t help with suggestions, at least I’ll obey orders.”

Chapter Eleven

PHILIP'S idea of their future habitation had always been one of the cottages that bordered the road outside the town. There were only a few of them and they were not too near together, as yet. With the delightful vagueness of the idealist he had visualized the bare patch of land that went with the cottage as a garden of flowers behind, say, a thick yew hedge. It would be perfect to sit out there on warm summer evenings, screened from passers-by.

"But you know," said Millicent, trying hard not to let her distaste for the cottage show, "you know, it takes anywhere from fifty to a hundred years to grow a yew hedge."

"Good lord!" said Philip. "Really? Well, don't let's have a yew hedge. Let's have some other kind, something that will only take one summer to grow."

Millicent crooked her hand through his arm with a little laugh. "I'm afraid that the only thing that would grow as fast as you'd like it to would be a fence. And then there's another thing. Have you realized that there's no electricity out here? We should have to burn candles or those smelly oil lamps that are always smoking and making everything sooty."

"Don't you suppose they'd put electricity in for us?" asked Philip hopefully.

Millicent shook her head. "About as soon as they'd put in the hedge! And even if they would, it would cost us a fortune to build a bathroom."

Philip sniffed. "I hadn't thought of that!" he admitted.

"And had you thought of how I am to cook? Coal is too expensive, and they haven't put in gas either. . . . No, Philip dear, I think these cottages are darlings, as ideas, but they're not very practical, are they?"

"I suppose they're not," said Philip.

"But I'm awfully glad we came and looked at them," said Millicent. "If we hadn't you'd have always had the thought in your mind that they were ideal, and every time you passed by, you'd have regretted that we were not in one. It's always better to have things out like this. We always will, won't we?" She led him out of the bare patch back on to the road and headed for town again. "Now I've been looking about the last few days and I want you to see what I've found. It's the darlindest apartment you ever saw! And it has hot water and gas and electric light, and I know it will work out cheaper than one of those cottages in the long run."

"An apartment, eh?" Philip swung his walking stick. For ten years of his

life he had been a prisoner in one bed-sitting room in the school. Didn't this smack somewhat of a return to captivity? "Will there be enough room to breathe in it? Sha'n't we feel like a couple of birds in a cage?"

Millicent laughed. "Not if we keep on singing! Let's go and look at it and you'll see for yourself. It's got two main rooms and a bathroom, and a kitchen that's fitted up so that you can reach everything with either hand without having to take a step. . . . And then, after all, don't you really think it's much nicer being in the town? It would be lonely out in those cottages; but in the apartment we'll be in the middle of everything that's going on. I can get to the shop every day in a minute, and it's only a very little longer for you to get to the school, and the walk will do you good. And then the movies will be just around the corner, and the church, and the shops, and the Jennifers, and everything. Don't you think it'll be much more fun?" She peered up at him excitedly, squeezing his arm.

To Philip, glowing with dream sunsets and their sense of infinite distance, the cottage lay in ruins. Gone were the beds of flowers nodding in the breeze. The swallows would have to find some other eave for their nests, and the bumblebees another garden. . . . But her arm was pressing his and she was looking up at him. He smiled into her eyes. "Yes," he said. "It'll be much more fun."

She was like a silk net about him. His hands and feet were caught, his desires, his will,—and yet it was so pleasant to relax and feel the soft meshes. He wasn't any good at struggling, never had been; and then, too, did you get anything more out of it in the long run? Perhaps it was all right if you were certain of what you were struggling for; but how could you ever tell? And yet Millicent seemed to know. She seemed to be as sure of her path as though it were laid with a series of flagstones. She took command as though born to it.

"I wonder how you do it?" he said aloud.

"Do it? . . . Oh, you're off in the clouds again, eh?" Millicent laughed. "Do what?"

Philip waved his stick. "It. Everything. How is it you're so sure? You take it all in your stride,—me, our being engaged, the future, everything. I mean, don't you ever pause in your mind and look at yourself and wonder who you are, and whether the whole thing isn't really a dream?"

Millicent smiled. "You old silly! Why should it be a dream? You might as well ask me how I know that to-day is Saturday, and that it's nearly four o'clock and that within an hour you and I and Uncle John will be having tea together upstairs?"

"That's just it," said Philip. "I know you're right. But I can't get within a

thousand miles of it. I keep on feeling that this isn't all, that you and I . . . how shall I put it? . . . that you and I ought to be doing something else, behaving differently. I don't know exactly what I do mean. But somehow we seem to be missing something." He gave an awkward laugh. "Perfect lunacy, I know; but that's what made me marvel at your sureness, and envy it too. It must be so much easier your way. When are we going to get married? I feel that that will answer many questionings."

As he flung the abrupt question at her he watched her face.

Beyond a flicker of her eyelids, Millicent remained unruffled. She patted his arm again. "I've got that all worked out," she said.

"I knew you would have," said Philip. "Am I permitted to know yet?"

"Why, of course," said Millicent. "Now, in the first place, it's no good hurrying it too much. We might as well enjoy being engaged. There are all sorts of parties being planned for us, and we can have a lovely time during the rest of the winter and in the spring."

"Parties . . . I see," said Philip. "And then?"

"Then," went on Millicent, "leases begin in October, and that'll give us time to find the apartment we want and pick out the proper wall paper and furniture and have everything ready."

"What exactly do you mean by ready? You've taken us to October and we haven't been married yet."

Millicent laughed. "You're too impatient. Listen. I thought . . ." She broke off and went back to where he had interrupted her. "You see, that furniture is going to cost quite a lot, and although of course I'm going to try and let it be known what I want for wedding presents, there'll be hundreds of things we'll have to get for ourselves. And so I thought that instead of your hanging about here when the school breaks up in June, it would be better if you went off somewhere with your sketchbook."

Philip looked at her quickly. "Do you mean . . . by myself?"

Millicent nodded vigorously. "Yes, I think by that time we ought to take a holiday from each other. We can write, but it would be lots better if we didn't see each other every day as we are doing now. Afterwards it will be . . . different."

"I think I see," said Philip. "But where shall I go? Somewhere right away?"

"Yes, where you can make all sorts of lovely sketches. We're going to need everything we can earn."

"True. In that case, it wouldn't be a bad idea to unearth the bicycle and go

over to Normandy again. All the real color is there, and one can do it very cheaply. What do you think?"

"I think it's a splendid idea," said Millicent. "I'll save every penny I can in the shop and you must work frightfully hard all through June and July and August, and the first half of September. Then you'll come back with lots and lots of drawings which we'll get Uncle to send to London and sell through that friend of his. And then, about the fifteenth of September, we'll have the wedding."

Philip was trying hard to keep up. The abrupt transition from Uxminster to France and back again made him lose count. "Why the fifteenth?" he asked.

"Because," said Millicent, "that'll give us a fortnight for our honeymoon and we can come back and move straight into the apartment on October first."

Philip gasped. "Heavens, it's incredible!" He gave an odd burst of laughter. "It sounds exactly like a railway time-table. Supposing one of us happened to miss the train?"

Millicent failed to see anything humorous in that. She shook her head decisively. "I'll see that we don't!" she said.

Chapter Twelve

PHYSICALLY Philip's engagement became somewhat like the digging out of a hibernating bear. During his ten years he had achieved the status almost of a recluse. The "citizenry" was well aware that he evaded their teas and social evenings whenever possible and had practically given up inviting him. They looked upon him as "one of those Oxford eccentrics." Now, however, under the spur of Millicent, he came forth, metaphorically if not quite actually, blinking and snuffling into the open. He was at least corporeally present at six different "evenings" given in honor of their engagement, and suffered congratulations with a fixed smile and a slight perspiration.

These ordeals successfully endured, there was still for a while no possibility of relaxing. Millicent's social antennæ were waving at top speed. She was building for the future of them both, and Philip's attendance at bridge teas became part of the bricks and mortar of her structure. But when, finally, the newness had worn off and Millicent felt satisfied that her position, for the time being, was secure, they settled down to a new routine. In consequence, the Pig and Whistle had another billiard champion that spring. Philip was unable to defend his crown. Without being aware of it, he had given up billiards altogether. What had previously been his billiard hours he spent now in the correction of exercises, so that he might be free to pass every evening in the bookshop. On three nights a week he got down there in time for supper. The other four he arrived after the meal, when his hour of "study duty" was over; always staying till ten thirty, at which hour Millicent put away her sewing and went with him to the door to say good night,—quiet uneventful evenings, many of them spent playing chess with Uncle John, while Millicent made a remark from time to time from behind her incessant needle.

And what a marvellous good chap Uncle John was. A real find! He had the quality that made you talk to him from the inside. Before you knew it, you were telling him things about yourself and your creed that you never expected to tell anybody—had never dreamed of boring Millicent with—and all he did was nod and take his pipe out of his mouth for a moment and drop a brief remark, but always exactly the right one, and, by Jove, you were off again! Imagine having wasted all this time in Uxminster without knowing that there was a real man there all the time. How ironically like life!

But over and above the discovery of Uncle John, the ritual of saying good night was the moment for which Philip had been waiting through the evening,—that private moment when they would stand together on the landing at the top of the stairs and he knew that she would put her arms around him, her eyes very soft and luminous, and for the space of one gorgeous heartbeat they

would be all-understanding, differences wiped out.

After a monastic life at the school, this serene companionship was like a soothing drug. It was lulling to be one with voices and laughter, to perform small services like poking the fire, to help Millicent carry out things into the kitchen, to fetch matches for Uncle John from the mantelpiece, to look up when it was his move and see how the light caught Millicent's black hair, to meet her eyes sometimes and smile, not saying anything, and then blow out a contented lungful of tobacco while their audience of one went on performing delicate mysteries with her needle upon queerly shaped lengths of silk which magically became dresses.

And then, one night in the spring, after three months of this domestic régime, as they were out on the landing about to say good night, Millicent tried in vain to stifle a yawn. She gave a little apologetic laugh and said, "I'm so sorry, but you've no idea how sleepy I am."

Philip murmured something adequate, but his mind was elsewhere. With an inner consciousness he watched Millicent and himself kiss each other as usual,—quietly, decorously, without rapture, as though merely in fulfillment of what was now a habit.

He found himself presently in the street without knowing how he got there; his hat, that he had forgotten to put on, clenched in his hand. "Oh, damn; Oh, damn! It might have been—it was for a moment—an exquisitely beautiful thing, and now I've dropped it and it's all smashed to pieces!"

He didn't know that his face was like chalk in the light of the street lamps, that people stared at him as he scurried along, drawn and hatless, staring thousands of miles ahead of him. The bitterness of failure weighed him down, the sense of his own impotence. "What have I been doing? Finding Millicent? Living Millicent? Being her lover? . . . My God, all I've been doing is to make a friend of Uncle John!" He gave a harsh laugh. "What a priceless paradox! . . . She yawns, and I am numb! We're a tired old married couple before we're even married! Am I empty? Am I old before I've been young? . . . God! . . . Oh, God!"

He was out of Uxminster now, forging along the road—the same road that he had walked with Millicent when he proposed to her—his mind twisting and writhing to escape what was being ground into it. Presently he burst out again. "It isn't smashed! I won't let it be smashed! I tell you I love her! I love her! . . . That yawn didn't mean a thing. It couldn't have. It mustn't. She had an extra hard day in the shop and she was tired. Why shouldn't she be, on her feet all day? I would be tired too, if I did it. . . . I've been greedy, going down there night after night. I've wanted to go night after night,—otherwise I wouldn't

have gone, would I? Of course not. It's absurd. Perhaps I've taken advantage of it, pushed it too far, accepted too much. But damn it, it isn't a habit. I refuse to admit that. And what's more, I'll see to it that it doesn't become one. I'll take steps. I'll stay away for a bit. . . . And then, too, pretty soon I'll be going to France for three months. That'll be a break. . . . My God, I wonder! Did she realize this first? Is that why she suggested my going. . . ."

He stopped in the middle of the sleeping countryside and stood leaning on his stick, lost in contemplation. A cold breeze ruffled his hair and tugged at his raincoat; and gradually his desperate feeling of having achieved nothing but second best was diverted by this evidence of her potential wisdom.

"Of course," he muttered. "I ought to have thought of it before. She's handicapped by generations of unemotionalism, can only express herself with difficulty at the price of hideous embarrassment,—but deep down she's working things out. She loves me, only it isn't soft and quivering. It's like a piece of iron that has to be melted down. The trouble is that I've expected too much, too soon. I must go slow. I must wait. . . ." Once more he moved, thinking and planning,—for all the world like a busy ant patching up the intricate building that has been kicked over.

Chapter Thirteen

THE thought of France, the desire for France, became an obsession with him. Its importance was paramount. As usual, his imaginative idealism ran away with him. He told himself that it was going to be the bridge by which he would cross to perfect unity, the final passing from nonentity to entity; that once returned from this pilgrimage of preparation, life would begin. Every drawing that he made in the ancient glory that was Normandy was to be impregnated with this conviction. They would not be “pretty” any more,—to think that there had been a touch of truth in that horrible word!—but beyond anything that he had ever accomplished. He could feel it in him now,—now that he had succeeded in catching hold of reality. Uncle John would gasp when he saw them. The London dealer would sit up and take notice. Perhaps they would be so good that one day he might be able to shake the dust of school from his shoes and spend his time drawing and painting. . . .

That was going farther than he had ever dared. At the harsh jangle of the school bell, announcing the end of recess, he came out of his dream, sweating with excitement.

It never occurred to him to confide any of this to Millicent. She was so practical. She was thinking about their marriage in such different terms. It would only annoy her to hear anything so idiotic. Better wait till it all came true,—if it ever did; then it would be an actual situation to compete with. Her mind worked that way. . . . Meanwhile, Normandy! He would start at Rouen and then, if the weather were good, work outwards in different directions. There was the abbey, for instance, at Jumièges; and that amazing church at Caudebec; and Cœur de Lion’s chateau at Andelys; and that other ruin at St. Wandrille, or was it at St. Ouen? It didn’t matter. All the way along there were exquisite corners, queer old market places, friendly old peasants in blue blouses and sabots, to say nothing of omelettes that melted in your mouth and good red wine that was only a few francs a bottle. . . . Heavens, how long it was since he had been there. Another life! And probably when he opened his mouth in French again, even though teaching had kept his grammar polished, his accent would be all rusty, atrocious.

As a brilliant inspiration, he used the rubbing-up of his French to bolster his resolution to break the nightly habit.

For at least half the week now he stayed away from Millicent and forced himself to march up and down his room, book in hand, reading aloud. He went over his drawing materials and wrote to London for special pencils and paper. He hauled out his cycling stockings from the drawer and, with infinite labor

and precision, darned vast chasms in toes and heels. And every night his final gesture—an act of faith—before turning out the light, was to take up a pen and elaborately black out the date on the calendar.

Chapter Fourteen

WHEN at last the great day arrived, Millicent and Uncle John were both at the station to see Philip off.

“Seeing Philip off” was a phrase that had been on Millicent’s lips for days. Quite sincerely she was prepared to be highly emotional. She would smile to the last, give him a very brief kiss and then wave her handkerchief at the receding train. More than that was impossible in public.

But when the moment actually came, her emotions, which ultimately found an outlet in tears, were actuated by a very different stimulus.

Philip, always a nervous traveler because he could never remember into which pocket he had carefully put his ticket, and always with his head out of the window at every station, in case some idiot porter should put his bicycle out at the wrong place, was totally incapable of standing with Millicent and her uncle and being properly “seen off.” For one thing, the baggage was right forward and the porter wheeled the bicycle to what seemed an infinite distance away, so that Philip kept on leaving them and hurrying to the end of the platform to make sure that the machine was still there, that the label hadn’t come off, that the porter really would guarantee to put it on the train. Then, having returned to Millicent with an uneasy smile, he put his finger in his pocket to make sure that the tickets were there,—and they were not. Eventually they were located in the pocket of his purse, but by then Philip’s eyes had become riveted on the approaching train. He was instantly on the jump. “Here she comes!” he said, and picked up his two suit cases. Then he looked at Millicent. “Well!” he said, “that was stupid, wasn’t it?” and put the suit cases down again. “Good-by . . .” He hesitated, then caught her hand and kissed her quickly. “Good-by. I’ll write. And you’ll write, won’t you?” Before she could say anything, he was shaking hands with Uncle John. “Good-by. See you soon.” And then, in a moment he grabbed up a suit case in each hand and began hurrying down the slowing train, looking eagerly for a possibly empty third-class compartment.

There wasn’t much question of feeling brave. Millicent was only conscious of disappointment and vexation. All that fussing of Philip’s was so unnecessary. It was impossible to get near him, spiritually, mentally, even physically. But she could wave,—and as the train began to move, while Philip wrestled frantically with the window, she began to flutter a little white handkerchief, very clean, with the ironing creases all fresh. . . . At last he had got the window down. Now he would say some lovely thing that she could remember all the time he was away. . . .

Philip cupped his hands around his mouth. “Did the porter put my bicycle in?”

Millicent bit her lip. The tears were very near. But at that moment Uncle John burst into a loud laugh. He slipped his arm through hers and said, “Well, my dear, now you begin to realize what it is to be engaged to an artist.”

She tried to smile, but the handkerchief was crunched into a little ball.

In the train that was gathering speed and leaving Uxminster farther and farther behind, Philip began to press tobacco into his pipe with a thoughtful finger, his eyes glancing from his two bags in the rack to the man and woman who were in the compartment. Although calmer on the surface, now that he was actually installed and under way, the process of gathering himself together necessitated an adjustment that was as much physical as mental. The harness of Uxminster had worn deep grooves in his shoulders. For years he had only been out of it on a bicycle. To be in a train was cataclysmic. He went through the motions of opening a newspaper, but there was no headline as enthralling as his own situation. Every house that whizzed by, every telegraph pole, brought him nearer to the boat, the Channel, the sharp tang of the sea. . . . He gave a laugh of excitement and rubbed his hands together.

“The pilgrimage has begun. I’m really on my way at last. I will purge myself with work, with new thoughts, new emotions. It’s going to be like a course of training, for spiritual muscles at least. . . . Three months and a little more. Good lord, it doesn’t seem possible that I’m not going to see them again for over a quarter of a year. It’s a long time. . . . I really ought to be all cut up, I suppose! But, damn it, if I’m honest with myself, I’m not! . . . It’s not right, somehow. Am I so egregiously selfish? . . . No, it’s not that. Perhaps it’s just the actual business of tickets and porters and so on, the newness of it all. It overlays the other thing. I’m excited, keyed-up, tense. Probably by the time I get there and start working, I’ll be miserable about her, miss her like anything. . . . Yes, that’s what it is. I’m really missing her now, only all this is in the way so that I can’t feel it properly.”

In an odd way he began to draw comfort from the belief that the pangs of separation would come later. It freed him from the vague feeling of self-blame, released his mind so that it immediately leaped forward once more, as though a drag rope had been cast off. “This very night,” he said to himself, “I’ll be walking up the old Rue de la Grosse Horloge at Rouen—please God it hasn’t changed—and getting the feel of the cobbles again. And then I’ll sit for a while in the café facing the cathedral, and just look at it, let it soak in. And then, when I get back to my room at the Pin d’Or, I’ll write and tell her how desperately I’m going to miss her. Then in the morning, work! That’s the

programme!”

PART TWO

Chapter One

ACROSS the soft green valley the perched-up town of St. Paul lay swooning in the sunshine. The only movement was a shimmer of heat that danced above the faded brown and red tiles of its jagged roof line. The steep hill that climbed to its crumbling brown ramparts was dotted with orange trees; and to the immediate left, where the dead lay quiet beneath bead wreaths in the tiny burying ground, a line of cypress trees flung themselves straight to the sky,—dark green flames lighting up eternity.

In the distance, beyond another valley, the towering Alps, gray-brown with purple patches of shadow, piled themselves overwhelmingly into a cloudless, hard blue sky. Little human sounds made the silence more stupendous,—a far-off cock, the thin note of a child, the diminished purr of an automobile the size of a beetle.

In the shade of a pine tree at the edge of the road, hat and coat off, sleeves rolled up, his face and arms deeply tanned, Philip Jocelyn sat with a half-eaten sandwich in one hand and a bottle of wine in the other. Beside him an unfinished sketch was propped against the pedal of his bicycle. Even as he ate and drank, his eyes went from the sketch to the town and stayed there, feasting on it, revelling in it, awed by it.

“It’s Aucassin and Nicolette!” he muttered. “It’s the Chanson de Roland! A gem. A whole casket of gems!”

In a desperate hurry he finished his sandwich, washed it down with a final tilt of the bottle, and snatched up his drawing once more. The light might change, or clouds might come up and obscure it if he weren’t quick, or he might wake up and find himself back in Normandy, where the rain came down in sheets.

Perhaps “Le Roi Pausole” had something to do with his being there, having come like a ray of inspiration in the sodden northern countryside which had offered no hope on his arrival. For several days he had wandered up and down the splashing streets of Rouen, restless and disconsolate, changing into dry socks at least twice a day in a cheap hotel room which, in such weather, became dreary to the point of despair. And then the memory of that magic country on the Mediterranean floated into his mind, tinged with all the colors of the rainbow. Taking his courage in both hands, he had boarded a train, to awake stiff and dirty next morning in a blaze of heat and sun which made him burst into song as he cut himself shaving in the lurching train that hurled itself between blood-red rocks and silvery green olive orchards along the shore of an unbelievably blue sea.

To his amazement he had found the book to be nearly true. The good king Pausolus had prescribed that no woman between the ages of fifteen and fifty should wear clothes. On the Riviera the only difference between the royal edict and reality was that the age limits were disregarded. The beaches were ablaze with women of all ages lying about in almost complete nudity, their limbs and bodies the color of ripe chestnuts. When they withdrew for food and drink they assumed gaudy pyjamas whose design was to leave naked as much of the human form as possible.

To Philip Jocelyn, fresh from the unremitting chastity of Uxminster, this riot of flesh was exciting and disturbing. He went to swim and stayed to watch. At the end of the third day his ocular appetite became jaded. He took a deep breath, turned his back to the sea, and set out to explore the hinterland.

At once he was in another world. For a week he pushed his bicycle through an enchanted fairyland, where at every turn of the road he caught glimpses of towns no bigger than birds' nests gleaming on wooded mountain crags,—towns which, when he reached them at last and walked through their ancient stone gateways, were inhabited apparently by old women and children; towns so old that they had fallen asleep centuries ago. Water splashed coolly from crumbling fountains. Dogs and cats lay undisturbed in the middle of the square; and the steep winding narrow streets, in which the sun only penetrated at midday, echoed beneath his feet. In all of them they talked a patois which he could not understand, but when he sat down to eat they answered him in French and were most kindly, pronouncing his name as though he belonged. On vine-covered terraces looking over an infinite vista of mountain and valley, they fed him omelettes and rabbits and fruit and cheese, and gave him wine from the hillsides that brought a flush to his cheeks, and sold him cigarettes of black tobacco as strong as the wine. And as the sun went down, long shadows crept out down the slopes, and the mountains became soft and changed from amethyst to violet and deep purple, until at last a velvety darkness covered it all; and then, here and there, pin points of light broke out like groups of motionless fireflies. And as though that were not enough, an enormous moon would come sailing up the sky to pour silver all down the sleeping hills.

On Philip Jocelyn, nurtured on the pale greens and timid browns of a damp island, this orgy of Southern color had the effect of strong liquor. Every day was a bewilderment, every phase of light a new and aching beauty. He was like a bird let out of a cage, flying and flying for the sheer joy of it. In some queer way the people, the language, the countryside, all came together inside him and made him feel as though, after years of wandering, he had found his way home.

The thought made him smile as he sat on the roadside at the foot of St.

Paul. “At that,” he said to himself, “perhaps there’s more in it than a mere sentimental idea! Jocelyn. . . . Why, of course, the name’s as French as they make ’em! Perhaps some émigré came over hundreds of years ago. Who knows if some far-off strain isn’t the thing that brought me here, like water finding its way to the sea?”

His muttering was half-aloud, the self-mumblings of the solitary man; but as he ended, he heard an exclamation behind him, and a woman’s voice in French, lowered to a stage whisper: “Tiens! That’s really beautiful!” Every day groups of children, and sometimes grown-ups, stopped to watch him at work. This morning he had not heard any one approaching. He turned and saw two girls, arm in arm, who had stopped and were gazing at his drawing. That is to say, he was aware that there were two of them. Actually he saw only one; and he stared at her as frankly as she was staring at his work. “Good lord, just look at that!” he thought, and caught his breath. She was not very tall, nor was she beautiful; but if he had found himself looking eye to eye with a black panther he couldn’t have been more surprised and fascinated. Of her kind she was perfect, and her kind was as lean and explosive as the wild animal. Her cheek bones stood out. Her nostrils were wide, her eyes deep-set and fringed with black lashes that curled up and touched her eyelids. She had the lean hardness of a nomad woman who has crossed the unending plains of Tartary on her two feet, sweaty, frozen, blown, drenched, smiling at thunderbolts. Beneath the thin blouse her high breasts were like unripe apples. She was a bronze come to life. When she raised her eyes and flashed a glance at him, it felt as though something had hit him.

The other girl giggled. It broke the spell. Both girls shifted on their feet.

She mustn’t go! He wanted to see her a little longer, to talk to her. . . . He cleared his throat, and in his somewhat academic French said, “You flatter me, Mademoiselle. Are you also an artist?”

The panther—he thought of her as that—opened her eyes a trifle wider, half smiled and shook her head. “No,” she said, “but I should have liked to be one.” She turned, apparently without motion, made Philip a sort of bow, and then the two girls were walking away.

Philip remained staring after them. Amazing creature . . . wonder where she comes from, who she is . . . and what was it she said, “beautiful” not “pretty.”

Lord, I wish she’d come back. . . .

They had reached the bend of the road. The panther turned her head and looked around.

Philip remained motionless. In a moment they disappeared. He gave an odd

laugh and reached into his pocket for a cigarette. “Queer that! . . . I could swear I’d met her before somewhere. . . .”

Chapter Two

PHILIP'S headquarters were in the town of Vence, separated from St. Paul only by a "swoosh" down a series of hairpin bends on the bicycle, or a forty-minute trudge up again. He had found a "garnished chamber" at the top of a house in the small "place" behind the chateau. From the window of his room he could look down through the branches of a majestic sycamore which almost filled the square. Around its base was built a bench, painted green, once, and there in the cool of the evening, Monsieur Raymond, the chemist, with flaming beard and wide-brimmed black hat, smoked his pipe and discussed politics with Monsieur Gounouillou, the proprietor of the antique shop, and Monsieur Bavin, whose highly colored pottery decorated the wall of half one side of the "place."

In the infrequent pauses of their conversation there could be heard the equally endless babble of water piped from the mountains into the gray stone fountain at the base of the chateau wall.

The purchase of a cake of soap had been more than sufficient introduction for Philip, and so, with infinite inner satisfaction, he invariably swung off his hat at the sight of Monsieur Raymond's beard and said "Bonjour, Monsieur!" Whereupon Monsieur Raymond would remove his hat and bow with an "Ah, Monsieur Jocelyn! Bonjour!"

And so, with childlike delight at being known, at being, in a sense, one of them, Philip would pass out under the old stone arch, smiling at the conceit that his ancestors had been present at the building of it. Perhaps, even, it was a Philippe Josselin who had planted the sycamore! What a gorgeous thing to leave behind,—better than mere drawings which would be scattered far and wide; better than the foolish German gun boasting of victory, which, incidentally, lay rusting among the empty tins and scrap iron in the Place de la République; better even than the magnificent choir stalls which, after all, were hardly even seen in the dusty dimness of the church loft. These people were grateful for that tree. It cooled their square. It gave it beauty and dignity. They used it every evening. It was a part of their life; and one would carry away the memory of it for the rest for one's days.

All unconsciously, he had fallen into as simple a routine as the inhabitants. Each morning he was out working by nine o'clock. His portfolio was becoming crowded. St. Paul was there from many angles, not only whole but in parts; he had caught Carros and St. Jeannet, Biot and Gourdon; and many a crumbling farmhouse with its guardian cypresses. At noon he ate wherever he happened to be working,—sitting in a meadow, perched on a rock, in the lee of

a church cloister.

The sun got at him and the wind—making him curse occasionally when it flapped his paper about—so that the pale creature who had passed in and out of the Pig and Whistle had disappeared. Its place had been taken by a man whose skin was brown, whose eyes had a light in them, whose unused voice broke out sometimes into a snatch of unrecognizable melody. And, having worked until the light began to fail, he would come riding or trudging back in the soft evenings between fields of olive trees and flowers and oranges, his whole being saturated with the ecstasy of it all. And then, his bicycle and his drawings duly housed, he would cross the “place”, bow to the group of friends, and make for the café in the Grande Place which lay well back from the road and whose crop of gay umbrellas sticking up above each table looked for all the world like a growth of tropical mushrooms.

Every evening the waiter would come forward with a smile. Philip was a client now. “Bonsoir, Monsieur Jocelyn!”

“Bonsoir, Félix! What do we eat to-night?”

“Ah, Monsieur is going to eat well. . . . Potage; trout, caught this morning; and a coq au vin that melts in the mouth!”

“Marvellous! One must do honor to the dish. Let me have a bottle of that most excellent Macon.”

“Bien, Monsieur!” And Félix would bow, pull out Philip’s chair and hurry off.

At the adjoining tables there were often a group of junior officers in the dark blue of the Chasseurs Alpains, clean-looking youngsters, rolling dice with sharp ejaculations and much leg-pulling. Frequently several older men would bring up their chairs to watch a game of cards played with drama and a riot of gesture by four of their comrades. In the corner were often a young man and a girl who held hands across the table, openly and unconfused, looking into each other’s eyes. And every evening an old brown dog of mysterious pedigree, with wagging tail and flopping ears, went from table to table, poking a mutely optimistic nose against various knees. . . . And above them all, the stars were so close that you could almost reach up and pick one.

After dinner there was a movie house just around the corner where the programme changed twice a week. But if you were bored with flatulent Hollywood stuff, you could just sit on at the restaurant and talk occasionally to Félix; or, if you felt really energetic, you could go down to Nice, to the shining lights of the great metropolis, and make secret sketches of the amazing types sipping their drinks outside the cafés and listening to the string bands; or, for a few francs, you could take in the acrobats and jugglers and strong men at the

Casino Municipal, and, with a little luck, win the cost of your evening at the boule tables. And, at last, sleepy but completely satisfied, back to bed in the small hours,—to begin it all over again next morning.

The healthy life, the absorbing interest in the work he was doing—in contrast to the lackadaisical reiteration of French and Latin verbs—the good food and the red wine, plus the magic of the countryside, all worked on him with subtle chemistry. He felt as though he were living a dream, as though he were the hero of a fairy tale. He had rubbed something by accident and said “Open Sesame!” and walked through into another world, and the stone had rolled back behind him, shutting the door through which he had entered. Was there an Uxminster? A school? They were barely perceptible through a thick haze. And Millicent? She was back there, of course, like the home port of a ship; but . . . he couldn’t stop to miss her in these far-off foreign waters. He was too busy. He hadn’t time. . . . And besides, wasn’t the whole point of his going away to let that problem lie fallow at the back of his mind so that it might work itself out? . . . Most certainly.

If there were any room for the slightest criticism of his present régime, it was that he was not talking enough French. Félix was all right, but scrappy. The interchange of words in shops could hardly be said to count. If only there were some one with whom to talk earnestly and at length in the evenings, for instance, to soak himself in the language. . . . Then the cup would be brimming over. Perhaps he might be able to do something about it . . . strike up an acquaintance with some lover of chess, for example. They could play first and chat afterwards. What about Monsieur Raymond? No, he talked too much to be a chess player. Well, anyhow he would see. There must be a lot of them if only they could be unearthed.

Like so many people cursed with good intentions and a corresponding inactivity, Philip merely turned the idea over in his mind, found it good,—and went on working. But one afternoon, as he approached the outskirts of Vence, pushing his machine, his eye was caught for a brief second by a face in the upper window of the antique shop. Always when he passed that shop he glanced in without stopping. Its display was too tempting. It was called the Mas Vert,—a white stucco house, every one of whose window shutters was painted green. It was built in the bank at the side of the road and had a brick terrace levelled off in front of it. Behind the house was an upper terrace, bursting with flowers, and under a pergola of roses were two or three tables and chairs. The shop windows revealed a collection of polished brass and copper, Provençal furniture, earthenware pots, squat and bulging.

The glimpse of that face stopped him. “Heavens,” he said, “it’s the Panther!” So that was why he hadn’t seen her in Vence. She didn’t live there.

She lived here. . . . He turned his bicycle and leaned it against the wall. After all, there was nothing extraordinary in looking in at a shop window. . . . She was not to be seen. Of course not, fathead! Hadn't he seen her upstairs? Perhaps she would come down in a moment or two. . . . He pulled out a cigarette and lit it. Really, they had the most attractive things. His glance went from piece to piece. Then, in the corner of the window, he caught sight of a small white placard, on which were the words "Chambre Meublée."

He said it aloud and his eyebrows went up. She might be willing to talk French in the evenings. . . . Would it be expensive? But just look at the view! He turned and gazed across the valley, across the roof line of St. Paul, beyond the old chateau of Villeneuve Loubet to where a patch of Mediterranean gleamed between a trough in the hills. . . . Fancy waking up with that outside your window! And one could eat breakfast on that upper terrace with the flowers crowding around. . . . Good lord, why not? Might as well ask, anyhow.

He tossed away his cigarette and pushed open the door. It made a bell tinkle. A large fly was buzzing against the window. Then there was movement upstairs and presently the sound of feet coming quickly down the stairs.

Philip cleared his throat nervously. Oughtn't he to buy something first, or was it all right to . . .

She stopped in the doorway and said professionally, "Bonjour, Monsieur." Then her eyes widened slightly as she saw him and her lips took on a half-smile.

"Bonjour, Mademoiselle," said Philip, and stopped, dried up. Those enormous eyes, like black water, and deep. . . . One could drown in them, and all she would do would be to look on and laugh, unless . . . Lord, she'd think he was crazy, staring like that. "I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle," he said. "I see that you have a furnished room."

The girl came forward. "Yes, Monsieur."

It was as though she moved in ripples, in . . . in undulations. How old was she? Twenty-six, or the reincarnation of an Egyptian priestess who had floated down the Nile two thousand years ago? Oh, rot; and besides, they didn't have priestesses in Egypt, did they? "Does the room look out over the Nile . . . I mean . . . over the valley?"

"Yes. Would Monsieur like to see it?"

"Thank you," said Philip, and in a moment found himself following her upstairs. . . . There was something uncanny about her, something enveloping, claiming, dangerous somehow. . . . Why was he following her? Oughtn't he to go out now, go away, while there was still a chance? After all, he could say he

didn't like the room, and get out.

The girl stopped on a broad landing with three doors. She opened the center one and stood back.

In a daze Philip murmured "Pardon!" and walked in. Vaguely he became aware that there were a bed, a fireplace, two windows looking down the valley. . . . He could feel her looking at him. "It's very charming, but I'm afraid I . . ." He broke off. Was there any legitimate reason for feeling . . . scared? Yes, that was the honest word to use. . . . Absurd! It was ridiculous to pander to vague lunacies like that. Why should he forego the one room in the whole of France that most appealed to him just because a slightly different type of woman did momentary things to his imagination? And that was all they were, momentary. Probably after he'd seen her for a day or two, the novelty would wear off. She would probably be woefully humdrum, have nothing to say, be a complete vacuum. . . . Standing on one foot again! God, you never got anywhere. There was only one way to handle it! . . . He took a breath and turned. "I mean, I like it immensely. If it's not too expensive, I'd like to come here, Mademoiselle." But, he felt a touch of chill in the region of his stomach, the price might still be prohibitive . . . it wasn't final . . . she . . .

The girl's soft voice poured over him. "Would Monsieur eat here too?"

"No. That is, yes." There was that terrace out there, and the afterglow of the sun would do amazing things to the valley. "I like to take sandwiches and wine with me at noon, because of my work, so it would really be only coffee in the morning and dinner at night, if that isn't asking too much . . ."

"On the contrary. It makes it very simple. For how long do you think you would like the room?"

Should he burn his boats or not? . . . It would be marvellous out there. . . . "Three months," he said quickly.

"Three months!" There was a note of surprise in her voice. "In that case, we can make you a price. Suppose we say twenty francs a day?"

Philip blinked. Up in Vence he was paying the same sum for his room alone, and although the dinner at the restaurant was excellent, the money mounted up night after night. . . . "Thank you," he said. "That is very reasonable, Mademoiselle. I accept. Will it be convenient if I bring my things to-morrow?"

The girl nodded. "You will find the room ready at any time to-morrow."

Philip swallowed. So it was actually done, eh? Well. . . . He gave a nervous laugh. "Thank you," he said. "It will be wonderful, I'm sure."

The girl closed the door of the room. "We will do our best to make it so,

Monsieur.”

Philip went after her down the stairs, watched her cross the shop and take the notice out of the window, putting it in a drawer. The gesture had a strange finality. She turned to him with a smile. “C’est ça!” she said. “Au revoir, Monsieur!”

“Au revoir, Mademoiselle! Till to-morrow.” He went across to the door, passed out into the sun and closed the door behind him. There was his bicycle, leaning against the wall where he had left it. Extraordinary to think what had happened in fifteen minutes while that machine remained there inanimate. He looked down the road, half expecting to see changes. There were none. Of course not. Why should there be? He lit a cigarette and blew a lungful of smoke into the sunshine. He had been lucky enough to find a wonderful room, that was all. The rest was pure fantasy.

Chapter Three

THERE was something about the Mas Vert. . . . Was the word “queer” or “exciting?” Philip found his heart pumping as he unpacked his suit cases.

The short check curtains were all freshly ironed. The bed was immaculate. Two brass candlesticks gleamed on the mantelpiece. Some one had put a bowl of flowers in the middle of the table. The sun came flooding in.

But it was not all that. It was nothing to do with all that. That was external. The thing that made his heart pump was internal, a feeling that something was taking place, behind his back, as it were; that in another minute, another second, something would dawn on him. He went to the window, leaned his elbows on the ledge and took a deep breath. There were the mountains and the little town. It was all so quiet, so old. It was eternity. And this room was a part of it. It was conspicuously different from being in the room of the Pin d’Or in Normandy, or the room above the sycamore in Vence. They had been only steps. This had a finality. . . .

Steps to what? And why finality? Why had these words come into his mind? What did he mean by them? Philip frowned. “I don’t know,” he said, “but they seem to include Monsieur Gounouillou and Félix, and the woman who fed me rabbit in Carros the other day, and the old padre with the unshaven chin down in La Colle, and the girl in this house, and myself, all piling up to something,—a composite picture, with this, curiously enough, the final stroke of the pencil. As though there was nothing else to put in. As though it were an end,—and a beginning!” He gave a laugh. “I haven’t the faintest idea what it’s all about.”

He left the window and went on unpacking. When finally all his things were stowed away in drawers and the suit cases themselves pushed under the bed, he opened his portfolio and one after another hung up six of his drawings with push pins. Then he lit a cigarette and stood very still in the middle of the room.

“Now . . . let it happen!”

Nothing stirred. He shrugged his shoulders with a little smile. “All right. . . . But, damn it, I can’t get rid of it. I’ve been here before. I can shut my eyes and see it all, even to the pattern on the china bowl with the flowers.”

For a moment he watched the spiral of smoke from his cigarette curl upwards and spread in the beam of sunlight. “And I mustn’t forget to write to Millicent and give her my change of address. . . . Curious! I wonder why, at this precise moment, she came so clearly into my mind. It was almost as if she were standing there . . . and she has been so far away lately, like some one who

didn't really exist. And I haven't missed her—not keenly, that is—since that first frightful day in Rouen, when it rained cats and dogs. I wonder . . .” He broke off, went to the bureau, and from the top left-hand drawer took out a bundle of letters. He held them in his hand, looking down at them. Then he made a move to open one, stopped and pushed it back into the envelope, shaking his head. “No. It's no good reading them again. They didn't help the first time. I'm not ready yet. Perhaps when I've assimilated this a bit more, I'll be able to tackle it.”

He dropped the letters back into the drawer, and with an eager step went out of the room and down the stairs, with an air of a man on the lookout for something.

But as the days began to slip by, the explanation of his feeling still eluded him. The psychology of his new quarters claimed his attention. It seemed as though the front of the Mas Vert and the back of it represented two worlds. It was difficult to get the hang of it. The front was ruled over by the girl, whose name it transpired was Jeanne Ricou. No one else ever crossed the frontier between the shop and the mysterious back parts of the house. There were movements there, and low female voices, and sometimes the deep growl of a man: but when the girl went through the dividing door, she disappeared for the time being, passed into another and unknown life. The only clue to that life was at night when, sometimes, Philip happened to meet on the stairs a thin tired woman, obviously the girl's mother, gray-haired, dressed in the invariable black of her type, but with eyes like live coals,—the common heritage of French women who refuse to be beaten by the hardness of the relentless days.

The back parts remained a terra incognita. But out of them emerged the figure of the girl. It was Jeanne, apparently, who placed his coffee and brioche on one of the tables under the pergola each morning,—where, in pyjamas and dressing gown, and hair that refused to lie flat because he hadn't wetted it yet, Philip became king of the valley and looked over his country with perfect contentment.

It was Jeanne who was waiting for him in the shop each morning with a neat package that held his lunch, and sent him off with the wish that he might work well.

It was Jeanne, again, who was there, as though she had never left it, when he returned; who seemed really eager to see what he had done. She knew something too, judging by the way she exclaimed with pleasure or put her finger on the precise point where he knew that he had erred.

It was also Jeanne who brought his dinner, course by course, on to the terrace, talking to him now while he ate; and, occasionally, sitting on, the

coffee cups stone cold, while the last light crept out of the valley. Odd things she said, profound things sometimes, that made you think about them all the next day while you worked.

It was Jeanne whose movements he could half hear in the next bedroom when he flicked off the light, punched his pillow into position, sighed once, and was immediately in a deep sleep.

It was all nonsense, having been scared of her. She was as pleasant and friendly as could be, in her queer way. Shrewd, too, in that shop of hers, with her pretence of reading the hieroglyphics scrawled on the bottoms of things. Certainly there were marks; he had looked to see. But he was certain that she summed up the people who came into the shop. If the prospective purchaser were French and spoke with the accent of Paris, that accent cost him money. If he were American, his accent cost him still more, particularly if he drove up in a great big car and came in with eager-looking young girls rustling in silks from the Rue de la Paix. It was fun to watch her at it. It was also fun, just before closing time, to go around with a duster and polish the lovely smooth wood of panetières and pétrains, to sit with his sleeves rolled up and give a shine to old brass and copper, to arrange lengths of brocade and toile de Jouy, to rout out a hundred things from beneath a thousand other things, and make amateur suggestions.

“Mademoiselle, what do you say if I wash this off and give it a place of honor on the mantelpiece? It’s a lovely piece of carving, but it doesn’t stand a chance down here.”

“Mademoiselle, instead of having that armoire in the window, don’t you think it would be a good idea to pull it back a little, and then arrange that table in the window with this lovely old shawl on it and that collection of ivory boxes in the middle? They can still see the armoire from the outside, but these things lead the eye so pleasantly.”

“Mademoiselle, I’m tickled to death that the ‘chambre meublée’ sign isn’t in the window any more. This is the most fascinating place I’ve ever been in! I think I’d better give up drawing and become your assistant!”

He was unconscious of the fact that her eyes followed him as he moved about, that her answers invariably ended in a question, so that he had to go on talking.

But each time he passed an hour in the old vaulted room with its jumble of things that had passed through a million hands, touched so many other lives before finding their way here, he became increasingly aware that they, and Jeanne moving among them, were all part of some previous experience, some vaguely familiar pattern that had been woven a long while ago, that he was

retreading a forgotten path.

In the cold light of reason he pooh-poohed the feeling, told himself that any lecturer on psychology would present it as one of the most common phenomena. But reason was not everything, and he forgot it when the late sun touched the brasses with a spot of gold and brought out the dark reds of old shawls, found its way to Jeanne's desk and covered her with radiance.

He called her always Mademoiselle. He began to find that he thought of her always as Jeanne. Once he politely invited her to dinner in Vence, and she refused. Once again he suggested going to the movies and she smiled and shook her head. "That's for children!" she said. And Philip nodded, knowing that for all his reading and all his theories he was a child beside this French woman who was no older than Millicent in mere years, but whose mental age was a thousand years older. . . . Queer that she made him think so much about Millicent, more than he had during the time he was by himself in Vence. He had hardly thought about her at all there, it must be confessed, and now he was always thinking about her, seeing her, as it were, alongside Jeanne, doing things so differently, being so absolutely different in her whole approach to the simplest action, the most normal motive. Was he by any chance comparing them? No, not really; besides, why should he? Millicent was there like a fixed planet in his firmament . . . but it was interesting academically to note the extraordinary differences. Millicent was like a self-confident child who thinks it knows everything and knows nothing. Jeanne was . . . what was she? It was not so easy to find a simile for her. She was . . . yes . . . ageless, age-old, like a slow-moving river running the whole length of a great continent, with different races living on its banks, calling it even by different names, making war on one bank or the other of its undisturbed flow. She had the same quality of motionless irresistibility, inevitability. As a society woman in Paris, as a simple tribeswoman in Syria, as the wife of the dictator of Turkey, she would have been exactly the same, have looked upon people and things with the same deep inscrutable eyes. In some ways it made her frightening again,—even though you knew that she was nobody but Jeanne Ricou, the girl who received your hundred and forty francs at the end of each week and brought you your food. But she did those things as though they were mere muscular reflexes that didn't count, that didn't reach what was going on in her mind. That was the extraordinary thing about her,—her aloofness, as though she came down from somewhere to compete with what was going on around her, and then went back up again to some secret plateau, some spiritual fastness to which there wasn't even a trail up which you could stagger after her. It left you helpless, wondering,—a little irritated at the belittling feeling that she must look upon you much as you look upon an ant that crawls over your paper when you are

working. That was all. . . . Ah, well, when he had gone, she wouldn't even remember which ant he was. But there would be times when he would see Jeanne Ricou standing in a beam of sun in the jumble of the shop, or sitting with elbows on the table, her chin in her hands, looking out over the valley in the moonlight, like a sphinx brooding over the sands. . . . Oh, damn it, why did things always seem to get twisted?

Chapter Four

IF his drawing paper had not run out . . . and if he hadn't gone down to Nice to get some more . . .

But it did run out, and after some enquiries he found a shop in Nice near the post office, where he replenished his supply. On coming out with the packet under his arm, he turned at right angles to the way by which he had come and came out on the banks of the river,—that insignificant-looking trickle called the Paillon, whose demands for elbowroom cannot be ignored, however, when the snows melt. It was bordered on both sides by an avenue of sycamore trees, and when Philip looked down over the parapet into the stony bed he saw a line of women on their knees, washing clothes in the stream. In places the soap made a milky pool in the water and then a rapid eddy would catch an edge of it and suck the rest away, and the mountain water would run clear and green again. Along the stones were a hundred white patches,—the washed linen drying in the sun. And among and over all the women and the clothes and the sparkling water was worked an intricate pattern of shadow from the trees.

“Nom d'un chien!” muttered Philip. “If only one could put that on paper! It's as significant as Millet's ‘Angelus.’ Those women spending their lives on their knees—in a river that's been there from the beginning of time—and the tower of their church sticking up above the trees . . . and that marvellous light!”

Behind him street cars slurred around a bend with a high steel scream of protest, trucks rattled and banged along the cobbles, their strident horns going all the time, to a staccato undercurrent of hurrying feet. The paradox of women washing primitively like that in the middle of all this machinistic hurry was curiously unreconcilable and yet characteristically French.

As Philip stood there speculating about it, a passer-by raised his hat. “Pardon, Monsieur, can you tell me the way to the post office?”

Philip raised his hat too. “Mais certainement, Monsieur. Go down this street here until you reach the tramway. Then turn to your right and you will see it in front of you.”

“Merci, bien. Merci. Bonjour, Monsieur!” With another salutation of hat the stranger passed on.

Philip lit a cigarette with a little smile of satisfaction. “Now that fellow hadn't the faintest idea that he was talking to a foreigner. . . . Damn it, I'm not a foreigner! The feel of all this is in my blood. It must have been some foreknowledge of it that made me gravitate to the teaching of French, that

brought me always to Normandy when I could scare up enough money. It's as if I . . .”

Behind him came a clear English voice, faintly tinged with cockney. “Oh, don't be silly!”

As if he'd been shot, Philip swung around. “Milli . . .” He bit the word in two as he saw that it was not Millicent but a total stranger, walking with her arm through a man's. She gave a high-pitched and rather inane laugh as she passed by.

Philip's face was white. He stood rooted, staring at them. The hand that held the cigarette was shaking. The words “Don't be silly!” were roaring in his ears. It was as though the phrase had pushed a button that opened a trapdoor. He found himself staring through and seeing at an infinite distance a tiny creature that was himself standing on one foot and being the butt of a florid man with bushy eyebrows in a scholar's gown; himself wandering dejectedly, aimlessly, through interminable ill-smelling corridors of a school; himself mouthing from a raised platform in a classroom; himself shuffling like a ghost past the chemist's and the post office and the Old Brown Cosey, and turning in at the Pig and Whistle to kill a meaningless hour at a meaningless game; himself, become an automaton, reaching feebly out, as to a means of escape, towards the bobbed head and white skin of another automaton . . . a mere sex impulse . . .

He shivered. It was unreal, impossible, unthinkable. . . .

“Sainte Mère de Dieu!” he muttered. “I was that once—but not any longer. I've left all that behind, outgrown it, sloughed it off like an old skin. . . . Mon Dieu, where am I now? What has happened to me? Do I have to go back to that? A dog to its vomit! . . . I can't do it. I can't do it!”

The river became blotted out. The street sounds merged into an indeterminate roaring that seemed to be closing in upon him. The trapdoor was a vast hole yawning for him to fall through. . . .

He grabbed his parcel from the parapet and went off almost at a run. He must get away, get back to where he belonged, where he was safe. . . . Safe? A harsh laugh broke from him. Where could he find safety from that stagnation, that death in life?

The need for motion, whether it would help or not, was imperative. His shirt was sticking like a wet rag to his body by the time he came to the café in the Rue Gioffredo where he had checked his bicycle. He paid the necessary franc and the equally necessary twenty-centime tip with some outlying fag-end of consciousness, and in the same way tucked the drawing paper into the satchel on the bicycle. Then he vaulted on to the machine and pedalled his way

blindly through the traffic, headed for the mountains.

Chapter Five

HE was late that night for dinner. By the time he came on to the terrace and sat down at the red and white check tablecloth and poured himself a glass of red wine, the mountains were soft and misty and already lights had broken out on the slopes.

He had been all the way to Segale, as jagged and tumbling as the rocks on which it hung precariously. The long ride, up one slope and down another, interminably, for hours, had tired him. He was glad to be tired. He looked forward to an early bed and then a great sleep, hours of kindly nothingness in which his mind might cease to run round and round like a squirrel in a cage.

Jeanne came with the soup.

“Bonsoir, Mademoiselle.” His voice was flat, stale.

She looked at him keenly, made no answer, put the soup down and went away again.

Philip nodded to himself. “It’s better like that. I don’t feel like talking to her to-night. I’m not fit to talk to anybody.”

He ladled out the soup, thick with potato, broke off a length of bread, and ate hungrily, quickly, until the plate was empty. Then he sat back with a sigh. “Lord, that feels better!” Then he laughed bitterly. “A little food and drink and that remark jerks out of me. Man is a damned slot-machine!” Scowling ahead of him, he ate bread and drank wine until presently Jeanne appeared out of the encircling twilight and placed a friture of fish before him, the dish decorated with parsley sprigs and slices of lemon.

The perfume of flowers and of the fields pervaded the terrace. On the bank behind, crickets were still singing lustily. Below, the folds of the valley were beginning to lose their shape. The only sounds down there were murmurs. The click of his knife and fork against the plate was far louder. . . . “I remember telling myself that this was to be the bridge from nonentity to entity. It has been,—but entity is on this side. Entity begins and ends here, takes on shape and meaning here, new shape, new meaning. The I who came so long ago and the I who am here to-night are not the same person. This I thinks differently, behaves differently, has a whole new set of values. Must they be scrapped? Can they be scrapped? And if so, how? Can one re-cross to nonentity, crawl back into the chrysalis? . . . I can picture it lying there with folded wings . . . rotting . . .”

He was barely aware that the fish was replaced by veal and vegetables, and that they in their turn gave way to fruit. Nor did he know at all that each time

Jeanne's eyes swept him as he sat hunched over the table.

He had even forgotten to smoke when the click of her heels on the bricks returned once more. He was prodding the cloth with his fork. Jeanne put down a tiny tray; and the perfume of coffee, strong and bitter, rose between them. This time she stayed, looking down at him.

“What is the matter?”

That was all she said, and that very softly. But it might have been an avalanche rumbling down the mountainside, cleaving itself a path, carrying all before it.

Philip dropped the fork. Its small clang hung suspended on the silence, died away. All he could hear was the pounding of his heart, like a great drum. . . . Why had she said that? What had he to do with this woman? What claim had she? What part did she play in this? How did she know that anything was the matter? Was he mad to suppose . . . Of course, he was mad. He was nothing but an ant . . . and yet that voice . . . Slowly, as though it were being dragged up in spite of himself, he raised his head and looked at her. . . . They were deeper than the Nile, those eyes of hers, fathomless, pulling him down . . . and still down. . . . He caught his breath. She wasn't laughing at him. She wanted him to drown! She wanted him! She was calling to him! She . . .

Jeanne's lips moved. “Philippe!” she said, and it was like a murmur. “Philippe, mon pauvre petit . . .”

The room, the pattern on the bowl of flowers, the unshaven priest down in La Colle—every jigsaw detail of the elusive picture—rose up, sorted themselves, and fell into place. He knew, not with the blurred edges of knowing, but in the full center, that the tiny creature through the trapdoor, the Philip Jocelyn at the other side of the bridge, the half-man in process of evolution, no longer existed. He was Philippe Josselin, from whom the thin deposit of the centuries had dropped as an unimportant thing! He was Philippe Josselin, who, in the days of the building of the city of Vence, had contributed the sycamore! He was Philippe Josselin, who, after a lifetime of stumbling and groping, had found himself!

He rose, his eyes blazing, and put his hands on Jeanne's shoulders. It was this woman—bringing with her the squeal and groan of water wheels, the pad of hard bare feet on the hot decks of dahabeahs, the brittle rustle of the leaves of palms, the echo of those other lives—this woman who had been paralleling his march down the centuries, the distorted image of whom he had reached out to on the other side of the bridge. . . .

“Oui, c'est bien moi, Philippe!” he said. “Philippe Josselin, devant Dieu et toi!”

He knelt before her, took her body in his arms, and laid his head on her breast. "It has been a long time!" he said. "But even a thousand years seems like nothing—now! To think that even when I saw you on the road that first day I did not know, did not recognize you at once!"

Jeanne's hands were on his hair, her face bent over him. "Mon petit," she said, "I think you did, for when you first looked at me something passed between us. Ever since I have been waiting for . . . this!" And with a tiny motion as old as mankind, she pressed his head to her body.

It seemed as though fatigue had left him when, later, he found himself in his bedroom. The moonlight was streaming down the valley like a river, silvering the roof tops of St. Paul, giving the mountains the texture of black and white velvet,—his mountains, his town, his valley! He leaned out of the window, a smile of ecstasy on his face. "Mine, every inch of you!" he murmured. "Every cypress and every olive, every dusty road glaring in the sun, every cool fountain, every square church tower, is a part of me, as I am a part of you all. Philippe Josselin has come back and salutes you! Through Jeanne, with Jeanne, I dedicate myself to you! I have not asked many things of you, O Life, but now that you have led me here, grant me this one thing,—with Jeanne forever and ever!"

His murmured prayer went out into the valley and was merged in the stillness . . . a grain of seed carried by the wind.

There came from the door what might have been the beating of a moth's wings upon the wood. Doubting, he didn't even turn. It came again. He raised his head and then, with a suddenly tight throat, went across the room and opened the door.

Jeanne stood there. She remained for a breath looking at him, her eyes like pools.

"Jeanne!" His mouth was dry.

She slipped in, noiseless as a ghost, and shut the door behind her.

"I became afraid," she whispered. "There may be so little time left . . . Philippe . . ."

Philip's arms went round her, and with an uncertain voice he said again, "With Jeanne forever and ever!"

Chapter Six

IF the first phase of the Mas Vert had been one of expectancy, the second phase passed beyond anything that his imagination could have conjured up.

He was in the condition of stupendous excitation of a soldier on the day of Armistice, vainly trying to realize that he still has the gift of life, that for some inscrutable reason—luck, fate, divine intervention—he was picked out to be saved.

Philip told himself that he had been picked out, saved. He didn't know why, didn't want to know why. The fact alone was more than sufficiently marvellous: and, like the soldier, driven by the feeling that he must hurry, catch up with all that has been lost, he reached out with both hands and hugged it to him. He had been cheated so long, trampled underfoot, starved. . . .

There were no hesitations now, no "standing on one foot." The barriers were down. As Philippe Josselin he could laugh when he wanted to, say whatever he felt like saying with color, verve and the wagging of hands. In homage to the glorious beard of Monsieur Raymond, which he knew he could never encompass, he let his moustache grow, for the first time in his life. His conviction of being French was in no sense a masquerade. It was as profoundly sincere as that of a man who, in the fulness of middle years, joins a new faith, and, on looking back, wonders why he has been blind so long.

Philip did not look back. He was not able to. The present filled him, obsessed him, intoxicated him. He was caught up by new rhythms. For the first time in his life he knew at first hand the devastating tremendousness of love, the irresistible onrush that sweeps all before it. Had he been able to analyze his experience with Millicent, he would have realized that all she had succeeded in giving him was a niggling frustration. She had roused emotions only to force him to camouflage them, to repress them to the point of withering. She was nothing but a mirage to a man in the desert. And because he had still been stumbling about in the penumbra of his own uncertainties, still the hulk in the ooze of the mudbank, he had subscribed to her code, convincing himself as to its rightness.

As the English schoolmaster, Jeanne's code would have appalled him, but through that same intervention—luck, fate, divine providence—she synchronized with his emergence from the chrysalis. And so he found her coming to him as natural as the rising of the sun, as frank as the wind blowing down the valley; and Philippe Josselin was receptive to the beauty that was given him.

All the stifled yearnings, the repressed tenderness, the feelings that he had

smothered, because the old code had taught him to scorn them as being “feminine”, came to full flower at the touch of Jeanne. To raise himself softly on one elbow in the dawn and look down at her face on the pillow, still asleep, one hand under her cheek, the other with the fingers curled like those of a child . . . to watch a glow come into her eyes when he kissed her awake . . . to hear his name on her lips in a sleepy murmur . . . to listen to her moving about in the next room as she dressed and know that in a little while he would see her again on the terrace in the sun . . . to pause as he was about to start off and, under cover of the shop door, kiss her throat, her eyes, her lips . . . to have the feel of her, the sense of her, as he worked . . . to know the glorious folly of chucking work to the winds sometimes and rushing back on his bicycle just to be in the same place with her, just to know that all this was really true . . . to take her off for the day on Sundays and ride to some hill village in a local bus and tiptoe arm-in-arm in and out of little churches fragrant with incense, where they talked in whispers; find a café and sit for an hour over a glass of white port, loving each other with their eyes; and then lunching at a shady table surrounded by families who, with their napkins tucked into their collars, would look up sometimes from empty plates and throw a glance of fellow feeling in their direction . . . to go back in the velvety evening, not alone any more, but with Jeanne’s hand in his, her soul and body in his, filled by Jeanne to overflowing . . . This was more than depth and spaciousness. It was being keyed-up to a pitch of emotional exaltation that was, if he had known it, beyond the normal. Was it Jeanne herself whom he worshipped, or was it life manifesting itself through her? How should he know? To him there was no differentiation. Jeanne and life were one: and like an old tree, hitherto gnarled and sapless, he broke into blossom.

Such a trivial consideration as time never entered his head. He was unaware of the days of the week, what month it was, and how long he had been there. He did not know that every day for three weeks before they had gone into each other’s arms Jeanne had watched for his return each afternoon from the window of her room, and at the first glimpse of his bicycle coming down the road, had hurried to the shop to meet him, making the inspection of his work the excuse to keep him with her for a few minutes. He did not know that for twenty-one evenings when she carried the soup out on to the terrace, and answered his formal “Bonsoir, Mademoiselle” with an equally punctilious “Bonsoir, Monsieur”, those great eyes of hers had been ready to melt. . . . And now that they had melted, time ceased altogether. There were only days and nights, and both were with Jeanne; so what did it matter how many of them slipped by? Did Aucassin care once he had found Nicolette again?

He did not know that a week had passed the first time they went off on a

Sunday excursion in the bus; nor that a second week had gone when they repeated the divine experience. Nor did he realize that another kind of marker was in operation when, on coming singing into his room, every so often, he became vaguely aware that the blue thing lying on his table was a letter. The large round girlish handwriting and the relentless Uxminster postmark did not even penetrate his consciousness. Sometimes it lay there unnoticed for several days. Sometimes it came in handy for snubbing out cigarette ends, and then—because otherwise it meant work for Jeanne—it was carefully picked up and dropped, cigarette ends and all, into the wastebasket.

Chapter Seven

THE road out of Vence was like a snake going down a hill. All the postman had to do was to sit on his bicycle and coast, with a touch of brake at the curves. A boy would have broken into a shrill whistling at the exhilaration of it, at the birdlike sensation of seeing farms and clumps of olive trees flash by, of opening up a new horizon around each corner. But the postman was a man of dignity and position, himself the father of boys; and it was no part of his profession to go zooming along to the possible danger of pedestrians, and certainly to his own. So it was with a mere habit eye, a purely unseeing eye, that he looked across to the cluster of colored dots that was St. Jeannet, perched almost at the very top of the gray mountain. He had seen it every day, in all weathers, all his life. All these artists said it was beautiful. Beautiful? What were they talking about? It was simply St. Jeannet, and they needed more lights up there. An obstinate bunch of politicians, that's all they were in St. Jeannet.

Braking all the way and lending all the dignity that he could to his uniform, the postman rounded curve after curve, exercising his iron-musclcd legs at the final rise that brought him in view of St. Paul. . . . St. Paul, bah! They were growing fat on the tourists and the artists! Crowned by the Académie indeed! And why not Vence, eh? Didn't they know anything at the Académie? Politics again, of course! He spat in the direction of St. Paul and then wiped off his moustaches with the back of a hairy hand. Eh, bien, pas la peine de se faire de la bile! And there was the Mas Vert. . . . She was pretty, la petite, and doing well, they said.

He stopped his bicycle and dismounted, stately and slow, like a general descending from his horse. Having leaned the machine against the wall, he unbuttoned his leather wallet and, wetting his thumb, went through a bundle of documents fastened together with an elastic band. "Ah!" he said at last. "Voilà!" He took a telegram from the bundle.

The bell tinkled as he pushed open the shop door.

Jeanne looked up quickly at the sound and rose from a stool at Philip's feet. At the sight of the postman she smiled. "Ah, Monsieur Baudoin, it is you! Does everything go well with you?"

The postman twirled his moustaches, raised his hat and put it back on again. "Bonsoir, Mademoiselle!" His eye took in Philip. "Bonsoir, Monsieur!"

Philip nodded and remarked that it was a pleasant evening.

The postman admitted somewhat grudgingly that it was,—perhaps a trifle overwarm for pedalling all the way back up the hill to Vence. Then, changing

to a more professional tone, he glanced at the telegram.

“It is you who are Monsieur Jocelyn?”

“Yes,” said Philip. “It is, in effect, I.”

“In that case, Monsieur, it concerns a telegram. If you would have the kindness to sign the book.” He held out both the telegram and the book.

Philip’s brow puckered. “For me?” He rose, took the telegram and gazed at it questioningly. The name was indeed his . . . but who . . . why . . . ?

The book was still waving in front of him. “Tiens! Excusez moi! Where does one sign? . . . Ah, yes, I see.” He scrawled his name, handed back the book, reached into his pocket and handed the man a franc. “Thank you very much.”

The franc disappeared into the man’s horny palm as though it had not really existed at all. “Merci, bien, Monsieur,” he said, and, raising his hat once more, added, “Bonsoir, Monsieur dame!”

“Au revoir, Monsieur Baudoin!” said Jeanne.

The bell tinkled again as the door shut behind him.

“Eh, bien, chéri,” said Jeanne. “Aren’t you going to open it?”

“I don’t want to,” said Philip. “I hate telegrams. I don’t think people have any right to send them. Don’t you think I had better tear this up without reading it?”

Jeanne laughed. “Pense-tu! But what an idea! . . . You look like a small boy with a spoonful of medicine in his hand!”

“I don’t like it!” said Philip. “I think it’s an impertinence, a subjection to some one else’s ego. Why should I have to swallow medicine?”

Jeanne slid an arm around his neck. “Mais voyons, mon petit! If you tear it up, you won’t have destroyed it. It will remain in your thoughts like the soreness in your finger after you have dug out a thorn. And then, too, if you don’t answer it, whoever has sent it will telegraph again! Perhaps it is a commission for one of your drawings. It may be the making of your fortune!”

Philip took her hand in his and touched it to his lips. “So be it! I will read it.” He moved away to the light of the window and ripped open the blue envelope. The strips of paper with their typewritten words were pasted on to the blank sheet in ragged uneven lines, but nevertheless their legibility was beyond denial. “Wedding takes place in three weeks. Where are you. Have heard nothing. Return immediately. Millicent.”

Jeanne was watching him read it. She saw him carefully fold up the telegram, again and yet again, until it was no bigger than a postage stamp. “Eh,

bien?" she said. "And the medicine? Did it taste good?"

Philip heard her voice from a great distance. What it was she said he never knew. The trapdoor had yawned open again and he was falling, falling at incredible speed. They were after him. They were dragging him back, like a ticket-of-leave man, to the foetid corridors, the manacles, the perpetual isolation. The wedding . . . In that other world down there he had left a cheque drawn against himself, and now they were demanding payment, in full! The wedding . . . He could see Millicent sending out invitations, trying on a wedding dress, ordering refreshments, talking to the parson, arranging the flowers in the church, bullying Uncle John as to what clothes he should wear, hiring that birdcage of an apartment, picking out furniture . . . Millicent, like an automatic machine, like a spider spinning a web . . . Millicent!

He passed a clammy hand over his face. "Mon Dieu, est-ce possible! It is I who am responsible for all that? Was it I? . . . 'Return immediately.' That means to-morrow morning . . . as soon as coffee is finished out there on the terrace . . . riding down the road to the railway station, coasting all the way nearly . . . and then going . . . leaving . . . leaving . . . Why? Why go? Why should I be called upon to honor that old cheque? Why not stay with Jeanne and forget it, sponge it all out? . . . By God, I will! I won't even acknowledge the telegram, and if another comes, I won't even open it!" He crunched the wad of paper in a white-knuckled fist; and then suddenly grew stiff again. "No, that's no good. That's ducking it, cheating. If it were only I who were involved, I could do it. But there's Millicent. I can't just smash her life. I've got to go back. One can't cheat. One has to pay up. Otherwise they'd carry it forward and make Jeanne and me pay somehow. Anything rather than risk that! I've got to go and make things right. Then I can come back clean, out of all debt!"

He turned from the window and went back to Jeanne and took her in his arms. For a moment he held her tightly; then he raised her chin in his hand and looked into her eyes. "Jeanne!" he said. "Ma petite Jeanne, écoute! This telegram comes from England. It is to do with a man who is dead, but who is believed to be still alive. I have to go back and prove to them that he is dead."

Jeanne looked puzzled. "But if it is a matter of law, why do you have to go? Why can you not send them a sworn statement?"

"If only I could!" said Philip. "They wouldn't accept it."

A quick fear sprang into the girl's eyes. She clutched his arm. "Philippe! You aren't trying to tell me that . . . that you . . . know about his death?"

For a moment Philip was puzzled. Then her meaning dawned and he laughed. "You mean that I killed him?" He shook his head. "No, my dear. God

knows that I've never killed anything in my life. That's not one of the things that's reaching out after me! I have to go and try to save some one from terrible suffering."

Jeanne's hand came up and caught hold of his coat. "When must you go?" she asked, her voice level.

"To-morrow morning."

"And when will you . . . come back?"

"I can't say definitely," said Philip. "A few days perhaps. Possibly a little longer. In any case, as soon as I humanly can."

Once again Jeanne's eyes changed. Very quietly she pulled his hand from her chin. "I understand now," she said. "I know this could not last. It was a gift that tumbled into our laps. And they have decided to take it away from us. You came from nowhere. Now you must disappear again. C'est la vie, quoi! . . . But it has been very beautiful, mon Philippe! Neither of us will ever forget."

The Sphinx brooding over the sands! It seemed as if she had withdrawn herself, had already passed on. . . . Philip went cold. He stared at her with something like terror. Then he gave a great cry and caught her to him. "No! No! Come back! . . . Jeanne! It isn't over! It mustn't be over! I love you! You're mine! You can't go away like that! . . . By God, you sha'n't go!" He shook her fiercely, talking all the while. "I've never fought for anything in my life, but I'll fight for you, for this! Do you hear me, do you understand! You've got to fight with me! Tooth and nail, with everything we've both got! This is the only thing that's worth it in the whole twisted mess. That's why I've got to go back, so that nothing left undone can creep in like a maggot and taint it. Don't you see! If we let this get away from us, we might as well be dead and buried!"

Half crying, half laughing, Jeanne clung to his arms. "Mon Philippe! Je t'en prie! Stop! Stop!"

Philip stopped, but he held her firmly by the shoulders, glaring at her. "Say that it isn't over! . . . Go on, say it!"

Jeanne gulped. "It is not over."

"Swear that you will fight!"

"I swear that I will fight."

"Thank God!" said Philip. "Now we have a chance!"

Jeanne's eyes were wet. She took his face in both her hands. "Philippe!" she said. "Philippe! . . . Mon pauvre petit!" and pressed her quivering lips to his.

PART THREE

Chapter One

MILLICENT dabbed at her forehead with a handkerchief and looked at the window, hoping to see the curtains flap. They remained motionless. "This dreadful heat!" she said.

John Sampson was sitting in his shirt sleeves. On the table between them was a large jug of lemonade. He reached out and poured her another glass. "Drink this, my dear! You'll feel better."

But she pushed it away impatiently. "I'm full of that mawkish stuff already," she said. "It doesn't do any good!"

John Sampson glanced at her out of the corners of his eyes; took another puff at his cigar. "Perhaps it'll thunder to-night," he suggested. "It can't go on much longer."

"It makes me feel like screaming!" said Millicent.

On the table in front of her was a pile of engraved cards with very special envelopes to match; and as she addressed each envelope and put a card most carefully in, Millicent ticked off a name from a list on a piece of foolscap.

Over the top of his newspaper John Sampson was still looking at his niece. Was it the heat that was making her nervous, or these wedding invitations? He gave a little smile. "My dear," he said, "can't you try and balance it off against those things?"

Millicent looked at him. "I don't know what you mean."

"Well, don't bite my head off!" said her uncle. "I was only trying clumsily to hint that not every girl is lucky enough to be getting married and going off for a honeymoon in such weather as this!"

The color drained out of the girl's face. She got up quickly, laughed with a harsh rasping sound and went across to the window, leaning her forehead against the pane as though to cool it. But the glass was hot too. So she took her forehead away and just stood there. At least, Uncle couldn't see her face. "Oh . . . that!" she said. "Yes, of course, I've . . . told myself that. It will be wonderful at the seaside, won't it?"

The tremor in her voice reached the old man. He went on quickly. "Where is it you young people have decided to go? You haven't told me yet. I suppose you've picked some spot that's off the beaten track. Which coast is it going to be, east or south?" His back was towards her. He couldn't see that the damp handkerchief which she had used to mop her forehead was now being picked to pieces. "I remember once—it must be thirty years ago now—discovering a tiny place called Appledore in Devon. There were just a few fishermen there,

and some way off a coastguard station. There was nothing else but sea and country, and I remember telling myself that if ever I had a honeymoon, that was the spot I would choose. I can see it now just as clearly as if I were there.” He sighed and shook his head. “Of course, it may all be built up now. . . . Where is it you said you were going, Millie?”

For a moment there was no answer. Then he heard a quick movement, and suddenly she was sitting on the arm of his chair,—white faced.

“Why, my dear . . .” he said.

Millicent bit her lip, threw back her head and tried to laugh. “I . . . I need your advice, Uncle! I’m up against something that I don’t understand. . . . You see, it was I who sent Philip away this summer. I don’t think he wanted to go at first, but I insisted. I thought it would be better if we weren’t always together right up to the day of the wedding, if we . . . if we didn’t see each other at all for a time . . . before . . .”

“I understand,” said John Sampson. “Well?”

The girl went on again. “Well, then, if you remember, something made Philip change his mind, and he became awfully keen about going, and began staying away in the evenings.”

“That’s perfectly true,” said John Sampson. “He was working up his French.”

“Yes, I know,” said Millicent. “And you remember that I read you a bit from one of his letters in which he said how useful that work had been?”

“That was the letter from Rouen, wasn’t it?”

Millicent nodded. “After that he wrote from that place called Vence, and sent all those picture postcards. One other letter came from there. It was eight weeks ago. I haven’t heard from him since. Not a word. He just . . . stopped writing. I’ve been writing to him once a week—lately—to ask what’s happened. I can’t get an answer out of him. It’s . . . queer, isn’t it? I’ve been keeping quiet about it all the time, expecting a letter every day—you know how moony he is sometimes—but now I . . . I’ve reached the end of my tether. I don’t know what to do.”

Her eyes went to the pile of envelopes.

There was quite a pause when she stopped. Evidently the old man was at a loss. He shook his head several times, frowning. Then he said, “It is queer. I don’t know what to make of it. Of course, he may have gone somewhere else, but that wouldn’t account for his not writing.”

“Do you think he’s had an accident and is in hospital somewhere?”

John Sampson patted her arm. "No, most decidedly not! The hospital authorities would have communicated at once. It is well known that they are most punctilious in matters of that sort. You can dismiss that theory, Millie."

"Yes?" Millicent laughed oddly, left the arm of her uncle's chair, and began pacing the room. "I've dismissed so many already!" She stopped by the envelopes. Her face looked drawn. "Uncle! . . . Do you think I'd better . . . tear these up?"

John Sampson gasped. "Heavens, child, what do you mean? You don't think . . . Why, that's absurd, preposterous! We know that Philip Jocelyn is dreamy, forgetful, and all that, but he's a man of his word! I feel sure that he'll be back on the very day you want him."

Millicent looked at her uncle. "You seem to know him better than I do!" she said.

John Sampson waved a hand. "In some ways, perhaps I do! The relations of one man to another are radically different from those that exist between a man and a woman. But that's beside the point. I have as much faith in Philip Jocelyn's integrity as I would have in that of my own son."

Millicent remained staring ahead of her. Then she nodded thoughtfully.

"Thank you, Uncle dear! I'm afraid mine needed bolstering up a little. You make me feel . . . ashamed of myself! All the same . . ." She gave a nervous laugh . . . "just to be on the safe side, I think I'll keep these invitations till I know. You see, I sent him a telegram yesterday morning, but even that hasn't brought an answer!"

"It was a good idea," said John Sampson. "There's a psychological urgency about a telegram that should bring results. I think you'll get a wire this evening."

Millicent began to gather up the envelopes. "If I don't," she said, "there's only one thing left to be done."

John Sampson remarked that her voice was firm again. He took a deep breath of relief. "And that is?"

"To go to France and get him!" said Millicent.

Chapter Two

THE train crawled out of London through a choking network of tenement houses, of endless crowded streets, broken out with pushcarts, dingy and of unutterable melancholy. Looking down upon it from the windows of the train, the canting words of holy church inevitably flashed into one's mind: ". . . that station of life into which it has pleased God to place us . . ." The ultimate avowal of inadequacy, of mental bankruptcy. As well have baptised the newborn infant of a denizen of that half-world with the formula: Abandon hope all ye who enter here.

As the train gathered speed, the stranglehold was presently loosened. Tenements gave place to grim factories, to pathetic suburbs, to patches of market garden, and at last to country where there were distances and green things and quiet and a sense of being able to breathe.

To Philip, hunched in a corner of a third-class carriage, the sight of country did not bring much peace. The tenements were better suited to his mood. As a matter of actual fact, he saw neither. Only his body was in England. The directing part of him was still in France, still seeing Jeanne as she stood motionless at the door of the Mas Vert, while the damned bicycle carried him away. She didn't wave. She didn't smile. She stood looking. . . . And then a bend had cut them apart, and ever since something inside him had been bleeding.

He hadn't slept all night. He had paced the corridor of the French train, metaphorically eating cigarettes until his tongue was like a piece of furry leather and his hands trembled as he lit one from the other. But it was not altogether the tobacco that made his hand shake. He was afraid. In that moment of Jeanne's withdrawal, there had been a terrible suggestion of prescience, of Oriental perception of the future, which he couldn't shake off. And as the train carried him farther and farther away from her, fear drove him back to the question,—“Why didn't I stay?”

Like an abscess in a tooth it had been suppurating in his mind all night. He had lashed himself for being a coward. A man of guts would have twisted the neck of the problem between an iron finger and thumb, have let it drop like the peel of a sucked orange and never thought of it again. Weak fool that he was! And yet . . . it wasn't quite that either. It wasn't as if he had cleaved his way to Jeanne against all odds. On the contrary, like a piece of flotsam, he had been carried there insensibly, by slow heavings, and at last spewed up at her feet. It had had nothing to do with his will at all. It had shaped itself, worked to its climax, without his knowing anything about it. Could he now snap his fingers

and try to claim it as his own doing? He was not suited to that rôle. Then too, if he attempted it, he might set up an interference against those same undercurrents which had befriended him. . . . Better trust to them still. Better not try to shirk the task that was set him. And yet, that queer look in Jeanne's eyes. . . . Suppose something happened? Suppose he became unable to find his way back? Suppose the current turned against him? . . . Through blank eyes he looked out upon the lovely rolling country of Buckinghamshire, green and inviting. It was empty, stale, meaningless, devoid of contact. Philippe Josselin couldn't stay there. It would be a torture, a slow death in exile.

His fists became clenched in his lap. "Not twice!" he muttered. "Even for purposes of irony, twice in one lifetime would be too much!" And as he said it, the train rolled slowly into the station of Uxminster.

Chapter Three

No one knew that it was a Frenchman who stepped out on the platform.

The solitary porter came forward, nodded and touched his cap.

“Carry your bags, Mr. Jocelyn, sir?”

Philip shook his head absently. “Merci . . . I mean, no, thank you.”

The porter squinted at him. It wasn't that Mr. Jocelyn was back early, nor that he was browner than he had ever seen him. There seemed to be a change. “Ah!” he thought to himself. “Blow me if 'e ain't grown a moustache! That's it. And 'e looks the better of it too!”

Entirely unaware of any speculation about him, Philip, with a suit case in one hand and the portfolio of drawings in the other, made his way towards the exit. The bookstall was unchanged. He might have been away only overnight instead of a quarter of a year. The same magazines had the same badly drawn female toothsome faces on their covers. Hung in clips by a corner, so that they depended diagonally, they made the same frieze around the top and sides of the stall,—inane, vapid things. The huge enamel advertisements of Bovril and Oxo were still there, would be still there, probably, when the end of the world arrived. To the rattle and bang of milk cans, he went past the station-master's cubbyhole, and the same smell of printer's ink came out of it. Ahead were the steps that led clankingly down to the street.

He had to stop to give up his ticket. It entailed putting down the suit case and fumbling in many pockets. The ticket collector's “'Morning sir!” barely reached him. He went through the search of pockets, silent, shrunk in on himself, battling with the sound of all this English life which was reaching for him, tugging at him,—as though he were a Gulliver bound by the million infinitesimal ropes of the Lilliputs. Already, instead of thinking wholly in French, as he had been doing uninterruptedly for weeks, the mere rubbing elbows with people on the boat train, the drive across London in a taxi, the sights and smells, had made half his thoughts English.

When he reached the street and looked along the dusty road, every inch of whose half-mile into Uxminster had been made his through the soles of his feet, he swallowed with a dry mouth. It was the street he had seen through the trapdoor in Nice, every stick and stone in the same place; and now, here he was, actually and in the flesh, beginning to tramp along it.

He didn't stop and turn back. It didn't enter his head to do so. He gripped his suit case more tightly and went ahead, bent forward a little like an infantry soldier with a pack, marching back into the trenches, not from choice, but

because the order had been given. There was no pause at the turn-off that wound uphill to the school. He took it in his stride, automatically. The usually muddy road was an inch thick in gray dust, the hedges silvered with it, so that in the strong sun the leaves were almost white. And then, as he rounded the last bend, there loomed up ahead of him the hideous yellow-brick building behind its patch of straggling melancholy elms; the grass field, unwatered and destitute of cricket nets, burned brown in unsightly patches, as though it were broken out with some giant ringworm.

Philip suddenly felt cold in his stomach. "Oh, God!" he said.

It was as though he hadn't really believed that the school was there. The reality hit him like an unexpected slap in the face; the accumulation of years of routine inside those walls, the weight of old habits, the incredible storage of a million memories, came out at him like a miasmatic emanation, enveloped him, engulfed him, seeped into him. . . . The earth was cracking on the grave of Philip Jocelyn. In another moment, there might be an upheaval and he would rise again. . . . "Jeanne! . . . Jeanne!" It was a great cry that broke loose inside him, as he stood there shivering and sweating.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. . . . er . . . Jocelyn!"

The voice came from behind. Philip turned, startled. In flannels and rubber-soled feet, Mr. Hemingway came smilingly up, his flabby white hand outstretched, his whole pose exuding unctuous benevolence.

Philip could feel his features taking on the old captive smile, the meaningless reflex of servitude. Meekly, hating himself, but unable to react otherwise, he put down his suit case and obeyed the mute order to shake that hand. The touch of it had always been as repulsive as a slab of limp cold meat. "How do you do, sir?" he said.

Mr. Hemingway's eyebrows began their whimsical play. "You are back early! Let me hasten to say that in face of such keenness, the hospitality of the school is yours,—such as it is!" He made a gesture of deprecation.

"Thank you," said Philip. "You are very kind, but I . . . I didn't mean to . . . That is, I forgot . . ." Oh, God, here he was bogged again, stumbling. This man, the prison, the whole thing . . .

Mr. Hemingway waved a generous hand. "That's all right, my dear fellow. Don't say another word about it. It is always a pleasure to be able to give. . . . Incidentally, I am sure that you will rejoice with us to know that we shall have a good attendance. There are going to be twenty more boys this year!" He rubbed his hands together and the eyebrows became twin arcs somewhere up by his hat brim.

“That’s wonderful!” said Philip.

The Headmaster nodded at least twenty times. “The assumption must be obvious that our labours, Mrs. Hemingway’s and mine, do not cease even while you are fortunate enough to be enjoying the long vacation. . . . The fact that you have enjoyed it is easily discernible from the color of your face! And may I, in passing, remark that I cordially endorse the growing of a moustache? It lends, if I may say so, added weight.” He considered it for a moment with his head slightly on one side. “Yes,” he said, “there can be no doubt of it.”

Philip was trying desperately to iron the mawkish smile from his face. Philippe Josselin was no slave. There was not the slightest reason why he should tolerate the hypnotic flood of verbiage with which this man dominated Philip Jocelyn. And besides—it came to him like a revelation—now that Philip Jocelyn was dead, they would have to get a new master in his place! That would keep him dead, would definitely cut one at least of the damned ropes that was tying him down. . . . But he mustn’t boggle this. He must make it perfectly clear and concise. Perhaps, instead of trying to say it straight away in English, it would help to translate from the French as he went. . . . Je lui dirai, tout tranquillement, que j’ai des affaires très urgentes en France qui ne permettent pas . . . Oui, c’est ça! . . . Without thinking about it, he pulled a packet of Gauloises from his pocket and offered one to Mr. Hemingway.

The eyebrows rose reproachfully. “You seem to forget,” he said, “that I have made it a rule never to smoke outside my room. One has to keep on thinking eternally of the moral effect on the young, you know! One can’t afford to let down for a moment, even during the vacation.”

Philip ignored the remark. He lit his own cigarette and began translating, quietly and unhurriedly. “One of the chief reasons for my returning so early is to tell you that I shall be unable to continue with you this term. Certain urgent affairs in France demand my immediate return in the course of the next few days. You will have ample time, I feel sure, between now and the beginning of school, to get some one else through the scholastic agencies who will . . .”

“What’s that!” The interruption was like a minor explosion. Mr. Hemingway withdrew half a pace, as though a rattlesnake had appeared at his feet. “Do I hear you correctly? Do you mean to tell me, Mr. . . . er . . . Jocelyn, that you have the effrontery to contemplate leaving me in the lurch like this, at the last minute, after all these years of consideration and kindness to you on the part of myself and my wife?” He trembled with emotion and high indignation. “I cannot believe it of you. Is this what you call loyalty to the school, to desert at the eleventh hour? Really, I am deeply pained, shocked, I may say. I had thought that all my assistants were bound to me, not only by a

sense of gratitude, but by ties of, yes, affection!”

He paused to note the effect.

There was none. Philip went on smoking, not even looking at him. He was fiercely concentrated, saturating his brain with French.

Mr. Hemingway shifted his angle slightly, assumed the severity that went well with the M.A. gown.

“What are these urgent affairs in France, I should like to know? How is it that they have never transpired previously? You force me to the reluctant conclusion that you have, to put it vulgarly, found a better job; that for mere gain you will cast off, as though they were nothing, the years of association, of building, of growth, which we have been fostering so sedulously!”

Philip could feel the flood creeping up around his ankles. “Restons calme!” he said to himself. “Il le faut à tout prix!” He took another lungful of tobacco and then, for the first time in his life, interrupted the Headmaster. “You allow yourself to be unjust, sir. If I were not sure that there were numbers of men looking for school work, I should not, as you have phrased it, ‘leave you in the lurch.’ The nature of the affairs is private, so I am unable to explain more fully, but, at least, I can assure you that I have not accepted another position.”

There was quite a silence between the two men.

Mr. Hemingway looked at him searchingly, puzzled, questioning. There was a change here. For ten years he had always been amenable, in fact, not to put too fine a point upon it, verging upon the abject, whose name came tripping off the tongue whenever an extra duty was in order. How could he find another such, so exactly suited to his needs, in those infernal agencies? . . . Rhetoric didn’t work any more. Well, then, a change of tactics.

“Look here, Jocelyn,” he said, and there was no more bombast in his voice, “don’t be a damned fool! I don’t know what’s got into you, but you’d better discover which side your bread is buttered! I know that you haven’t got any money. How the devil do you expect to live if you haven’t found another billet,—and I believe you when you say you haven’t. It only makes it all the worse. I don’t want to know what your private affairs are, but if you’ve got some mad idea of jumping off into space—and ever since I’ve known you, you’ve always given me the impression that you were on the verge of it—you’d better take a word of sincere advice. Don’t!”

Philip was staring at him. He could hardly believe his ears. This wasn’t Hemingway. This was a human being, a decent sort. Had he misjudged him all these years? How extraordinary! Why, good heavens, he was sympathetic, he was trying to help. . . . Impulsively he reached out and put a hand on the

Headmaster's arm. "That's mighty nice of you, Hemingway! But it's not jumping off into space, even though you're right about money. When I leave here I sha'n't have a bean more than what I can earn with my pencil. Incidentally, it doesn't matter. It isn't of the slightest importance. The thing that matters is that I've made the most marvellous discovery in the world, and it's that that's going to change my whole life. . . . I've been down among the pines and olives of the Côte d'Azur all this time, working every day among the hill towns, spiritually speaking, with my pores open. I didn't know it. I didn't realize what was happening. But it took me back, got me. I belong there. Do you see what I'm driving at? I'm not Philip Jocelyn at all. Never was, really. You said something just now about the impression I always gave you. Well, you were right, although I hadn't the faintest idea of it. But I know now. I found out over there. I'm Philippe Josselin! Don't you see? Isn't it obvious? Looking back at it now, hasn't it always been obvious? . . . That's why I've got to leave you, Hemingway! I'm a fish out of water here. I've got to get back to my proper element."

The words came tumbling eagerly from Philip's mouth, untranslated, urgent to confide, to make clear, to share with another soul. His own need was so insistent that he didn't see the gradually changing expression in the other man's eyes, an expression whose meaning dictated orders first to Hemingway's face and then to his whole body, so that even though he remained apparently motionless, his stance became one of hostility, of doubt crystallizing into certainty.

"Really," he said, "if you expect me to believe that, either you're crazy or you must think I'm a fool! I certainly can't waste my time listening to anything like that. No. Your proper element is here. Haven't you accepted it, molded yourself into it all these years? Without thinking of my own convenience at all, Jocelyn—entirely of your welfare—I refuse to accept your resignation. The ensuing term is going to be unusually busy, and I shall expect you to carry out your usual duties. . . . No! I don't want to hear another word! And meanwhile I strongly advise you to pull yourself together and forget this," he paused for a brief but meaning second,—“this hallucination!” He turned abruptly and walked away.

It was rather like jerking a horse at full gallop back on to its haunches. For several moments Philip made no move. The cigarette dropped from his fingers to the gravel. A thin column of smoke rose from it. "My God!" he muttered. "He won't let me go! . . . I'm caught!"

Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead. All those years of saying "Yes, sir", and "No, sir", had him by the throat. He was like a rabbit who had popped no more than a head out of the burrow when a bullet got him. If only he had

stayed French, he might have won. It was that moment of forgetting, of showing himself, that had betrayed him. How could he get away now? It was an added thing to be negotiated.

He picked up his suit case. The school was waiting for him. He marched to the door, which clanged to behind him, hollowly, suggestively. Slowly he made his way up the stone stairs and along the corridor. At his door he paused, gave an odd laugh. "And he thinks I'm mad too! . . . What about the others? Will she . . ."

He dropped the suit case to the ground and jerked open the door. His nostrils widened at the stale odor, faintly tintured with mouse. "Lord!" he muttered, "how awful!" He strode quickly across the floor, dropping his suit case on the bed as he passed, and flung open the window. . . . There was no gorgeous valley, no thousand-year-old town sitting there quietly: nothing but the bilious brick of the other wing of the school,—the wing where Hemingway was, and Hemingway wouldn't let him go! God, how heavy it all was, how exhausting, like a poor devil of a fly on a sticky paper working and working to drag first one leg and then another out of the glue.

He turned his back on it . . . and the room came stealing at him: the chair creaked as though he had just got out of it; there seemed to be a faint movement in the cupboard where he kept his cocoa; the loose floor board yielded as though he were still pacing up and down as he had every night for æons; the fringe of the tablecloth waved backwards and forwards; a page of old scrap paper floated off the washstand and rustled drily when it fell on the bare floor. . . .

Philip stood rooted, sweating coldly. Then he moved rapidly. "Absurd!" he said. "It's nothing but the draught." But the odd feeling wouldn't altogether leave him. The damned room was claiming him. He pulled open the drawer of the bureau to throw into it an old undarned sock that he had left lying on the table. As he touched it, the picture of himself packing came back. He remembered why he had left it there, began to think again the thoughts that had been in his mind the night before his going. The suit case had been on the bed,—exactly where it was now! And he had taken the cherrywood pipe out of his mouth and laid it. . . . He reached out a hand, picked it up with a smile and began to fill it. Had he been, or was he going? Rouen to-night! And he would walk from the Pin d'Or to the Cathedral Square and sit at the café and saturate himself. . . . He struck a match and the cherry wood began to wheeze and gurgle. The two ends were joining; the end where he had left off and the end where he was to begin again. . . .

But suddenly he took the pipe out of his mouth and hurled it at the

wastebasket. “No!” he cried. “Never!” And, grabbing his hat, he went out, almost on the run, and slammed the door behind him.

Chapter Four

By all rights there should have been changes in Uxminster; if not a new sky line, then at least a new life going on, since he was to see it with new eyes.

But as Philip came striding down the hill, passed the cottages, and found himself beginning to enter the High Street, it was impossible to believe that he had ever been away. The rattle of carts, the incessant ringing of bicycle bells, the jostling of people on the narrow pavement, the familiar smell that came out of the baker shop, the peculiar background of it all which needed no translating, no sorting and arranging, began to settle down on him, to infiltrate itself through all his veins. By the time he reached the door of the Pig and Whistle, he was so far possessed by it that he turned in mechanically.

The barman nodded. “ ‘Morning, Mr. Jocelyn! The usual?”

Philip nodded. When he reached the bar a heavy pewter tankard of bitter beer was waiting for him. Was it only yesterday that he had done this? He murmured, “Good health!” and raised the beer to his lips.

When he went out again the swing door squeaked as it had a million times. He paused on the step. Up the street first, or down. . . . Good lord, what was he thinking about? That was all before. It didn't apply now. He passed a hand over his face as if to brush the whole thing away. He had got to see Millicent, to tell her . . . What was he going to tell her? He had never thought about that. He had merely obeyed an inner command to come back. And now here he was, and the shop, Millicent, was a bare hundred yards away. . . . What was he going to tell her? Hemingway had refused to believe that he was Philippe Josselin, refused to let him go. Would Millicent refuse too? Would that word “hallucination” begin to creep about? Could they use it to keep him here? Would the Trumbulls and the Jennifers whisper behind their hands and look at him queerly? He could hear their comments,—“Perfectly harmless, but not quite right in his head you know. . . . Really, but he looks all right. . . . Yes, but he thinks he's a Frenchman. . . . A Frenchman? How extraordinary! But then he always used to seem a little queer, don't you think? . . . Oh, but that was nothing. He's definitely touched now!” Was that going to be the new term? Could Hemingway possibly use that to hold him? . . . No, not possibly. That kind of thing wasn't done any more. . . . Was it beyond the normal comprehension that a man could emerge from one state of being into another without being mad? People were so afraid, just as he himself had been. They clung desperately to their little bits of wadding, their little certainties. There wasn't a soul in this town. . . . Yes, there was! There was Uncle John. He was susceptible to ideas. He might begin to understand. Uncle John!

Philip left the inn doorstep big with the thought of him, warming to the memory of those chess evenings, those moments of expansion when, from one armchair to another, there passed a current of deep comprehension. A corker, Uncle John! If there was anybody in the wide world. . . . He was so immersed in pictures of their relationship that he almost passed the shop, stopped with a jerk at the second window and had to go back a couple of paces to look in through the door. . . . There was Uncle John, busy with a couple of women. He didn't look a day older, after all this time. . . . Where was Millicent? Not there, eh? Must be upstairs. . . . Perhaps, after all, it would be better like that. It would give him a chance for a word alone with Uncle John.

He pushed the door open and went in.

At the inrush of sound from the street, John Sampson looked up. On seeing Philip, his face became wreathed in smiles. He turned quickly to the two women. "Will you excuse me a moment, just a moment?" Without waiting for an answer, he hurried across the shop, grasped Philip's hand and began to pump it up and down. "Well, my dear boy! And so here you are! It's good to see you. We've been worried!"

The touch of the old man's hand, and the sight of his eager face, took Philip in the pit of the stomach. Hitherto, his own emotions, his own desires, had been so omnipresent that Uncle John and Millicent had seemed like lay figures a thousand miles away, so remote that their side of it hadn't penetrated to him. Now, with Uncle John's hand in his, the penetration was complete, instantaneous. "Oh, God, I can't do it!" he thought. "It's . . . it's murder!"

Uncle John patted his shoulder. "Now there's no need for you to look as apologetic as all that! A little worry never did anybody any harm. And now that you're back, everything's perfect! . . . You're not in a hurry, are you? You'll wait till I've seen to these two ladies? It won't take more than a moment or two. Millie's out shopping. Last-minute preparations, you know! . . . I'll be back in a jiffy!" He waved his hand jauntily and returned to his customers.

Speechless, Philip stood there in the middle of the shop, rocking on his feet. It was murder! There would be lines in the old man's face, pain in his eyes. . . . Last-minute preparations! Millicent was getting ready to marry him . . . to marry him! All her thoughts and yearnings turned towards him, ready to come to him . . . like Jeanne . . . like Jeanne . . .

Rigid, every muscle tight, he turned, made his way to the desk and held on to it.

Like Jeanne! No, no! That was unthinkable! That belonged to Jeanne. He had given it to her,—the first ecstasy, the wonder, the impassioned beauty. . . .

There was nothing left for Millicent. It wouldn't be marriage. It would be . . . prostitution.

A hand clapped him on the shoulder. Uncle John was back again. "There," he said, "they've spent their little half-crown; now we can talk. You arrived this morning, I take it?"

With that merciful eighth sense by which mankind can hide itself at times of need, Philip turned with what passed for a smile. "Yes," he said. "I merely dropped my things at the school and came straight here."

A whimsical expression, behind which was the hint of a question mark, came into John Sampson's eyes. "It was the telegram that did the trick, eh? Well, the change has certainly done you good. You look like a different man. Did you get a lot of work done? I'm tremendously keen to see it."

A different man! . . . Oh, God, why couldn't he tell him? . . . He could hear his own voice. "Oh, rather! I'll bring the whole portfolio down and you'll see for yourself that I didn't altogether waste my time."

"Good boy!" John Sampson rubbed his hands together. "I told Millie you were hard at it. I must write that letter to my colleague in London and we'll see that he finds the best possible market. You can't afford to neglect any opportunities, now that you are getting into double harness!"

It seemed to Philip that his sickly smile was frozen to his face, would never melt again, that it was so obvious a mockery that the old man must be blind not to see underneath it, not to burst out suddenly and demand to know what he was hiding. How infinitely better that would be than to go on standing there, a ghastly lie, pinned in a forked stick. And every minute the lie would go deeper, bogging all three of them in an inextricable morass.

Uncle John's voice went on. "Why don't you bring them down to-night and have supper with us? It'll be just like old times. I would suggest that you stay and lunch, only, as you know, we merely have time to snatch an uneasy bite and get back to the shop again."

Philip clutched at it. To-night! Yes, that would give him time to find out what to do, how to do it. "Very well," he said. "We'll settle things to-night."

John Sampson clapped him on the back again. "That's right!" he said. "And we'll do it leisurely, over a bottle of wine and a cigar. By Jove, it's good to see you back! It's a long time since we had a game of chess! I feel as if I'd forgotten how to play. We shall have to . . ."

The shop door opened and was swiftly shut again. Millicent stood there, her hands full of bundles, her face alight. "It is you, then!" she cried.

Both men turned,—Uncle John quickly, with a smile that was a mixture of

delight and triumph, Philip as though every bone in his body creaked with the effort.

It seemed an eternity before his eyes found her face; but when they did, he knew that the word “hallucination” was a lie. Hemingway was unchanged, Uncle John was the same, line for line, the feel of Uxminster had made him respond automatically to age-old habits; but the sight of Millicent, the one being upon whom his whole emotional concern had been centered, was like looking at the photograph of some one whom he had known years and years ago. She was the same and yet not the same,—the photograph of an oil painting, the color all gone, a mere outline, cold and stark, without glamor. . . . With a sense of shock it came to him that she was, in reality, exactly the same as she had always been; that it was he himself, under the urge of sex, who had supplied the glamor.

Millicent gave a gasp. “Good heavens, what have you done? You’ve grown a moustache! It makes you look . . . funny! I hardly recognize you. I suppose it is you . . .” She laughed excitedly. “But of course. How silly I am.”

“You’re excited, my dear,” said Uncle John, beaming, “and I don’t wonder. Now why don’t you take him upstairs? You can’t possibly talk down here. Customers may come in at any moment.”

Somewhere Philip found a voice at last. He must get away, quickly. He needed to pull himself together. “I’m awfully sorry I can’t stay now,” he said. “The Headmaster’s expecting me to lunch. I just came along to . . . to see you, to let you know that I was back. I must hurry. I’ll be here for supper, early.” He edged around, still with that grimace of a smile. “Au revoir. Till then!”

Millicent’s surprised eyes followed him as he made an escape out of the door and disappeared up the street.

Uncle John was still rubbing his hands together. “Well, my dear,” he said, “didn’t I tell you he would be back in time? If you live with me long enough, you’ll end by admitting that I rarely make mistakes when it comes to reading a man’s character!”

The girl nodded absently.

“And doesn’t he look fitter than you ever saw him?”

Millicent nodded again, a puzzled frown puckering her eyebrows.

“From what he says,” continued Uncle John, “and he’s about the most modest man I ever knew, I shouldn’t be surprised if he’d done some fairly good work. He’s going to bring them down to-night. I thought we’d have a special little supper of celebration and get out a bottle . . .”

From immobility, Millicent became suddenly galvanized into action. It was

evident that her uncle's words were a mere meaningless patter of sound against her ears. Still grasping the parcels, she left him in the middle of his sentence, hurried across the shop and disappeared through the door that led upstairs.

The old man remained with his mouth open, staring after her.

“Well,” he muttered at last. “Upon my word! . . . What's got into her now?”

Chapter Five

ALWAYS in the old days the bed-sitting-room had been the one sanctuary, the hole that he could always creep into and pull the lid down on himself when the world was too much with him. Even Davies-Jones and the two other masters, gregarious merchants who found security only in group conversation, and who therefore needed Philip as one added verbal target, had learned the proper interpretation of the slammed door of his room. When they heard it, they looked at one another with momentarily raised eyebrows, as who should say, "Queer bird! Gone to earth again. Better leave him alone."

To-day, however, when he came tearing back to it from the bookshop, it failed him in all respects. Not only was his earlier impression of it not there, but the quality of sanctuary was altogether absent. The books remained silent. The one armchair, whose upholstery had been molded to the shape of his body, did not seem to fit any more. The impress of personality with which he had endowed the room, faint though it had always been, to-day seemed alien. It was like a man suddenly noticing, not without panic, that the shadow he threw was not recognizable.

For a while he walked up and down, touching things aimlessly, as though his hand had been completely severed from all direction from his brain, were an independent and restless agent, employing itself in meaningless investigation. They might have been a man and a puppy out for a walk. Presently they came together at the bed. He opened the portfolio and spread out six or seven drawings. Remembered sounds, smells, sights, took possession of him, not separately, but run together as a unit of emotion, in the way memory has, kneading time and circumstance to a composite whole. Yet although it was France he looked at, it was Jeanne he saw,—Jeanne laughing, Jeanne asleep, Jeanne in his arms. . . . For some moments his projection of her was so vivid that he was almost with her . . . almost. And then gradually she faded, and he knew that he was very much alone. All his life he had been alone, all his small "faits et gestes" the outcome of solitude; so that eventually he had sought solitude, had turned to it from the petty importunings of every day as to a haven. In a sense he had whitewashed and papered his solitude, decorated it with his own thoughts, peopled it with congenial companions from the literature of the world as he had been able to find it on the back shelves of the bookshop.

To-day, with the vision of Jeanne just beyond his grasp, it ceased to be solitude and became loneliness, acute, aching. There was no telling himself this time how he was going to miss her, fooling himself that one emotion interfered with another. His emotions in regard to Jeanne were as sharp as a

razor. For the first time he plumbed the real meaning of “missing” some one. He missed her not only emotionally but physically; so that he was filled with a sense of incompleteness, of frustration, of bewildered emptiness, of reiterated longing. For a time he stood there, deliberately yielding to it; even, in a backhanded way, enjoying it,—or, if not quite that, at least drawing a certain morbid satisfaction from it. It represented the nearest approach that was possible.

There is, however, a point beyond which no emotion can be sustained. Eventually he reached it, sighed, muttered, “Mon Dieu, I’ve got to pull myself together and tackle this thing!”

He gathered up the drawings and put them back in the portfolio. “Now,” he said. “Millicent!” It was like a password that brought him back to Uxminster. “If that clot of blood means anything, let me at least be logical, analytical. . . .” He began to march up and down, and, as he did so, went back in mind to the shop, to the sight of Millicent as she came in.

“What do I know of her?” he asked himself. “If I am to find the right answer, I must know the terms. When all is said and done, who is Millicent? What is she? I merely took her for granted, blindly. It isn’t enough now. Let’s see . . . Winchester . . . growing up in the shadow of the cathedral, tintured with religion and respectability, narrow as the devil, but honest. Education practically nil, several degrees worse than they get here, and that’s taking it pretty low. Probably never read anything but servant fiction, but she undoubtedly has a series of rigid definitions of good and bad, moral and immoral, duty, all the usual Sunday-school maxims. All of which means that she’ll be horrified at the mere mention of Jeanne and jump to the most frightful conclusions. In some ways, good. It’ll help. May make her glad to have made a ‘lucky escape.’ One can almost hear the Dean! . . . Lord, in a way, that sounds appalling, most damnably cold-blooded. But, good heavens, did she ever really love me? Knowing what I know now, I can’t believe that she really did. Her own ego, self-consciousness, never seemed to be shaken. She was always one step ahead, planning something else, almost as though I were merely an adjunct to some deep ulterior purpose . . . or as though to be a married woman were the be-all and end-all of the whole business. . . . Good God, no! Surely that’s taking it too far. An older woman, perhaps, but not a girl like that! . . . And yet, her deep concern with the people here, her social functionings, unremitting, tireless, are pretty good evidence. I don’t know. It might at least be subconsciously true. But true or not, I’ve got to realize that it is I who am in the wrong, I who am knocking everything sky-high from whatever point of view she may be looking at it. . . . It’s manifestly impossible for me to go there and sit through a would-be jovial supper. I couldn’t face it; besides, there

wouldn't be the slightest chance of getting an opportunity of saying anything. And with this cursed wedding three weeks off, speed is of the essence. . . . Let me think. The best way to tackle this is to see her alone, be perfectly straightforward, conceal nothing, and rely on her fundamental decency and good-heartedness. She may cry, I suppose, which will be hellish. Lord knows, I've absolutely no experience at this kind of mess. It's no good trying to plan what I'll say. That'll have to be left to the inspiration of the moment. All right; then where shall I see her? Certainly not at the shop, equally certainly not here, and if I go upstairs into those rooms of theirs, it would be too damned intimate. . . . The tea room!" Without hesitation he went to the table, pulled out the drawer, groped in it for pen and paper, and proceeded to dash off a note. His first effort went into the wastebasket. The second came more slowly, but at last he signed his name at the foot of it.

"There!" he muttered. "One way or the other, that will settle it."

Chapter Six

MILLICENT pulled the thin frock over her head. It was silk and reluctant. By the time her head emerged through the top, her carefully arranged hair was all rumbled. She worked the thin dress down over her body and smoothed it, fastened snap hooks at the wrists, buckled the loose belt.

Then she stretched out a hand and picked up a note that lay open on the dressing-table. She read it for the third time. "It is impossible for me to come to supper to-night. But I must see you. Will you meet me for tea at the Old Brown Cosey at four? Most important. Philip."

"Must see you. Most important." She repeated the two phrases aloud, considered them, and then, after a moment, gave a queer strained laugh and went on in a sort of self-mutter that was half-spoken, half-thought. "Have I been right all this time? . . . It's so terribly hard to really put your finger on anything with Philip. He was thinking of something else this morning. Just imagine it! . . . Perhaps if I kissed him . . . if he really sees me . . ."

She dropped the note back on the table, sat down and took the hairbrush. Wherever she touched her hair with it, electricity made it cling to the bristles. Soon her hair was resplendent again. Then she took up a box of rouge and worked on her cheeks; and, after a moment's hesitation, applied lipstick to her pale lips. She picked up her engagement ring, looked at it for a moment with a tiny frown and finally slipped her finger through it. It looked very nice in the glass as she patted her hair with both hands, pulled a curl this way, tucked another that. Then she got up and fetched a hat from the closet, a thin biscuit-colored straw that fitted her head closely. Having pulled it on, she sat down again and resumed the hair-arranging process.

"There!" she said, and glanced at her wrist watch. It said four o'clock. She shrugged her shoulders. "After all, it's his turn to do a little waiting!" So, without hurrying, she took up the hand mirror and sat so that she could see the back of herself. Apparently it passed muster. On the left of the dressing table was a large square bottle of jasmin perfume. She removed the stopper and dabbed her cheeks, her throat, the backs of her hands; and again gave that queer laugh.

Then she pulled open the dressing-table drawer, chose a handkerchief, tucked it into her handbag, put Philip's note into the drawer and shut it. She was ready now; but at the last moment she took another look at herself in the mirror and gave another dab of rouge to her cheeks. Then she went out of the room and down the back stairs so as not to have to go out through the bookstore. Uncle would only ask questions. . . .

Her efforts had been entirely successful. She made a charming picture as she tripped along, not too fast, because she didn't want to get too hot, pretending to be vastly interested in the window display in each shop front, but in reality seeing only her own reflection in the glass. The hat, a wild extravagance in preparation for Philip's return, which wasn't to have been a bit like this, was very becoming, and the dress, which she made herself from a magazine pattern while he was away, matched the hat perfectly. She was entirely justified in the gleam that came into her eyes.

Her wrist watch said a quarter past four as she entered the Old Brown Cosey. As she came up the stairs, she saw Philip pacing up and down by the fireplace. She took a deep breath and smiled at him as he came to meet her. "Philip!" she murmured, went up to him and kissed him deliberately. . . . Nothing . . . a statue! So she was right. Something had happened. He was altogether different, older in some way, sterner . . . and it had nothing to do with that moustache either. It went deeper than that,—so deep that she shied away.

"Well, here we are!" she said, her voice brittle. "Let's go and get a seat in the window. In this sort of weather, one needs all the breeze one can get." She forced a smile at one of the waitresses who came forward, and led the way, Philip following, to the far end of the room. Only one of the window tables was occupied, so she picked out the end one farthest away from it and installed herself comfortably. "Tea and buns, please," she said to the waitress, and then, when they were alone, "Now give me a cigarette, Philip, and I'll be ready to listen to all the apologies you can muster up,—for not having written to me, or answered my telegram, and for refusing to come to supper to-night. Do you realize that this morning you never even said 'hullo,' that you ignored me completely? If you hadn't sent that note asking me to tea, I should never have forgiven you!"

Philip sat down and passed her his cigarette case. "I'm awfully sorry about this morning. I was . . ."

"You were up in the moon again!" said Millicent. "Apparently you've been there nearly all the time you were away. I bet you'd forgotten the date and the month, and even what year it was!"

"Yes," said Philip simply. "As a matter of fact, I had."

Millicent laughed, a little shortly. "I knew it! Thank you for the compliment. . . . Really, Philip! You're impossible! I suppose if I hadn't telegraphed, you'd still be over there. . . . Aren't you going to give me a match?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" said Philip. He hurriedly took a match from the stand

on the table, struck it and held it out to her.

Millicent lit her cigarette, choked and made a wry face. "Good heavens! How awful! What on earth have you given me?" She ground the cigarette out in the ash tray.

"Oh, of course," said Philip. "I quite forgot. Those are French ones. Let me get you some others from the waitress. They have them here, haven't they?"

"No. You ought to remember that they haven't," said Millicent. "But don't bother. I have some in my bag. Do you mean to say that you can smoke that horrible stuff?"

"I like them," said Philip. He helped himself to one while she groped in her bag and produced a packet of her own.

"These are what you always used to smoke," said Millicent.

"Are they?"

Millicent's eyebrows went up. "You don't mean to say that you've forgotten them too?"

With an effort Philip picked up the packet. "Why, yes, I do remember them."

"You'd better!" said Millicent. She glanced at him swiftly. "I don't believe I could stand those awful French things around the house."

Philip swallowed and looked away. "Ah, here comes the tea!" he said; and looked up at the waitress and smiled gratefully. "Thank you." He took out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. In God's name, why did life exact these accursed punishments? He glanced quickly around the tea room. The nearest people were tables away. They couldn't possibly hear anything,—if only he could find what to say! What was the psychology of the hangman when he watched his victim mount the scaffold? And this was worse because she didn't know she was on a scaffold. Why did one's brain become as flabby as a sponge just when one needed it most? . . . And it was all such a damned shame. She hadn't done a thing. . . .

Millicent's high laugh brought him back. She was holding out a teacup.

"Good heavens, Philip!" she said. "I thought you were changed this morning. Now I know you are. You're moonier than ever. Here have I been holding out this cup for hours! It isn't very flattering, you know, the first time you're with me again after all these months! Can't you manage to pull yourself together and say something? I've been waiting to hear you tell me that you're glad to be back, glad to see me, or even that my frock looks nice. . . . Are you? Do you?"

Philip lurched out a hand and took the cup, dumped it down in front of himself, the tea splashing into the saucer. Well, here it was . . . thank God! Anything was better than teetering on the edge of the precipice. He must be very careful, lead up to it gently and then, taking his time, paint the picture just as it was, omitting nothing. She deserved that. Indeed, it was her right. He leaned forward. "Millicent," he said, "I'm trying to . . . to work myself up to telling you something. But it's desperately difficult, and I'm hating myself because it's going to hurt you. I wish I hadn't got to say it. It . . . it's terribly unfair." He broke off and began stirring his tea wildly, as he thought out the next step.

Millicent put down her teacup with a precision that was infinite. . . . So it had come, in spite of all the new dresses and the rouge and the perfume that he had raved about, given her. . . . The arc described by her hand seemed to be the only important thing in the world, and it was not until finally the bottom of the cup fitted the pattern in the saucer exactly that she knew that at last she was able to look up. She sat back and locked her fingers tightly together in her lap, under the table. He mustn't know. He mustn't see. She would rather die than show him. . . . "How do you know it's going to hurt me?" she asked. "Don't you think I can . . . guess what you're going to say?"

Philip looked up startled. "You can guess? How . . ."

"I'm not altogether a fool!" said Millicent. "Hadn't you better say it? I'll tell you if I guessed wrong!"

Philip was peering at her. "But you can't possibly . . ."

"Say it, I tell you!" The words came like a nervous explosion.

Philip nodded. Of course; she was perfectly right. But somehow it had put him off his stride. . . . "Very well," he said. "I've come to ask if you'd mind . . . I mean . . . if you'd be willing to break off our engagement?"

Millicent let out a breath, as if it had been punched out of her. "I knew it was that! Why should I? I haven't changed my mind!"

"I'm awfully sorry," said Philip. "You see, so many things have happened. You must let me begin from the . . ."

Millicent broke in. "I gathered that things had happened from all the letters you didn't write me!" She gave a hard laugh. "Don't take a year mauding about it. Why don't you sum it up by telling me her name?"

Philip frowned. That wasn't fair. It was cutting the ground from under his feet. "It isn't simply that," he said quickly. "You see . . ."

"Is she French?" demanded Millicent.

Philip swallowed. "Yes, but please let me . . ."

“And are you engaged to her, as well?”

He blinked. One could hardly call it that . . . “Not exactly,” he said slowly. “Not in its English sense. You have to take into consideration . . .”

Millicent wouldn't wait. “Perhaps I'm a fool, but I thought an engagement was an engagement in any country.”

Philip nodded. “Of course,” he said. “You're perfectly right. But this was different in certain respects.”

Her eyes wide, Millicent leaned forward. “You mean . . . you're married?”

Philip shook his head. “No,” he said simply. “No. Somehow we didn't think of that. It swept us both off our feet. You see, we have been living together for three months. But I want to go back and marry her.”

Millicent's writhing hands became very still. It was as though a bomb had gone off at her feet, and the concussion had momentarily paralyzed her nerve centers.

Philip leaned towards her. “Perhaps you'll let me say a word now. You have sprung this so abruptly on yourself. I had meant to tell you very differently. You've made it a sort of oleograph, throwing all the wrong colors into prominence. It's the other side that's the important one,—if I can only make you see it. . . . Supposing I were a total stranger who had come to tell you that Philip Jocelyn had been run over by a taxi and killed. In a kind of way, that's exactly what has happened. In other words, I left here as Philip Jocelyn, intending to come back with all the inequalities ironed out, with all the stumbling blocks between us removed. But after I had been in France some time, something happened,—something entirely outside myself, something ancestral, atavistic. I discovered that that other race is my race, that all this time, perhaps for hundreds of years, the clot of French blood that eventuated in the man you knew as Philip Jocelyn was in reality Philippe Josselin. Can you understand that at once everything was changed? It was as if Uxminster had suddenly become an old skin that I had shed, and I was amazed to see it lying there beside me. And it was only after this had happened that the French girl came in. So you see, it was not the man you knew who fell in love with her. It was the other man, the Frenchman, to whom your telegram was like a voice from the other side, a recall to another earth. It was the Frenchman who caught the next train. It is he who is asking you now, most humbly, if you will allow him to go forward, if you will be generous enough to grant him this second chance.”

It is doubtful whether Millicent heard anything of the racial change, certain that she was entirely unaware that his phraseology had become altogether Latin. Her mind stopped when she heard him say, “Somehow we didn't think

of that. It swept us off our feet. We have been living together . . .” The words were like a flame that burned and shrivelled, like the touch of the finger of truth upon her soul. “We didn’t think of that. It swept us off our feet . . .” And she had been thinking in terms of wedding dresses, of going to the Trumbulls no longer as Miss Sampson but as Mrs. Jocelyn, of being able to hear herself say, “My husband . . .”, of knowing the triumph of being hostess in that apartment, of occupying a definite social position as a wife. She hadn’t ever known it consciously. It had been overlaid, buried deep. But it stood up stark and naked now. Was that love, that little trickle of ego? “We didn’t think of that. It swept us off our feet.” Once Philip had felt like that about her,—and she had been ashamed, frightened, and had pushed him away. She hadn’t wanted that. All she had wanted was to show him off as hers. Love, “living together”, that was something secret, forbidden, repulsive . . . something to be hidden and avoided, even after the wedding ring was safely on, of itself intolerable, only to be endured because of motherhood. . . . “We didn’t think of that. It swept us off our feet.” That was love,—and it frightened her. . . .

Her pale hands came out of her lap and she covered her face with them. It wasn’t fair. Why was she afraid? Why couldn’t she have felt as they did? Why couldn’t she have met love, when it came to her, with open arms, stirred but unafraid? Life had cheated her. She was only half a woman,—the wrong half, the half that a man didn’t want. It was the other half that Philip had been looking for, when his eyes had been all alight, and she hadn’t ever had it to give him. And now he wanted to go back and marry that French girl. . . . Her wedding dress was crumbling in pieces at her feet. The Madonna lilies that she had set her heart on turned brown and curled up. The frock she had on became a mockery and a horror. As she walked down the High Street people would stare and snicker. “It was to have been her going-away dress!” Mrs. Jennifer would say, “My dear, I’m so sorry!” and as soon as her back was turned, would hurry around to Mrs. Trumbull and say, “Well, you know, I always did think that that Sampson girl . . .” She couldn’t bear it! If only he had been run over by a taxi! If only she could kill him now! Everybody would know that she was . . . jilted!

The momentary gleam of enlightenment had faded out, gave place to anger, as her imagination flicked like a movie camera and presented her with a series of close-ups of herself and those other women of Uxminster whom she had called her friends. It was too much. Like a poisoned arrow the word “jilted” stuck into her, and the venom of it ran through her, sprayed her mind with companion word-pictures,—disgrace, ridicule, contempt, sneers. All those beastly people would say that she had run after him. If only she had been able to! That was what made it doubly bitter, that it was because of her

coldness he was jilting her, chucking her . . . Was he? Well, she would show him, show them all!

She dropped her hands. Her hard, dry eyes went across the table and hit him. “Do you know what you are talking about, Philip Jocelyn? Are you an adult or not? Do you understand that you agreed to marry me, that everything’s ready, my clothes, the apartment, the invitations, my father and mother coming on from Winchester, everything?”

Philip’s face became screwed up. “I know!” he said. “I’m frightfully sorry it’s gone as far as that. But there wasn’t anything I could do. I came as soon as I got your telegram!”

“My telegram! Are you quite mad? What’s that got to do with it? I only sent it the day before yesterday. If that’s the first time this idea entered your head, all I can say is that you’d better send another telegram to the girl in France and say that you’re not coming back!” A gleam came into her eyes, as though she saw her way now. “Go on!” she said. “Write it now, and we’ll go out and send it off.”

Philip met her hard eyes. “I’m sorry,” he said. “That’s impossible.”

“Is it?” said Millicent. “Why? I don’t see it at all. Just because you come and tell me about some silly affair with a woman over there, you expect me to be horrified, scandalized. You’re out of date, my dear!” She laughed, and it seemed to Philip that it might have been metal hammers pounding on rock. “Ever since I was old enough to read novels I’ve known that men did these things, but I never would have believed that you were one of that kind! Even now, as a matter of fact, I don’t believe that you were primarily responsible. It must have been that French woman who came and grabbed you while you were dreaming over your drawings, and because you are what you are, you take it seriously and imagine that you’ve got to go back and marry her! I never heard anything so childish! You can thank your stars you’ve got me to get you out of it. You’re going to marry me, Philip Jocelyn, on the day that has been planned, and you needn’t worry about the rest. If that woman tries to make trouble afterwards, she’ll have to deal with me! I can stand up to her, if you can’t! In the first place, she’ll never dare to come to England, and in the second place, I’ll take jolly good care that you don’t go off to France again by yourself! Now let me help you write that telegram.”

Philip was staring at her, bewildered, unbelieving, with something approximating panic. Good God, would she force him to marry her? Would he find himself being dragged to the altar? She had always exuded force, but in the days of their courtship it had been veiled, sweetened, camouflaged. She had refused his kisses one minute, only to tell him that he was perfectly right

about them the next. She had patted his arm and squeezed his hand and looked softly up into his face when she had finally turned down the cottage and got her way about the flat. At every step along their brief road together it was he who had surrendered. Now that she had taken the gloves off, he was as defenseless as a fly trying to argue politely with a spider. Every word she said was another coil around his ankles. From the moment she had entered the tea room she had taken the affair completely out of his hands. He had wanted to tell her in his own way, to work up to it gradually, to paint the picture in gentle harmonious colors so as not to hurt her, so as to avoid shock, friction, scenes. But,—and with a mental flashback he remembered that it was just the way in which she had grabbed the engagement ring,—she had hurdled all the preliminaries and plunged straight on to the fact of Jeanne! Good God, how little he knew of Winchester! What had happened to the Cathedral Close if its shadow no longer touched the girls who grew up in it? It must be the movies

...

He jerked himself back from that philosophical bypath at the thought of his immediate danger. "But Millicent," he spluttered, "you don't understand! It isn't any question of what you call an affair. It's the most desperately serious ..."

Millicent interrupted relentlessly. "Now, my dear Philip, don't talk nonsense! You haven't got the makings of a disciple of Shaw at all. So you needn't waste your time trying to convince me that a seaside passion, however French, is more serious than a church wedding. Our banns have been solemnly read each Sunday by the vicar, and an entire English community is waiting for the day on which to file into church and see us get married. That's serious, if you like,—to me the most serious moment in my whole life; so much so that I am willing to overlook and forget your holiday escapade!"

Philip's face went white. Escapade! Did she know what she was saying? Had she the slightest idea of what marriage meant? Was it beyond her understanding that Jeanne and he had been married, in all but one sense of that word, for three months? . . . Arguments! Arguments! This sempiternal rattle of empty syllables!

On the table between them the tea was cold in their two cups, the buns untouched, their original cigarette ends extinct in the ash tray.

The quartette at the opposite window table had had more hot water brought to them, and a second supply of buns, and were now swallowing tobacco smoke as heartily as they swallowed food. Many other couples had come in, so that the surrounding tables were dotted with people. Even in her concentration, Millicent, with that never-ceasing social sense of hers, had observed them, if

only with a tail-end of consciousness, and had tuned her voice accordingly.

Not so Philip. He was completely unaware that they were not still quite alone in their corner. He passed a hand over his face despairingly, leaned back, grasped a teaspoon in his fingers and began twisting it. "Look here," he said at last. "It's no good beating about the bush any more. You can call it an escapade, or anything you like. It doesn't matter. I've said I'm very sorry, and I am. But I can't marry you."

Millicent made no answer. The receding of blood from her cheeks left the rouge as crude as the paint on the face of a Japanese doll. There seemed to be only one move left, one last shot. "So," she said, "it really is your idea to try and sneak out of it at the last minute, eh? . . . I suppose you'd like me to cry a little and ask you to let me be a sister to your French woman! . . . No, Philip Jocelyn, my mind doesn't work that way. You have made a solemn engagement to marry me, and as you haven't been able to give me any good reason for not keeping it, we'll see what reasons you can dig up to my uncle, to the vicar, to Mr. Hemingway, to Uncle's lawyer!" She picked up her handbag, a dainty, effeminate, appealing trifle of a handbag. "I hope you will enjoy talking to them! Good-by for the moment. We shall see each other again very soon." Then she rose and, in case any one should happen to be looking at them gave him a nodding smile and left him.

Chapter Seven

THE moon was high when John Sampson breasted the slope at the top of which was the school. He paused for a moment and wiped the perspiration from the band of his straw hat. The climb had made him blow. He shook his head a little ruefully at the thought that he was not as young as he used to be; at which, he clapped the hat back on his head and plugged along grimly, his eyes fastened on the only light in the masters' wing.

"He's there!" he muttered.

When he reached the stone steps, his stick sounded like a giant woodpecker as he tapped his way up. At the top he peered from side to side for the bell, found it and pushed the button. It made a great ringing in the empty interior. He waited, listening. There came no sign of life. Once more he pushed the button, letting his finger stay on it. When he removed the pressure, the returned silence presently yielded up the sound of a distant door slamming.

"Ah!" said John Sampson, and braced himself more firmly on his legs.

After a moment there came the sound of feet descending the stairs, one at a time, draggingly. The man coming down was evidently holding on to the banister.

Then chains and bolts rattled, a lock clicked, and, with a rusty squeal, the school door swung wide.

Philip Jocelyn stood there. "You!" he said. Even in the moonlight his face looked drawn and tired. His hair was rumpled as if he had just that moment got up off the bed. His tie had slipped under his collar. There was cigarette ash all down his waistcoat. His appearance was one of utter dejection.

John Sampson nodded to himself as though he were thinking, "Well, no wonder!" Aloud he said, "I have come to demand an explanation."

Philip gave a bitter laugh. Even Uncle John had no use for him now! "Haven't you brought the vicar and the lawyer then?" he said. "Oh, well . . . Come in."

The old man stepped inside. Philip closed the door and then pushed an electric switch that lit up the staircase.

"We'll go up to my room," he said. "It's less like a morgue there."

"Very well," said John Sampson. "Lead on."

In silence Philip led the way up the stairs and along the corridor, opened the door of his room and stepped back for the old gentleman to go in.

The room was a chaos. Books and clothes were on the bed, the chairs, the

floor. The room was blue with acrid French tobacco smoke. Droppings of grey ash were like wormcasts all over the carpet.

Philip went to the armchair and cleared it with a sweep of his hand.

John Sampson sat down. He took off his glasses and wiped them, put them on again and looked up at Philip. "Now," he said, "I wish to know what all this is about."

With a rather shaky hand Philip lit another cigarette, swallowed a vast lungful and blew it out again. He dropped on to the edge of the bed. "Didn't Millicent tell you?"

"She told me enough to leave me completely in the dark," said John Sampson. "She told me that which I find it hard to believe of an Oxford man and a gentleman!" His reproachful eyes were still fastened on Philip's face.

Philip smiled at the ancient threadbare cliché, shrugged his shoulders and remained silent.

The old man's eyebrows came up in angry surprise. "This is no smiling matter, sir! My niece told me—and I quote her exact words—that you were 'trying to sneak out of marrying her!' Is that true? . . . Answer me!"

Philip caught his breath a little hysterically, leaped off the bed and hurled his cigarette at the fireplace. "Answer you! Answer you! . . . God Almighty, why does everybody badger me? Is it a conspiracy, an Inquisition? Is there no escape from all these words, these futile mouthings, this waste of life? Why the hell should I answer you? Who are you? . . . What do you know of the inner things that drive a man? What do you know of my having risked everything . . . everything, I tell you! . . . to come back in order that she shouldn't be hurt, and everybody unites in pushing me back into the barbed wire, in stamping me gleefully down into it! . . . Oh, my God!"

To the unsuspecting old gentleman, this outburst was like a heavy blow with a boxing glove. It staggered him, left him gasping and blinking, as Philip strode about the room, kicking books out of his way. Evidently there was something here, something—a great deal—more than Millicent had told him. Was it possible that she had wilfully misrepresented facts? Had he been too hasty in siding with her, just because she was a woman, because also she was his niece? One always instinctively, and therefore blindly, took the woman's side first. And yet this man Jocelyn, this queer, shy person, had always been the very incarnation of integrity in all their dealings. . . . It was unintelligent of him to have started off by barking like that, particularly with a man of that character. He was an old fool who had left his brains behind. . . .

He rose from the chair, cleared his throat, put out a tentative hand as Philip

passed him. "My dear boy," he said, "I ask you to forgive me. I had no right . . . I would like to help if I can . . ."

Philip stopped and looked at him.

John Sampson took advantage of the opening. "Won't you tell me," he said, "what happened at tea? Is it some lover's quarrel? Can't it be patched up by means of a little diplomacy, an apology perhaps on both sides? You know as well as I do, my dear boy, that in the heat of the moment one can say many stupid and apparently unforgivable things. But in the light of morning, when one has slept on them . . . Philip, I beg of you! This is a moment that must call for all one's judgment. It is no light matter to be thrown aside for an angry word. You are older than she. You have more experience. You are settled in your career. Without doubt you will one day be taken into partnership in this school; eventually, perhaps, become the headmaster. Don't you see? You are in a position to be more reasonable than she, to look at it with calmer eyes. . . . For both your sakes, I ask you to go to her to-morrow and make it up with her!"

Philip gave a strained laugh and passed his hand over his face. "That sounds more like you!" he said. "It was the last straw to have you kick me in the face!" He moved away, driving his hands deep into his trousers' pockets. Then he came back and stopped in front of the old man. "Do you know that I came to the shop this morning for the express purpose of talking to you about this?"

"Why didn't you?"

Philip waved a hand. "You prevented me. It doesn't matter how, but I couldn't go through with it. . . . Look here, I want to show you something. These drawings. Take a good look and tell me if you don't think they're done by a different man from the one who used to bring you those stupid little scratchings to sell." He went over to the bed, heaved some books off it and made a place for the portfolio, which he opened. "Here! What about these? Come over here and see for yourself."

John Sampson followed. "Yes, but . . . What's it all got to do with . . ."

Philip flung round on him. "It's the proof, ocular, tangible, right in your hand. . . . Do you see that? That's called St. Paul. And this one's Carros. And here are the cypresses in the cemetery . . . and the old farm. I ask you, is it the same man?"

John Sampson picked up the drawings, looked at them one after the other, eyes round in astonishment. "Did you do these? I had imagined that perhaps in years . . . and this is only a few months, a bare summer . . ."

“A bare summer?” There was a note almost of triumph in Philip’s voice. “A lifetime! A reincarnation, if you like! And that fool Hemingway thought I was crazy! And Millicent didn’t even know what I was talking about!” He caught the old man by the shoulder. “Uncle John, throw your mind back to last winter. Do you remember what happened? Do you realize that it was you who made all those months worth while . . . those chess evenings . . . the moments when we . . . said things. Perhaps they didn’t mean much to you, but to me they were the beginning of thought, of motion. Do you remember that night after night Millicent remained in the background? She was sewing, making dresses, a lay figure in a world of her own, while you and I got to know each other. It wasn’t anybody’s fault. It was simply that even then she and I had nothing to say to each other, to give each other. It was you and I who were exchanging things. . . . It wasn’t until the spring that I discovered it. That was why I was glad to go away. I had to go away to try and find out about myself, about her, to discover what was lacking. There was nothing I could put my finger on, nothing I could tell Millicent then. I thought it was up to me to work it out alone because I thought the lack was in me. . . . And then I got to France!”

He had left the old man and was pacing rapidly up and down. He paused now long enough to light a cigarette, so absorbed that he forgot to offer one to Uncle John. Then he resumed his march, followed this time by great swirls of smoke.

“What I am going to tell you,” he continued, “is not with the idea of justifying myself. To me there isn’t any question of justifying. That word doesn’t enter into it. Explanation, if you like; the payment of a moral debt, so that afterwards there may not be a contused spot of ill-will, a fog patch of misunderstanding that might reach out . . . Perhaps the real word is self-protection. I don’t know. You’ll see for yourself.”

Up and down, down and up, weaving an unconscious pattern through the books on the floor, Philip began to unwind the skein of his days in France.

John Sampson watched him, listening in silence.

The ugly word “jilted” had been in his mind too when Millicent, tight-lipped and white, had returned to the shop from her tea party and, standing in front of the desk, had blurted out bitter sentences, urging him to immediate action. It had rankled while the slow hours ticked themselves away until closing time. There was nothing, he knew, in the girl’s conduct during the summer which in any way suggested a break between them. Therefore the blame was Philip’s, must be Philip’s; and so, mystified, but with his mind full of harsh condemnation, enhanced by the shock to his own vanity at having

misread the man in the first instance, he had clapped on his hat and set his face to the hill. He had half expected evasion, excuses, subterfuge, a refusal to talk . . . he didn't know what.

Before Philip's concentration, his obvious sincerity, the very naiveté of his story, John Sampson's made-up mind returned to fluidity. Here was no evasion, no subterfuge. His unselfconsciousness was such that he might have been telling the story of another man. . . .

Presently, sitting all this time on the edge of the bed, his eyes going from Philip's face to the drawings and back again, the personal element disappeared altogether. Little by little he became caught up, fascinated. Monsieur Raymond, wagging his flaming beard under the sycamore tree, made a picture that he would never forget; Félix, flourishing his napkin, and the old brown dog going from knee to knee with suppliant nose, struck a responsive note in him; and by the time he was taken to the Mas Vert and heard more and more of Jeanne, he was leaning forward, excited, flushed. . . .

Jocelyn, Josselin,—what more simple? All the way back to William the Conqueror the whole history of the two countries was tintured with names that had got left behind on both sides of the Channel, changing in form only to suit the phonetics of each race. Certainly it was not Jocelyn, not the Jocelyn he knew, who had made those drawings. But a Josselin,—and, more than that, a Josselin who had found his inspiration, his Jeanne . . .

The old gentleman sat very still, nodding to himself, and for a moment the pages of his life turned back. . . . Slim, like a lily, in a long dress of green velvet fitting her body, dark braided hair wound about her head. . . . He had called her The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, and she had put her head back and laughed, standing there in the Devonshire sun on the bank of the stream. . . . Thirty years ago, forty? What did it matter now how long ago it was? He had been young once, and it was then that he had met her, his youth to hers, the enchantment of it throbbing in their eyes, but remaining unspoken because that very youth set a fence about each of them. . . . And upon a day—would he never forget it?—the holiday had come to an end. He had dashed wildly to her, his heart bursting,—and again youth choked them, struck them dumb. By accident, he would never have dared, his hand had touched hers and the flame of it had burned them both so that their eyes became afraid of the unknown that lay in each of them. At last he had mumbled out a rough good-by: and that was all. Life had seen to it that they didn't meet again. And now he was old John Sampson, so old that it was foolish to let that ancient scar ache even for a moment.

“. . . and with the terrific conviction,” Philip's words fell on hearing ears

again, “that the stream of our two lives had slowly been converging all this time, and that her coming to me was almost like finding the Holy Grail after a lifetime of pilgrimage, can you wonder that when she looked at me like that and said it was all over, I nearly didn’t come back, wouldn’t have come but for that inner order; that every time I let myself think of it I dread that something may have happened, may be happening?”

The pages of John Sampson’s book were closed again. He shook his head.

“I understand profoundly!” he said. “Life rarely offers second chances. Having learned that through many years, I confess that in your place I should have stayed. Ah, well! . . . But you came back. You are a better man than I am!” He laid the drawings back in the portfolio and rose from the edge of the bed.

Philip caught him by the arm. “That’s all right, but tell me what I must do about Millicent! Is there any way by which I can make her understand the truth? Is there anything I can do to smooth it out, to help, to make things right with her?”

Uncle John spread his arms. “Poor Millie! Poor girl! There is always one who gets left out, isn’t there? She’s going to take it hard. She has few resources of her own, and I’m afraid time will seem very long before this heals over! But I don’t see why you should have to stay because of that. There is no reason why both of you should have to go on paying. You came back. You have carried out the duty that was laid upon you to the best of your ability. Go back. I will take it upon myself to do all that can be done for Millicent,—though one knows full well that, in the last analysis, it must be done by herself! When you boil it right down, man is a terribly lonely animal. . . .”

“Yes, but surely,” insisted Philip, “there must be something I . . .”

“My boy,” the old man interrupted him, “leave it! Leave it! Since there can be no marriage, your absence will be more helpful than your presence. There is nothing you can do and your staying would be a constant reminder.”

Philip broke away. His eyes began to have a light in them. “You really mean that?” he asked. “Is it your judgment that I should be useless here?”

John Sampson nodded. “It is!”

“Then . . .” Philip swallowed. It was so tremendous that he choked at saying it. “Then you think that I’m . . . really free to go?”

“Yes,” said John Sampson, “I do!”

Philip’s hands became aimless. They touched his tie, his face, went into pockets and out again. “My God!” he whispered, and again, “My God!”

At the sight of his face old John Sampson turned away. His eyes went back

to the drawings, and a thought struck him. Philip would have no income when he left the school. The market for art was a hard one. Suppose he couldn't sell those drawings? . . . He shook his head. For how many years had he himself grubbed feverishly, vainly, so that he might go back to the stream. . . . These two mustn't starve. If he bought them himself, one by one, Philip would never know over there in France. . . . And after all, his motive would be entirely selfish. It would give him a sense of communion with his own youth. . . .

Without turning around, he said, "Will you do me a favor? Will you leave your drawings with me? I am more familiar with buying and selling than you are, and it will give me great pleasure to see how much I can get for them in London. In a word, I could act as agent for you, if you would be willing?"

Had the boy heard him, or was he still up in the clouds? John Sampson made a business of arranging and closing the portfolio before he turned.

Philip had heard. But the adequate word seemed to have passed beyond his reach. He held out his hand and wrung the old man's, hard.

PART FOUR

Chapter One

THE road out of Cagnes begins to climb at once, right from the cemetery.

With a heavy suit case strapped on to the carrier of his bicycle, there was nothing Philip could do except dismount and plug along on his two feet; but it was pleasant plugging, for there was a heavy growth of pines on either side, with presently, here and there, a clearing in which a ragged-tiled farmhouse, butter-colored in the sun, squatted among pines and olives and flowers.

There were women working there in large sun hats, who looked up as he passed and tossed him a "Bonjour!" adding, with a smile, "Fait chaud, hein?"

To which Philip replied with a somewhat breathless "Ah, par exemple!"—breathless, but with a surge of emotion. Those women didn't know who he was, just a stranger passing by, but they treated him as one of themselves. It was like coming home again! Furthermore, it was an omen of peace, of happy conclusion, of journey's end. Jeanne would have had his telegram from Paris and be awaiting him, and then the stream of life would go on, limpid, gleaming, calm, to the end of time.

Nothing could have happened to her in this ageless countryside. All those stupid fears had been conjured up by distance, by absence, by his being in check. Every pine tree and rock, every field worker, was a reassurance, now that he was really there again, the smell of it in his nostrils, the feel of it all through him, and every step he took brought him a yard nearer to that supreme moment when he should be face to face with Jeanne and all would be uninterruptedly depth and spaciousness. . . .

"There is a tide in the affairs of man," he recited the words aloud, "which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; but which, neglected, all the rest of our lives is bound in shallows and in miseries. . . ." Shallows and miseries,—that was Uxminster, all those barren years of unprofitable nothingness, of automatism, culminating in the miseries of emotional reproach, self-inflicted if you like, but none the lighter for that, which he had endured so recently: the death pangs of Philip Jocelyn, as it were, before passing on into Josselin! . . . He nodded his head at the idea. Yes, that was it! If he had only thought of it like that before, it might have helped him to go through those pangs, realizing how inevitable, how much in the order of things they were.

Well, at least they were over; and, so far as in him lay, he had emerged with a clean slate,—barring what one might call the Millicent corner of it, and that, damn it, was blurred; would remain blurred until, as Uncle John put it, the hand of time put in its work. He sighed. That hadn't come out as he had hoped. It was like a burr of regret sticking to his mind and refusing to be brushed off,

a cut in his drawing finger. Willy-nilly, he would have to work with it, until in him, too, it healed over and disappeared. And again, it was right. If Millicent were going to suffer, was there any reason why he should get off scot-free? He shook his head again. One always had to pay in some coin or other. . . .

Eh, bien, let it stick as it might, he was finished with backward thinking! Somehow he had climbed out from the trapdoor, was above ground again, and the present and the future were the only things that counted. . . . With a rush his mind leaped forward to the Mas Vert. Would Jeanne come a little way down the road to meet him? Or would she be in the shop door looking out? What time was it? Eleven,—there was a possibility that she might be laying lunch up on the terrace, imagining that he might like it early, after the long journey. Up on the terrace, with heavy bees zooming about and that little flapping rustle of leaves that was like an incessant accompaniment; and the softness of the valley inviting the eye to incredible distances. . . . Marvellous that terrace, and more marvellous because Jeanne would be there! She was thinking of him now, waiting for him, looking at the clock, those extraordinary eyes of hers deeper than ever. . . .

All unconsciously he quickened his pace as he saw ahead of him the well-remembered corner where the ground fell away, exposing with dramatic suddenness the whole of St. Paul, like a toy city, basking on its small hill. And the Mas Vert was only three turns beyond,—three of the most lovely turns of the whole road; where the two almond trees marked the footpath by the water tank down to the farm in the bottom of the valley; and where the clump of pines on the edge of the road would stand forever as a monument to the place where he had first seen Jeanne. . . . How extraordinary it was! He already had an immediate past here, a whole background of people, places, experiences, even without counting that other past, which might well be as old as the trees themselves. It was as though his own new roots were already reaching down to those deeper ones. . . .

There was St. Paul! He took his hat off in greeting, paused for a moment, leaning against his bicycle. He had drawn it from so many angles and in so many lights that every roof line and orange tree, every cypress and bit of wall, every curve of the mountain behind, was a part of him. The detail of his work had made it essentially his own, the conqueror of it, not with the sword, as in the old days, but with the pencil. . . . He allowed himself no more than time to get his breath back before pushing on again, this time with a forward-looking eye that endeavored to reach around corners. At any moment now Jeanne might appear. . . . But she didn't; and as he rounded first one bend and then the next, his feeling of rightness left him. He began to be not so sure; and presently apprehension made his hands sweat. Something was wrong. He was convinced

of it. Had a great rock slid down the hill behind and crushed the house? It had happened at Roquebillière, had cut the village in half like a piece of butter, burying it in the landslide. . . . But that was caused by rain. There hadn't been any rain here. . . . Was she ill? Not in such a small number of days! Had she gone away? Why should she? There was nothing to take her away. Didn't she know that he was coming? If not, why not? Surely the wire couldn't have gone astray? What could possibly . . .

Well, thank God, there was the house, anyhow! And there was smoke coming out of the chimney! The pergola and the terrace were unchanged. Of course! He wiped his face on his coat sleeve and gave a laugh. He was just a damned idiot to get all cockeyed like that! Fancy imagining rocks and landslides just because he couldn't see her! Ridiculous, childish! . . . But for all that he sneered at himself, he could feel his heart thumping against his ribs, as his eyes reached out and gathered to him not only the Mas Vert in all its physical detail, but the intense emotional vision of all that had taken place there, the only real things that had ever happened to him.

His mouth was dry with excitement. As he came up he noticed, without being able to pause to analyze it, that the table was not laid on the terrace. Then his feet were on the brick walk, and, because he had always done it, because, in a sense, his bicycle belonged there, he walked past the door of the shop without allowing his eyes to glance in—he wanted to save it, to get it in all its fullness—and propped the machine against the wall. Then, with free hands, unencumbered, he was ready. . . . Ready? He laughed at the oddness of the word and then at its correctness,—for he undoubtedly was keyed-up, tense, with an odd prickling at the back of his knees, as though standing on the precipitous edge of a great height. Well then, come on! . . . The contact of the doorknob against his hand gave him a shock, and the sharp tinkle of the bell—that odd little bell on a long curving spring—as he pushed the door open made him laugh aloud from pure nerves.

“Jeanne!” he said, not very loud; and it seemed to him that the word only traveled about a yard and then dropped to the floor.

There was no answer. His searching glance went into the shadow under the arched ceiling where her desk was; from there to the far corner where he had polished brass on the bench. . . .

The shuffling of slippers in the stone corridor made him turn like a flash.

Madame Ricou stood framed in the doorway at the foot of the stairs.

“Ah!” she said. “So it is you!”

Philip caught his breath. Was he right? Was there hostility in her voice? He swung off his hat with his best smile. “Bonjour, Madame! Yes, it is I. Are you

surprised? Didn't you get my telegram?"

Madame Ricou made no move. Her eyes remained on his. "Telegram? Why should you telegraph? What have you come back for?"

The smile faded. Philip took a step forward, anxious, puzzled. He was right. For some reason this woman hated him. What had he done? Or left undone? "But, Madame, I do not understand. Of course I have come back. I said I was coming back. . . . Where is Jeanne?" Where indeed was Jeanne? It was almost as if her mother were standing guard there in the doorway . . . and those bitter eyes of hers wouldn't leave him. "Where is Jeanne?" he asked again, with caught breath.

"What do you want with her? Have you not done enough?" Her harsh voice came rolling at him like a wave.

Philip went cold. "Enough? I . . . I do not understand."

"No, you would not! The task of understanding is beyond a man of your kind. How dare you show yourself in this house when you have betrayed its hospitality and left us nothing but disgrace and unhappiness? Go back to wherever you came from and leave us alone. We want nothing further to do with you!"

Disgrace? Unhappiness? . . . Philip was as white as the road outside. His imagination went leaping like a wild thing. Was Jeanne dead? Had she killed herself because he had gone away? Were those flaming cypresses in the cemetery . . . ? Two swift paces brought him within reach of Madame Ricou. He caught her by the shoulder fiercely. "What do you mean? What are you saying? Jeanne . . ."

She shook his hand off. "What do I mean? You ask me that, me! Do you think I am a fool? Do you think I do not know that it is you who have given my daughter a child? Do you think I have not found out what you were doing all the time you were pretending to paint? It may have taken me a long time, stuck off in the back of the house there, but I am not blind any more! . . . Monsieur l'artiste, this house has no place for you! Leave us! Go! You are not wanted here!"

It seemed to Philip that the ground was rocking under his feet. He didn't get the full meaning of it all at once. It took time to make the adjustment from the fact that she was not dead, to let it drop from him as some ghastly and intolerable burden that he would never have to carry any more. Then, timidly, as though on tiptoes in the presence of great holiness, he made the approach to the second and equally overwhelming realization,—that Jeanne was to have a child . . . that they were to have a child, he and Jeanne. . . . "The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary . . ." Where had he read that? What had it got to do

. . . It was not Mary. It was Jeanne. Jeanne was—how did the phrase go?—“with child.” Why “with?” It was the most extraordinary use of the word; and yet, the whole thing, “with child,” was so old as to be ageless, back into pastoral times; rather lovely, when you thought about it, carrying the suggestion of the unity of the two of them, the essentialness of one to the other; and so magnificently simple, “with child,” stripped clean of all literary buncombe, the whole content of the immortal picture painted in two syllables. No human being could ever improve on it. It was remarkable. It would live forever. . . . And she had declared that Jeanne . . . Good God, it was Jeanne who was with child, Jeanne! She had stood there at the shop door when he went, not smiling, not waving, just looking at him. Had she known then? Why hadn’t he known, intuitively, since his emotions were all around and about her? Why that infinite separation of ignorance? And so that was why Madame Ricou hated him! That was why she bandied the words “disgrace” and “unhappiness!” What perfect lunacy! What herd-mindedness! And she didn’t look like that sort of woman. She looked like a woman with brains, a woman whose face seemed to indicate that she had dealt with life at first hand, had laboriously discovered its meaning for herself instead of accepting the fatuous definitions of others. Her face must be a lie. Lots of people had faces like that,—Hemingway was one of them. His face impressed people, made them send their wretched kids to his school, put money in the bank for him. . . . Damn Hemingway! What the devil was he wandering off like that for? . . . Jeanne was going to have a child and her mother was telling him to go to the devil. She was standing there, waiting for him to go. . . . He must think all this out sometime later. Now he must say something, do something. . . .

“Madame, I am overwhelmed by what you have told me,” he looked it too, “and I cannot attempt to explain to you. There are no words in any language that would make it clear to anybody. But I ask you to let me tell you one thing. There need be no unhappiness in this house. I love your daughter and I have come back to ask if she will do me the honor of marrying me.” When was it he had said, “I have come back to ask if you . . . ?” How the devil was it that he kept on coming back and asking? He had used it in England to smash an entanglement and now he had dug it up again unconsciously for Madame Ricou. If only she knew, it would be her turn to think him a fool! Let her think it if she liked. It didn’t matter. The only thing that mattered was to see Jeanne. She had thought, perhaps—had said so, indeed—that he was never coming back. There was the unhappiness. She might be doubting, waiting, wondering . . . and being bullied! Bon Dieu, de bon Dieu, had this woman no charity, no bowels of compassion? Couldn’t she think that for herself, of her own daughter, or was she so ironclad, so fearful of the tenets of her class, that her

daughter's happiness no longer counted? Why just stand there glaring at him? Where was Jeanne? Perhaps, if he raised his voice, she might hear him and come. It was worth the gamble.

Philip took a breath and pitched his voice at the stairs. "Madame, I sent a telegram from Paris yesterday to let Jeanne know that I was on my way. Will you not go at once and let her know that I am here? This question is between her and myself. If she tells me to go . . ." He stopped and shook his head, leaving the thought in the air—"I refuse to believe that she will."

Upstairs a door opened, after a second slammed again, and then there were swift feet on the stairs.

"Ah!" said Philip.

With one hand pressed to her heart, her face white, she appeared on the landing, looked down uncertainly, as though not quite sure. . . .

"Jeanne!" cried Philip.

The girl did not move. She looked at Philip as if convincing herself, then at her mother with searching eyes, and then back to Philip again. "So you have really come . . . and now already my mother has told you . . . Well?"

Why did she stand there like that? Could it be that she too . . . "Jeanne, *mais voyons!* Your mother has told me one of the loveliest things in the world! She has also told me one of the most hideous and ridiculous,—that I must go away, leave you. She doesn't understand that I love you, that I have returned here to find you, to marry you, if you will have me." Philip threw out his hand. "Do I have to tell you this? Don't you know it already? Haven't I shown you? Jeanne, why do you stand there? Why don't you come down?"

For a space the girl made no move. Only her eyes left Philip's face and went to her mother's. "Did I not tell you?" she said quietly. The wounds of recent battles were evidently not yet healed.

Madame Ricou flung up her hands. "Tell me! Tell me! Does it alter facts? Does it make you any better, or him? Have you no shame? Are you like animals, that your emotions cannot be controlled by your brains? If your poor father were alive, he could deal with this man, with you also. I have no authority. I am nothing . . . nothing! Marry him then and see what comes of it! Mark my words . . ."

Jeanne threw out a hand, her voice suddenly shrill. "Maman, je t'en prie!"

There was silence.

At last Madame Ricou turned on her heel, her face dark, and, with an odd helpless gesture, left them. Only the shuffle of her slippers could be heard until the kitchen door closed. Unconsciously they both stood listening. Only when

she heard the sound of the door did Jeanne move. Then, slowly, she came down the stairs, crossed to Philip and stood in front of him, her wide eyes searching his.

“Then . . . it does not change anything?” she said.

“Only to make you more beautiful!” said Philip.

“And yet,” said Jeanne, “I am afraid.”

“Why? Aren’t we together again, you and I, forever?” He put his arms around her, kissed her, held her tight. The touch of her gave him the courage of ten. He laughed. “I love you! I’m never going to leave you again. I’ll take care of you!”

But Jeanne clung to him. He could feel her tremble in his arms. He raised her face in the cup of his hand and smiled down at her. “There’s nothing to be afraid of now!” he said. “We’ve won!” And he put his lips to hers.

Chapter Two

IT was Philip's idea that they should walk up into Vence the following morning and get married. If they didn't do it at once, something—that same vague unnamed thing—might steal in and prevent it at the last moment. Once married they would be safe.

But there were documents to be filled in at the Mairie and at the police station, papers of identity, certificates of domicile and nationality,—lets and hindrances which made it seem that marriage was one of the most difficult and complicated steps ever undertaken. Philip was forced to sit, restlessly, endlessly, in stuffy rooms with stuffy officials, answering questions and filling in replies with a scratchy pen dipped in purple ink, while the sun beat upon the windows and flies buzzed in incessant arabesques round his head. And then, when everything was duly signed and finished, it appeared that days had to elapse during which the papers must go through a mysterious process of documentation in other offices, accumulating other signatures as they went.

The Mas Vert was naturally closed to him. Even without the unconcealed antipathy of Madame Ricou, it was obvious, if senseless, that he should no longer occupy the next room to Jeanne's nor eat with her on the terrace. So he lodged, like a sparrow on a twig, in a box of a room in the hotel in Vence, renewed acquaintance with Félix, who welcomed him back with enthusiasm at the restaurant across the square, and went pedalling down each afternoon in an ecstasy of impatience to meet Jeanne at the door of the shop, to be with her, to see for himself that nothing had happened since yesterday. So long as he kept her with him, it would be impossible for anything to happen. So, as an excuse, he insisted on her coming out with him to find some place for them to live in.

The few hundred pounds of his savings transferred into francs and placed on deposit at the bank in Vence were considered enough to give them a start; but Jeanne decided that she would continue at the shop, not only until they should find out what Philip could expect to earn with his pencil, but also because her mother could not run the antique business alone. This narrowed down their house-hunting to an area that would permit of Jeanne's daily comings and goings on foot. Vence, therefore, was not only too far, but didn't seem to have anything that attracted them. St. Paul, across the valley, was manifestly impossible. They took the postman into consultation, who finally, after scratching his head and thoughtfully swallowing a petit verre, remembered that there was an empty "mas"—small enough, but then, mon Dieu, what did they want, after all?—down beyond the farm of le vieux Billau, en suivant le sentier qui descend, vous voyez bien, n'est-ce pas, au tournant, là! . . . De rien, Monsieur dame! Merci à vous!

The pathway, it was no more than that, followed a stone bank that held a field of olive trees from sliding down into the valley. Philip and Jeanne made their way down it. The dog came rushing out of the Billau farm in a hard-working fury of barking and was barely placated by soft words.

“After all,” said Philip, “it’s his job to make a noise. He’ll be friendly enough, if he ever gets to know us. And the same is probably true of old Billau. He won’t object to having neighbors again.”

Jeanne laughed. “Monsieur Billau looks shaggy and has a rough voice as well!”

So they went past, unmolested by anything but noise, and followed around two abrupt turns that hid them both from the house they had just passed and the road also. Above and below were olives, with here and there a field of orange trees and a plot of roses being grown for the perfume market. Across the valley, bathed in sun, silent but for the uplifted voice of an occasional rooster, lay St. Paul with its background of mountains that went down to the sea. Ahead of them the path ran out into a clearing and on again, losing itself among the olives once more. But in the clearing was a small stone house, square, tiled, its back to the hillside, its face to the valley. A low wall guarded it and on either side of the gateway shot up a cypress tree. An old shed with a tiled roof ran off at right angles, and a splodge of yellow and green in the yard, bright against the wall of the house, was made by a group of three orange trees.

Philip stopped abruptly on the edge of the clearing. “Why, of course,” he muttered. “This is the cottage!”

“What is that,—cottage?”

Philip squeezed her hand. “A vision I had once, long ago. But I only saw it through a haze then, without knowing what it really meant. This is it.” He nodded towards the house.

Jeanne glanced at him quickly. “Then it pleases you too?”

Philip laughed. “Pleases me? It draws me like a magnet. I am helpless. There is nothing to be done about it. It’s got to be ours. I can’t think how I missed it when I was here before.”

“Can’t you?” said Jeanne. She smiled. “You gave up exploring after you discovered me!”

Philip slid an arm around her shoulder. “No wine bottle will hold more than its litre. Don’t you think roses would look beautiful all along the inside of that wall? And it seems to me that the door and the window frames are crying aloud for blue paint to match with the sky. Let’s go down and peep in. There are no shutters on the windows, and rightly so. Who would want to keep out

the loveliness of all the valley, either by day or by night? Does it invite you too, Jeanne? Doesn't it look to you as if the little house is waiting for us, as though all along it had known we were coming?"

Jeanne smiled. "Then do not let us make it wait any longer! Come!" She pulled him by the hand and they went down the path and in through the gateway between the two cypresses. . . .

The agency handling the sale of it was in Vence. The first question they asked produced a flood of sales talk as potent as though the deal concerned the purchase of a casino with gambling rights.

Jeanne sat down with a smile and laid a card on the table with the simple remark that she was in the antique business at the Mas Vert. The agent came to earth like a pricked balloon and Jeanne proceeded to show that her knowledge of values and conditions had been acquired on the spot.

Throughout these initial moves, Philip maintained a discreet silence. He was entirely unfamiliar with the rules of the game. With growing awe and admiration he listened to Jeanne as she advanced to the attack. The agent rubbed his hands briskly together and settled down.

It began to dawn on Philip that he was watching two high priests engaged in the observance of a ritual, two duellists each relishing the excellence of the other's technique. They advanced, retreated, separated, came together again, in the most intricate weavings of argument and counter-argument. It seemed impossible that the tiny house with its two cypresses and its patch of land the size of a handkerchief could assume such vast ramifications. In the hands of the two experts, it seemed to be growing each moment, until the whole of Versailles, in comparison to it, shrank to the size of a doll's house. Each cypress became a forest, each orange tree the whole of the plantations of Valencia, each drop of water in the tank at the back as valuable as the entire irrigation system along both banks of the Nile.

At these impassioned passages, Philip's heart sank within him. It looked as though there were not the slightest chance of their ever seeing the inside of the house; and when Jeanne shrugged her shoulders, gathered up her gloves and rose to her feet, Philip rose too in despair. But the agent promptly took the cue and yielded a foot of ground, poured one extra drop of rainwater into the tank. . . . Jeanne sat down and began pounding again. It seemed like an æon before the asking price was cut in half and a monthly sum agreed upon which would count against the purchase price. Bewilderedly Philip heard with amazement that the place was theirs.

Whereupon, smiling and satisfied, the agent shook hands, first with Jeanne and then with Philip, and, with the announcement that the papers would be

made out immediately, ushered them into the street with a trail of bonjour and au revoir and merci. . . .

Jeanne looked up at him with a smile. “Eh, bien, chéri,” she said simply, “voilà!”

Philip wiped his forehead. “Mon Dieu! I am exhausted. I feel as though I had been through a battle, a siege, as though I had been occupied by the enemy for years, and can still hear the last of them marching out! . . . Was that really you, Jeanne? Are you made of flexible steel, hard and unbreakable? I didn’t know you in there. I thought it was some other woman.”

Jeanne laughed. “And which woman do you prefer?”

“The one I knew before we went into that office!”

“That’s the one you’re going to marry,” said Jeanne. “You won’t see the other again,—unless we should happen to fight!”

Philip shook his head. “I should have to hire the Chasseurs Alpains. I wouldn’t dare tackle you by myself after this morning’s exhibition. In any case, my dear,” he became serious again, “I promise you it’s the last thing we shall ever do!”

Jeanne looked at him quickly and then away again. “I know,” she said, and in the clatter of traffic it hardly reached him, “there won’t be . . . time for that.”

Chapter Three

It was no one even faintly resembling an assistant schoolmaster who broke open the packing of the furniture they bought in Nice and carried it in, piece by piece, for Jeanne to arrange; who, with an old apron tied round his middle, and his shirt open at the throat, bedaubed himself thoroughly and satisfactorily in his efforts to paint window frames and doors; who opened sandwiches, fruit and wine at noon with the same pomp as though they had been peacock's tongues and nectar; and who, on one occasion, was observed from a window by Jeanne, standing quite still in the far corner of the yard, just looking at the house.

"Eh, bien!" she called out. "Tu ne travailles plus?"

Whereupon Philip's stillness left him. He walked over to the window and caught her hand. "I can't believe it!" he said.

Jeanne leaned down to him. "Believe what?" she asked, knowing perfectly well.

"This!" said Philip. "This place. You . . . and the child. It's tremendous, isn't it? If only those infernal papers would go through!"

Jeanne's eyes were melting. She touched his cheek with her hand. "Mon petit!" she whispered. "Mon très cher petit!"

Their absorption in getting the house ready helped to take his mind off watching the days until their marriage papers were ready; so that the notification, when it did come, caught them almost unawares.

There was going to be no celebration, no uproarious group of invités conducting them down the path to their house with songs and characteristic jokes; and not even the driver of the car in which Philip fetched Jeanne and her mother and brought them to the Mairie in Vence had any idea of what was going to take place inside.

Philip paid him off, and when the brief and chilly formalities of the civil service were duly complied with, the three of them walked across the tiny square, picking their way between the chattering stands of market women, cluttered with vegetables, fruit, live roosters, rabbits, flowers, pottery, tinware, printed cottons and the thousand and one other spots of color which go to make up a French outdoor market. It took a little elbowing to make progress, but they got through, and, as soon as the swing door closed behind them, the market might have been on another planet. They were engulfed in the silence and encompassing gloom of that ancient building which had been a holy place in the days when the Romans were actively engaged in the task of dividing

Gaul into three parts.

Even Madame Ricou, frozen and unrelenting as she had been in the Mairie, as though going through with it from a sense of sheer duty, however repugnant, was moved to a display of emotion at this abrupt transition into the presence of the Lord God. Good Catholic that she was, she lived too far away from Vence to be able to use the church regularly, and now the half-perceived statues of saints, the dim outline of the high altar, lit only by two pin points of candle, and the faint tang of incense that lingered on perpetually from Sunday to Sunday, all contributed to gentle her. She dipped her whole hand into the holy water, splashingly crossed herself several times with fervor; and, going down on her knees in the front bench, bowed her head.

To Philip, whose sense of beauty was always alert, it was not alone the simple majestic architecture of the church that touched him, nor the sense that for a thousand years man had worshipped his various gods there, leaving an intangible but cumulative atmosphere behind. It was the feeling that at last—at long last—he was about to shed the final remnant of one epoch and step across into another. Jeanne and he had won to safety, were immune from attack. Both Church and State were working for them, championing them, had thrown up impregnable ramparts around them. . . . He took a deep breath and squared his shoulders, looked up at the dim altar and smiled. Queer how these things went! Jeanne and he, two waifs in the slow purposes of life, had now become of sufficient importance, because of their official plan of union, to have the eye of this god turned upon them personally. Between them they had dropped a crumb of interruption into the cog wheels of the great machine, and, before its smooth rotations could continue, cognizance of them must be taken. From being pygmies they had become, momentarily at least, giants, hero and heroine in this particular act of the drama of creation; and since, in the last analysis, the word “god” must surely be man’s boggling definition for “life”, Jeanne, who already bore within her the seed of an addition to the continuance thereof, should therefore be doubly pleasing at the foot of this altar erected to the worship of life, designed, decorated and lit so that every sense was drawn inevitably to the focal point—the Child.

And yet, as he stood there, silent, waiting, his mind, as always, going around and about the immediate subject in hand, it seemed to Philip presently as though the vast gloom did something to him, swung him up to some point in the ether from which he looked down at the tiny figures of a man and a woman, so tiny as to be unrecognizable. But there they stood, humbly, obediently, in acknowledgment of a third life of which they were the authors. Authors? Perhaps, but in its least assuming sense. Servants was a better word. Hero and heroine? Giants? How absurdly wrong. They were so neutral that

“instruments” became the most fitting word of all. As individuals, they didn’t exist. They were merely seeds blown together by the wind, without say, without entity, completely without significance once their task of creation was completed. . . . The thought was too lonely. He shied away from it, swooped back to Philippe Josselin and caught Jeanne’s warm hand for comfort.

“Can’t we . . . do something about it?” he whispered.

His answer came in the uneven shuffle of feet on the stone floor, strangely loud in the silence.

Preceded by a small boy carrying a lighted candle half as tall again as himself, a priest emerged from the door of the sacristy and made his way, flapping and scraping, up the church,—an old priest, bent and wrinkled, a prayer book clasped in his knuckly hands.

He acknowledged their presence by a bow, his eyes elsewhere. . . . “Seeds indeed!” thought Philip. Then the priest muttered to them to follow him to the altar steps and kneel.

Still clasping hands, they advanced together and knelt. . . . “Servants, that’s all!”

The priest’s voice began to rise and fall in mumbling and unrecognizable Latin, a parrotlike recitation; while the small boy sought relief from boredom by making his candle drip wax in patterns on the floor.

“We’re not even a crumb of interruption,” thought Philip. “They’ve done it a million times before. We’re merely symbols of what it stands for.”

Presently they were all standing and without looking up at either of them, the priest muttered, “Do you, Philippe Josselin . . . Do you Jeanne Ricou . . .” As if it mattered whether they had names or not! And then at last, with the final laconic pronouncement that they were man and wife—“the fitting anonymity from which we came!” thought Philip—the old priest and the small boy led the way from the altar.

Only a hurried scribble and the passing of a fee were all that was necessary now before they could hurry out to a human world where they counted, where their names were not mere labels but warm living realities, vital each to the other. . . .

Philip’s impatient hand was already reaching for his pocketbook.

Chapter Four

THEY called it Le Petit Mas—the little farm—and in it they began to cultivate the soil of ecstasy.

They might as well have called it the Garden of Eden, for, while in it, their contact with other human beings was nil. From time to time they saw their neighbor, old Billau, working in one or other of his fields as they passed, and the dog's barking became purely perfunctory under the regularity of their passing. Philip, pushing his bicycle, walked with Jeanne to the door of the shop, and then mounted and rode away to work. In the early afternoon he came back for her and they went together down the pathway to Le Petit Mas.

Being out of sight of the road and their neighbor, cut off by a fold of land, they might as well have been a thousand miles from anywhere, but for the sound which reached them of automobiles grinding up the hill in second speed on their way to Vence; and but for the sight of man's handiwork which lay perpetually beneath their eyes. Framed by their two cypresses, the valley sloped away from their gate; here and there, in the geometric patterning of the swelling flanks of land, lay another small "mas", in whose window winked at night a tiny pin point of light. For miles the fields were triangles, oblongs or squares, of green, umber, yellow and faint purple, blending from one to another like the notes of a song. Miles away, a toy castle, turreted, white, gleaming, peeped out above the pines on a conical hillock; and miles beyond that was a patch of sea, like an opal in a giant ring, its color changing all the way from gray-white to pea-green and the most intense blue, as the sun crawled up the sky and slid down again.

In the foreground on the right, so near that it looked as if one could pick an orange and toss it against the wall, was the town of St. Paul, end-on, foreshortened, running away from them and finishing in a sharp point at the burst of cypresses that hid the cemetery. And roofing it all—itsself an endless fascination—was the illimitable and ever-changing sky, at times a thin backdrop of pale blue hung behind the mountains, at others a playground for billowing clouds, piling themselves up into fantastic combinations of curling loveliness, and then remaining stationary as though showing off; at sundown becoming suffused with blood-red, as though some minor angel, told off for the purpose, had made the rounds with a torch and set each one on fire to clear the way for her majesty the moon and her attendant nightingales.

To Philip it was no longer a dream, a dim and vague possibility, only to be attained if and when the mysterious undercurrents chose to cast him up. He was there. He was a part of that sky, that landscape; not any longer as a

trespasser, knowing that at any moment he may be put out, but with the extraordinary knowledge, the almost unbelievable excitement of knowing that it would go on and on. The blue-painted door was his to shut or leave open as he felt inclined. The stone wall, on which tiny green lizards sat and sunned themselves, was his wall as much as theirs, warm and friendly to the touch, solid and enduring. The small whitewashed rooms, monastic in their simplicity, a perfect setting for their brown Provençal furniture, reflected the touch of no man's hand but theirs, were, as it were, a virgin soil planted by themselves from the beginning, impregnated with their voices, their thoughts, their being, the starting point of Philippe Josselin and Jeanne his wife.

He had forgotten her wide-eyed moment of fear. In the excitement of his return it had not registered; nor had he caught her cryptic remark when they had mentioned the possibility of their quarreling—that there would not be time. With the optimism that is the crowning mercy of life he saw, now that they were married, the future stretching out before them with the sublime confidence of a child sighing with satisfaction at the concluding line of all good fairy tales: "So they lived happily ever after!" And as if to add the last touch to the picture of perfect security, there came one morning a registered letter from John Sampson, an excited note to the effect that the editor of a weekly magazine had picked out six drawings and was going to use them as full-page illustrations. With the letter was enclosed a cheque for sixty pounds.

Merely translated into francs the sum seemed enormous, but with the sun pouring in through the window, their window, on to his figuring, and the feel of Jeanne leaning over his shoulder watching him work it out, that sixty pounds, the first real money he had ever earned with his pencil, stretched out into a series of golden ciphers, every one of which spelled justification.

He swung around with a laugh and pulled Jeanne down on to his lap. "Didn't I say I would take care of you? I'll admit that when I said it money was the farthest thing from my mind; but there it is, that stupid-looking piece of paper, for good measure, over and above all the other kinds of care that I did mean. It's the proof that we were right, a sort of admission from the world! . . . Are you glad you married me, Jeanne?"

"Do you mean glad that I married you or glad that I love you?"

"Both!"

"Perhaps there isn't any difference," said Jeanne, wriggling down so that she could lean against him and put her head on his shoulder. "And yet I think there is."

"I don't see it," said Philip. "What is it?"

She shook her head. "I'm not altogether sure that I can explain." Her eyes

went out of the window and down the valley. “When I came to your room at the other house I was glad for myself personally. I was just Jeanne Ricou then, on the outside, wondering. You and love were the same, so of course I wanted you, and because I knew that you wanted me too, that we had arrived at that moment together, the wall between our rooms was simply a symbol for uncertainty. You and I were certain, so there was no reason why we should remain wondering any longer. So I came and tapped at your door and you took me in, and I, Jeanne Ricou, was very glad that I loved you. I am still, for myself personally. You are beautiful. Your body and mine are as lovely as though we were the first man and woman. Your mind and mine, in all the essential things, are as sympathetic as our bodies. In all the little things, of eating and working, fetching and carrying, it is good to be together. Therefore I am glad that I married you,—glad for the little part of me that is still I, Jeanne. I used to think it was all of me. But I know it isn’t now. It is only the shell, the color on the picture. The bigger part of me I have found is not I at all. That which you love is not I. The important I is not Jeanne at all, but an inner being, quite impersonal, indeed universal. It is simply woman, the female of the species, the producer of life.”

Listening to her, Philip saw himself back in the old church. He shook his head impatiently. “I know what you mean,” he said. “Something of the sort came to me the day we were married, but it made me feel extraordinarily small and humble, and I hated it.”

“Oh, but why? I don’t see it like that at all!” Jeanne sat up straight and faced him. “That was what I meant by being on the outside. Then one was small and humble because one had no knowledge of this, because everything seemed so completely without purpose. But now . . .” she waved a hand towards the valley. “Why, it changes everything! We’re on the inside. We’re a unit of all that, contributors to it all, continuers of it! Don’t you see?”

Philip frowned. “Yes, I do see. But all I can say is that I haven’t got as far as you. I’m not sure that I want to, either. My little ego is kicking and fighting in its birth struggles. I am deeply concerned with being Philippe Josselin, deeply concerned with you, this Jeanne whom I can see and touch, whose lips cling to mine when I kiss her, whose eyes light up when I come to fetch her at the shop, a warm and human Jeanne! You may be an abstract link in the chain of life, but it is my life—which only began when you came into it—and you are my woman, and every minute of you, every aspect of you, every waking thought of you, is mine, indescribably and most personally mine! Don’t you see? I’ve never had an ego before, never had anything to be cocky about. Even at Oxford it was always a question of watching the other fellow do things, become somebody, carve a way out of the rank and file. And right afterwards

came the school, which rolled over me like a steam roller.” He waved a hand as if to push it away. “That’s all over. I’ve got you now!” He put his arms around her. “You, and this house, and this life! What other knowledge may be lying in wait for me I don’t know and don’t want to know, now. At the moment you and I together are the universe, and I am glorying in it. Let me have my little hour!”

For a moment Jeanne looked down into his blue laughing eyes that seemed to have a reflection of the sun in them; and suddenly, with that same gesture—older than time—which had come to her on the terrace the night when he knelt at her feet, she took his head in her two hands and held it to her breast. . . . His little hour!

Chapter Five

WITH the exception of the postman, who, with a certain proprietary air—hadn't he after all discovered the house for them?—looked about him with nodding approval and repeated several times, as he was conducted through the several rooms, that they were “joliment bien installés”, no such animal as a visitor came near Le Petit Mas.

On reluctant feet Madame Ricou had been brought there once by Jeanne. Only partially mollified by the tangible evidence of the wedding ring, she had sniffed her way over the house, darting hard eyes into every corner, however. To all Philip's efforts at conciliation she replied in monosyllables and persisted in calling him “Monsieur.” Her inspection—it could hardly be called a visit since she refused to sit down—was of the briefest. Within twenty minutes the two of them watched her back as she made her way up the path once more.

Philip shook his head. “I'm awfully sorry your mother hates me so,” he said. “What can I do?”

Jeanne sighed. “Nothing, now. All we can do is to wait. I don't know whether it's you she hates, or the change. Perhaps in time both will come to seem natural.”

Madame Ricou rounded the corner and disappeared.

Philip looked down the valley. “You know,” he said, “it's rather like seeing a steamer disappear over the horizon. We sha'n't hail any one else for a long while.”

“Perhaps not,” said Jeanne, “but at least there is one other ship in our sea.” She nodded in the direction of the other farm. “He also needs time, however.”

She was right. It was not until some six weeks had gone by that the unusual sound of approaching feet made them both look up quickly one evening just as they were finishing dinner.

“Tiens!” said Jeanne. “Our neighbor.”

Philip's eyes followed those of his wife. It was quite another “vieux Billau” than the one whom they were accustomed to seeing in the distance bending over his fields in a pair of rough trousers of brown corduroy and an old blue shirt. He evidently considered this a visit of ceremony and had done it honor. His garments were those assumed only for weddings and funerals,—a suit of thick black cloth, a tie, a pair of ankle boots and a wide-brimmed black felt hat. With six feet of bone and muscle barely concealed by these clothes, with shaggy eyebrows that were like twin gorse bushes, and a pair of fierce moustaches sticking out on either side of his face, he looked like a tame

brigand come down from his hills.

Philip smiled and whispered to Jeanne, "Isn't he magnificent!"

Jeanne was already halfway across the room in answer to what could hardly be called a knock at the door, but a pounding summons with a heavy fist. She flung the door wide open—he needed the space—with a welcoming "Bonsoir, Monsieur!"

The black hat came off with a flourish. "Vot' serviteur, Madame!"

His voice was a perfect match for his size, a deep boom.

"Give yourself the trouble to enter," said Jeanne.

"Madame is too amiable."

As Philip came forward to greet him, he was in time to see Monsieur Billau bend his head and step in. Beside him Jeanne seemed to dwindle to the size of a pixie.

Philip held out his hand. "Welcome, Monsieur. As our neighbors the Spanish say, 'Our house is yours!'"

Monsieur Billau bowed and shook hands. "Monsieur," he said, "for me, the Spaniards, ça ne me dit pas grand'chose, vous savez! But I have been thinking that now we are definitely neighbors. . . ." He spread enormous hands and a smile took in both Philip and Jeanne. "That is nevertheless a good saying of theirs, and I am flattered that you should use it to me."

"We were just about to have coffee," said Philip. "Would you drink some with us, or a glass of wine? . . . Permit me!" He took the huge hat and placed it on a bench along the wall.

"As for coffee," said Monsieur Billau, "that does not go with me except in the morning. But a little glass of wine . . . volontiers! It sits well on the stomach at any hour."

While Jeanne went to fetch the coffee from the stove, Philip pulled up an armchair and produced a glass for his guest. He filled it with red wine. "And now," he said, "what will you smoke? A cigarette, or do you prefer a pipe?"

Monsieur Billau looked approvingly from the brimming wineglass to Philip. "Vous avez la main généreuse, Monsieur!" he said. "If Madame has no objection to a pipe . . ."

Jeanne smiled at him over the coffee. "On the contrary," she said. "A pipe is more becoming to a man."

Monsieur Billau's gorse-bush eyebrows seemed to come into bloom. "Is it not so, Madame! A cigarette—in two mouthfuls it is gone, and one is hardly aware that one has tasted tobacco. But a pipe! A pipe is like a friend. Ça vous

tient compagnie, in the fields or in the house, and when it works well, one becomes attached. One scrapes it, one polishes it, one knows the warmth of it in the hand. This one . . .” he fished in his pocket and produced an enormous specimen, burned black, crumbling at the edge of the bowl where, countless times, he had knocked it out against the heel of his boot . . . “this one, she has served me already three years! Elle a du temperament, celle-là! Sometimes she is as sweet as a ripe olive; at others as contrary as a *bonne amie*, needing coaxing, persuading!” He broke off, gave his moustaches a vicious tug, first one side and then the other. “When one is a solitary like myself, one occupies oneself with these things!” He picked up his wineglass, his great hand as steady as a rock, and glanced at each in turn. “Santé! Madame, Monsieur!”

Philip chuckled inwardly at the sight of those moustaches sticking out on either side of the glass, as Monsieur Billau inhaled a vast swig with one swallow that left the glass half empty. “Good health!” he said, taking a sip from his own glass before turning his attention to the coffee that Jeanne had poured out for him.

Monsieur Billau sucked the damp fringe of his moustache, gave it the proper adjustments with his fingers and then proceeded to load his pipe.

“But why should you be a solitary, Monsieur?” asked Jeanne. “I have heard my mother speak of your daughters. Do they not come to see you?”

Monsieur Billau had a match to his pipe. He took several pulls, tamped the tobacco down with a thumb that seemed as insensible as a piece of wood, and was in time to take two more pulls before the match burned down. “Ah, Madame,” he said, fanning the smoke away with his hand, “when they were first married that was true. They used to come back sometimes. But now they are settled down with their families, and to go from one place to another is not easy.”

“They are far away then?” asked Philip.

“Far enough,” said Monsieur Billau. “Marie, the older one, married a *pâtissier* who has now his establishment in the Grand’Rue at Aix-en-Provence. What with four children, and the clientèle with whom she must occupy herself, it is impossible for her to make the long journey here. But she is a good girl. She writes me, and I have photographs of the little ones,—little ones, *ma foi!* Two of them are married already.”

“I had no idea!” said Jeanne. “Mon Dieu, time is nothing!”

Monsieur Billau nodded. “Before one is able to turn around, it is tomorrow! One day a father, the next a grandfather, and then . . .” He spread a significantly empty hand. “And then it is the turn of the little ones to do it all over again! Only the olive trees know how to withstand time.”

Philip smiled, glancing at the great bulk of his guest. "It seems to me, Monsieur, that you must have learned the secret of your olives."

"Ah, pour ça!" He raised deprecating eyebrows, but it was evident that he was pleased. "It is true that the bon Dieu gave me a good body. But I have already passed my sixty-fifth year."

"Sixty-fifth year!" echoed Philip. "It is not possible!"

The old gentleman took another mouthful of wine and repeated the ritual with the moustache. "Ah, Monsieur," he said, "in my day, when the fire of youth ran in my veins, I could challenge any man in the regiment. They used to call me 'Le Costaud.' Now . . . I am only 'le vieux Billau'."

"I congratulate you!" said Philip. "N'est-ce pas, Jeanne, if you and I could look as wonderful at that age, eh?"

Jeanne was stirring her coffee. She looked up quickly, not at Philip but at Monsieur Billau. "Wonderful," she said, "but you were telling us about your daughters. So Marie is at Aix. And the other, Thérèse was her name, wasn't it?"

Monsieur Billau chuckled, settled back in his chair and crossed his legs. "Ah, la pauvre Thérèse! She has had adventures." He nodded several times. "She would have been more comfortable if she had stayed here with me! I told her so at the time, but, mon Dieu, who can talk to a girl of twenty?"

Philip leaned forward quietly and filled Monsieur Billau's glass again.

Monsieur Billau didn't notice it. He had turned to Jeanne and said, with a glint in his eye, "You know the answer to that, Madame, as well as I do!"

"Perhaps!" Jeanne smiled. "It depends on the voice she hears. . . . What did Thérèse do?"

The old man nodded. "There is much in that, as you will see! Thérèse went to the fair,—no farther than Vence. But that was far enough! There was a shooting gallery with targets, and clay pipes, and moving animals of metal. The young man who kept it caught sight of Thérèse and she of him. It may be said that those two shots were the most accurate fired that night. When she came back it was all over. She was no longer my daughter. She was a woman who had met her man. Of course, I did not believe her. I belong to the earth, you understand, the good rich earth. My father and his father were both here before me, and my grandson will be here after me. I could see no merit in a strolling good-for-nothing, un espèce de sans pays! I forbade her to have anything to do with him and ended the argument with a couple of clouts that made her ears ring."

Jeanne shivered. "Ah, la pauvre fille!" she murmured. "That, Monsieur, is

one way not to talk to a girl of twenty!”

The old man turned to her with outflung hands. “Madame, it was the only way I knew, the way I had been brought up myself.” His face relaxed and he chuckled again. “But she turned out to be my daughter, after all. She did what I would have done. She ran away! And as luck would have it, he married her. Ever since then they have been rolling around the country on four wheels from village to village, and when the man gets drunk it is Thérèse who starts the metal animals running and hands out the rifles. What do you think of that for a life when she might have remained here with me, or have married a man with sense and fields of olives and a good house over his head,—a man, indeed, who had already asked me for her?”

“Perhaps the man of sense would have got drunk too,” said Jeanne. She nodded in the direction of the valley towards the lights of the village. “It isn’t altogether a new story down there.”

“And in any case,” said Philip, “there must be a great glamor in the life of the fair,—constant movement, music blaring, the crowd surging along between the lines of stands, and the torches throwing rings of light which make the shadows all the blacker. And then, too, in the daytime, snug in the caravan, jogging along between green fields, with magpies skipping ahead, towards the adventure of the next town. It’s the lure of the open road, the freedom of the gypsy, the voice of the sea in the ear of a sailor. They are all cousins, these people.”

Monsieur Billau nodded, looking attentively at Philip. “That’s what it is to be an artist,” he said. “You can dress it all up, make it look nice. For me, I can see only the unpleasantness of that life, the hardship, the rain leaking into the caravan, the brutality of a drunken husband. We are more realists than you.”

“Are you sure?” said Philip. “What is reality, after all? Because you see it in black and I in rose, it does not necessarily mean that they are not equally real. My magpie and your drunken husband both exist, but luckily I am able to ignore the man and see the bird. Therefore reality is nothing but a reflection of our own minds.”

Monsieur Billau took another draught of wine and then sprang to defend his position. “Mais, mon cher Monsieur,” he began, “you confuse the elements. You exaggerate the value of the small thing and minimize that of the big one. Now, let me ask you . . .”

Philip smiled. This was wonderful. The light was soft, and here and there a gleam of copper came redly out of corners; Jeanne was leaning back in her chair, her head against the slats, half her face in shadow, the other half luminous, beautiful, her deep eyes following the moonlight out there in the

valley; and across the table, their table, the spirit of France in the person of their neighbor. There was a light in the old gentleman's eye. He was launched in one of those delightful arguments on an abstract subject so dear to the French heart. So long as he or Jeanne took the proper cues and burst in with a contradiction at the right moment, it would go on and on, interminably, settling nothing, convincing no one, but as rhythmic and as beautiful to observe as the footwork of fencers. It was a preliminary, a warming-up, for what would become a series, a cycle. With an odd jump, his mind went forward, and it seemed to him that he was seeing them six months from then, a year, sitting in the same chairs, having almost the same discussion, but from a closer range because then they would be on a closer plane of relationship, of acceptance of each other. They would have been many times to his house and he to theirs, and every bonjour they exchanged across the fields would assume a deeper personality because time and growth would have placed a "patine" upon them all. They would be in a certain juxtaposition the one to the other, like the olives and the cypresses, without which their very houses would change character. . . . Roots reaching down . . . a stronger hold. Reality? Who could tell him anything about that now?

His eyes went across to Jeanne and he smiled with deep satisfaction; and at the first pause he went leaping back into the argument with Monsieur Billau, content, wholly at peace.

Chapter Six

JEANNE had begun to make things.

Philip didn't notice it at first, because she began them at the shop and left them there for the next day. It was not until she brought them home one night and continued with them after dinner that he became aware of the nature and meaning of her new work.

There had been quite a snap in the air when they walked home together, and now they were sitting on either side of a fire of cones that stirred and crackled and sent out blue flames. The dinner had been cleared away, and on the table was the portfolio of his drawings from which six more of the recent ones—the third batch to be sent off since their marriage—had been selected to send to England.

And then, with chairs pulled up, just as Philip stretched out his legs and put a match to his pipe, Jeanne produced a workbasket and out came knitting needles and wool.

It was the first time she had ever done it, and for a moment Philip had a sense of shock. His mind flashed back to Millicent and her eternal dresses. A twinge went through him . . . Millicent! What was she doing now? John Sampson had merely written that she had returned to Winchester, permanently. Did that mean . . . Why did that burr still stick? He moved uneasily in his chair and with a voice unconsciously touched with roughness, said, "Mon Dieu, what are you doing there?"

Jeanne looked up quickly, eyebrows raised in surprise. "You are not angry?"

Philip shook his head. "Did I sound like that?" He laughed. "I'm sorry! I suddenly thought of something a million miles away. . . . No, chérie, I'm not angry. Don't I look like the incarnation of perfect contentment? Le Sieur de le Domaine taking his ease!" He struck another match. "All the same, what is this burst of energy? I've seen you darn a stocking, to say nothing of my socks, but this looks like terribly serious work."

"It is," said Jeanne. "Look!" She unfolded a diminutive garment and held it up, her eyes on his face.

Philip sat up with a jerk. "Mais, mon Dieu! . . . Jeanne! . . . For the love of God, what month is this? Where are we?"

Jeanne shook her head. "It's all right. Don't alarm yourself. This is only December."

"But, Jeanne, my dear, I hadn't realized. I hadn't thought. I've been so

intensely absorbed. . . . When are you . . . When is . . . ?” His face was white, as if he expected it to happen at any minute.

Jeanne’s eyes widened. “Ah, non, par exemple! It can’t go as quickly as that!” Her hands clutched the wool, her knuckles white. “We’ve got . . . until the spring . . . sometime in April. I . . .”

Philip didn’t notice her tenseness. “The spring!” he echoed, and let out an enormous breath of relief. “Why, that’s ages away!”

Jeanne shook her head, tight-lipped.

Philip was staring at her work. “So these are for the child! . . . The child . . . when all the valley will be bursting with buds. . . . Mon Dieu, what have I been doing? Forgive me, Jeanne! I haven’t thought about this child at all. My whole concentration has been on you. Won’t you consider that as an excuse? Every line I’ve drawn on paper has had you behind it, in thought, in feeling. When I’m sitting alone out there working, and you’re in the shop, I’m never alone. I’ve got you with me, so that when I break off to eat it’s almost as if you handed me the food. Every time I stop and chat with old Billau over the wall, I feel I can see through our door and know where you are, can follow you around the room with my eyes, so that when I come up to the door and open it you are always in the exact spot where I knew you would be! It’s like music of which you can’t quite make out the air, but which one follows all the time. It’s like a grafting, so that the part of you which has gone out to me has entered into me, inseparably, so that I am entirely changed by the addition of new ingredients, sharpened, quickened, tuned to another pitch. . . . Do you remember when we got that cheque for the drawings and I said something about my ego? From where I am now, that seems like a hundred years ago. Then I was only Philippe. Now I am Philippe-plus-Jeanne. Isn’t it extraordinary that one never knows at the time that a change is taking place? One can only know afterwards by looking back. The whole of life becomes a series of lookings back,—and, what is more, a series of constant surprises.”

Jeanne looked up at him over the tiny clicking of her needles. His head was against the cushion and his eyes far away in the flames. Had he only arrived there? She had been Jeanne-plus-Philippe before she even went to his room! And now . . .

“One of the surprises,” said Philip, “at least to me, is that at every stage I am convinced there is nothing more, that one has attained the culminating point of perception. And then, of course, on looking back, one finds that at the last stage one hadn’t even begun to perceive!” He smiled. “Even now, with that extra infinitesimal piece of knowledge added to my infinitely small stock, I don’t see how there is room for anything else. You have given me so much

that it is impossible to believe that the child can add to it. How can it when you have filled me to the brim? . . . The answer, of course is, that there isn't any brim, that one fine day when you are sitting there with the child, I shall remember this evening and marvel at what an ignorant idiot I was! . . . Jeanne, are you ready for this child?"

The knitting needles stopped.

Philip turned and met her surprised eyes,—eyes with something more than surprise in them.

"Ready?" She let out a quick breath. "What do you mean?"

"I hardly know how to put it. . . . I suppose I mean spiritually, emotionally. You see . . ." He hesitated, sat up with his elbows on his knees, a frown creasing his forehead. "You see, what we have built up is so exquisite, so delicate, that I'm scared of another element. It may be desperately selfish, but I don't want anything to change, now. I'm not ready for it yet. I want this to go on. It hasn't been long enough. I haven't had time to enjoy it enough. . . . Jeanne, this child will do something to you, to us both,—but infinitely more to you than to me. So when I ask if you're ready, what I really mean is have you gone ahead of me again? Has the child already ended this period for you and started you on the new one? Am I even now, so to speak, high and dry on the bank by myself?" He ended with a sort of laugh as though to depreciate, at the last moment, the importance of his own question; so that, if she must say yes, she wouldn't know quite how much he wanted her to say no.

Jeanne was bending over her work. What could she answer? How could she tell him? He said the child would do things to her! Do things . . . Mon Dieu, if he only knew! Should she tell him now how frightened she was, that if only she could get away from her loaded body for an hour, a minute, she might be able to find a little courage again; that the fact of this mighty force within her was eternally demanding, dominating every breath she took, every thought? What did it matter that her mother told her that a million women were enduring this every day and thought nothing of it, that it was natural, not mysterious at all? She was different. She knew she was different. No child in the world had ever done what this one was doing now. . . . And it would go on and on . . . until . . . until . . .

She couldn't see the stitches any more. Her hands were working automatically. And Philip was waiting for her to answer . . . Philip who was a child too. Should she tell how far away she was? Should she drag him down from his dreams, shatter it into a thousand fragments? April . . . how little time there was. . . . She let her knitting drop to the floor, rose and went over to him. "Make room for me!" she said. "Put away your old pipe." She sat down on his

knee. “Je t’aime bien, tu sais, mon Philippe! Hold me a little in your arms. I . . . need you!”

Chapter Seven

A MORNING arrived when Jeanne was unable to go to her mother's. Hitherto, however ill she felt, she had carried out her daily tasks of cooking and sweeping, of walking with Philip to the shop and seeing him off,—so normally that he had remained wrapped in his dream.

The sight of her on her bed in the daytime, drawn and sick, was a profound shock. He kicked himself for a thoughtless fool, an egregious, egocentric imbecile, who couldn't see a thing until it hit him in the face! He wasn't fit to be with her! He didn't deserve to have been married! Mon Dieu, where was the doctor? This having children was a brutal and devastating business, nature at her cruelest. Jeanne must be suffering the tortures of the damned, and all this time she had never complained, never even hinted,—and like a brainless, inky schoolboy he had dared to ask her if she were ready! It would take him all the rest of his life to live down that ghastly piece of ignorance, that crass fatheadedness! She was so far engaged in the mystery of creation that he might as well be unborn himself, for all the understanding he had. How could she ever get far enough away from it to acknowledge his existence, to look upon him as anything better than an exasperating mosquito buzzing around her, a nuisance, a distraction?

He stood still in the center of the living room, staring at the bedroom door, feeling sick; and presently he crept in.

Her eyes opened at the sound of him, and she smiled.

Philip felt as though his heart would burst at the sight of that smile. "Jeanne, darling, what can I do?" he whispered. "Can't I get the doctor?"

Jeanne shook her head. "It's nothing at all. It'll be all right soon," she said. "I'd just like to lie here for a while."

"Would it help if I sat with you and held your hand?"

"Not just now, mon petit," said Jeanne. "I think I'd get through this better if I were alone. I'll call you later on."

For a moment Philip stood there looking down at her. Then, feeling like a beaten dog, he crept out again.

She was alone in some far-off corner of agony—and he couldn't help her! He was useless, a failure! She didn't even want him in the room with her! Oh, God, why couldn't he take that pain, why couldn't he suffer it instead of her? Why was he nothing but an oaf, a blundering callous fool of a man? Why hadn't he grasped all this before, ages before? He had let her work as if he hadn't even known that she was going to have a child! Perhaps that was why

she was suffering now! It must have brought something on. He must have brought something on,—he, who said he loved her!

The sun streaming into the room didn't touch him. It was all black. The valley between the cypresses didn't even exist. All he saw was Jeanne on that bed, Jeanne alone. . . . They loved each other, and yet both were alone, as alone at this appalling moment as if they had never met . . .

Yet there was one thing he could do. He could surrender, admit that he was not enough. On tiptoe he went out of the door and then ran, across the yard and up the pathway, until he reached the brick terrace of the Mas Vert. The bell jangled savagely as he wrenched the door open.

“Madame Ricou!” he called.

The shuffling slippers didn't seem to hurry, and only presently she stood in the doorway. “Eh, bien, Monsieur?”

He didn't know, or knowing would not have cared, that his face was still white. He stood in front of her, humbly. “Jeanne is suffering,” he said. “Will you come?”

“There is no reason why she should be,” said Madame Ricou. “All the same . . . I will come.”

She fingered the knot of her apron and took it off.

They set out together, silent, with nothing to say to each other, yet both actuated by the same motive.

When they reached the house, he held the door open for her, watched her cross the floor and close the bedroom door behind her,—the room from which he was excluded.

He remained outside, walking up and down, his hands clasping and unclasping behind his back.

After what seemed an eternity, Madame Ricou came out into the yard. On her way to the gate she paused and said, “She would like to see you now!” and then in a gentler voice added, “It's all right! It's all right!” and went hurrying up the path.

Philip went into the house at a run.

The next morning it was he who lit the fire and made the coffee.

Jeanne blinked a moment sleepily when he woke her with it. “Mais, mon Dieu, what is this?” she asked.

Philip waved his hand airily. “I'm the new servant, Madame! I'm afraid

I've not had as much training as I should have had, but if Madame will be kind enough to give me instructions, I will try and carry them out."

They smiled at each other.

"What nonsense!" said Jeanne. "I'm perfectly all right this morning."

"What nonsense!" said Philip. "You're not nearly as all right as I am. How do you like your coffee?"

He sat down on the side of the bed and began stirring his own.

"It's beautiful!" said Jeanne.

"Thank you for that sweet lie," said Philip. "I personally think it's rotten. But give me a day or two and you'll see."

"A day or two? You don't mean that . . ."

"Yes, I do!" said Philip. "From now on, I'm in charge. All you're allowed to do is to knit and tell me how to proceed. I'm butler, cook, valet and housemaid,—all the things that you have been, my dear, and are never going to be again! I've been like a drunken sailor, accepting and accepting. But I'm sober at last and it's all changed . . . But," he wagged a finger at her, "don't forget that I'm also the boss, so there isn't to be any argument!"

"That's all very well," said Jeanne, "but how about your work?"

Philip shrugged his shoulders. "That can take care of itself for a while. There are more important things than work in the world, and this is one of them." He swallowed the last mouthful of the indifferent coffee, lit a cigarette, rolled up his sleeves and went out in the kitchen where he armed himself with a broom.

"What are you doing?" asked Jeanne.

Philip called through from the living room. "I'm about to sweep. And I'm going to leave your door open so that I can talk to you while I do it. . . . You know, my dear, you married a perfect idiot! Up to yesterday, everybody knew more about this than I. The postman, for instance, ran into me the other morning, and he stopped his bicycle and chatted. And after a moment he looked at me knowingly and said, 'And Madame, does it go well?' . . . Then, too, old Billau slapped me on the shoulder the other day and said, 'It begins not too badly, mon vieux! Take good care of her!' . . . It was time I woke up! Will you ever be able to forgive me?"

As far as relieving her of all physical work was concerned, he had indeed waked up; but while she insisted on going about her job as usual, he stayed with her and learned how to wash potatoes and mash them with butter when they were all steaming; how to heat the oven and prepare roast meat; how to go

about getting a soup and making salad dressing,—realms of science to him absolutely unknown. Jeanne had seemed to do them so effortlessly that he was astounded to find himself so bungling. He cut his fingers, burned himself on the oven, and made the most remarkable litter all over the kitchen. But day after day he stuck to it, refused to be persuaded out of it, and, because it was for Jeanne, took pleasure in it. And when they had eaten, he carried her chair into the sun and talked to her, or read to her, or sat quietly if she snatched an uneasy sleep, not moving so that she should not find herself alone when she woke up.

Imperceptibly, the days began to lengthen; but it was still dark before five o'clock in the afternoon. As soon as the lights had to be turned on, Philip laid a fire and put a match to it so that the cones would make a cheery crackling, and Jeanne was duly and snugly installed in the big armchair in front of it. And sometimes, to make a change for her from his own society, he would suggest, "How about going over and getting old Billau this evening? His conversation makes good listening." And if Jeanne felt able to support it, she would occasionally say yes, thinking it would make a more cheerful evening for Philip. The old gentleman was only too willing to come, and Philip would start him off telling yarns of his days in the army, racy tales full of color and humor; and every time Jeanne managed a laugh, Philip would hug himself in triumph and laugh uproariously, and le vieux Billau, throwing a twinkling eye from one to the other, would chuckle and say, "That was a good one, eh, my children? Well then, listen to this . . ." and off he would go again, nobly keeping his end up in the gentle conspiracy.

Every afternoon, like a black shadow, Madame Ricou came doggedly down the footpath and, having seen for herself how her daughter was, went as doggedly back again.

And so the weeks slipped by, unmarked by any but Jeanne, whose inner ear was tuned to the secret clamor of her child.

Chapter Eight

LIKE an oyster forming a pearl around an irritation, so Philip, now that the child was embedded in his consciousness, proceeded to go around and about it with the colors of his imagination.

April was to be the golden month, when Jeanne, done with sickness and released at last from pain, would be restored to him, triumphant, doubly important for having fulfilled her contract with creation, the heroine of spring, the little sister of bursting buds and sprouting crops. She and her child in a shower of almond blossom, with the increasing sun laying its unfolding warmth upon them . . . could any picture be more symbolical of birth and rebirth, of eternity? No wonder man bowed down to the virgin and child, erected masterpieces of architecture in their honor, culled the first flowers of artistic achievement to their glorification on canvas and ivory, on sheets of music! The theme was immortal because, stripped of all creed, it was life, as starkly pagan as it was camouflagedly Christian. . . .

But over and above all that, because it was personal to himself, vital to himself, April was to be the golden month because it would give him back Jeanne as she had been, Jeanne direct, not Jeanne who could only reach him for a moment at a time through layers of spiritual concentration, of physical discomfort which erected barriers that could not be torn down. When she smiled at him after the child was born, the smile would not come from a long distance, as it did now, filtering its way through all those other things. It would be fresh, sweet, immediate, undeflected,—like sun after rain, instead of through it. It would be Jeanne again! And on her breast the recurring miracle of a child,—this one the more miraculous, if that were possible, looking to the divergent pilgrimage through the years made by its parents before coming together. What would it be like, this child? Would it have Jeanne's blue-black hair and great eyes, her slim undulating body that walked like all the East? Would it, too, have that look of having come searching through many generations, or, now that Jeanne and he had at last found their way back to France, would the child be at peace on the soil to which it belonged?

The Petit Mas, and Billau's farm, and the valley would be the child's "patelin", the cherished natal spot that was almost a religion to the French heart, that was carried with him through all his journeyings, and that brought him back again and again like a homing pigeon. The stones in the yard would hold the echo of its pattering feet, and perhaps, like old Billau, whose father and grandfather had been there before him, this child's children and grandchildren would be there after him. . . .

Amazing thought that he, Philippe Josselin, should be the one to mend the broken gap,—broken he didn't know when, perhaps as far back as the Conqueror. Was that the secret of why he had been unable to marry Millicent; because, without knowing it, he was obeying the urge of that ancient blood, a pawn between the finger and thumb of the Master Player? If so, what came after? What would be the next square? Need there be a next? Wasn't he at last established, protected, on "king four", the pivot around which the game revolved . . . at least until April; and then the Petit Mas would come to life again. Jeanne would be back! The child's first cry would be a magic note which would release him from tension, from going on tiptoe, from hushed living. It would be like a rush of air blowing through the house, dispelling the charged static. They could all open their lungs again, laugh aloud, move freely,—in April when Jeanne would be herself again!

It was like the line of a secret song—when Jeanne would be herself again—that sang itself in his mind as he went about his humble tasks of sweeping and cooking, that became almost a prayer as he stood transfixed by pain at the thought of her pain, that became a pæan of praise when her eyes were tranquil and he knew that momentarily she knew peace, that tore him unutterably when twice during those long days she clung to his hand and whispered again and again in a kind of fierce desperation, "Philippe, I love you . . . I love you. . . ."

But never once did she tell him that she was afraid.

Chapter Nine

SQUAT and rambling, the Billau farm hugged the earth among the terraced olives. There were barns and sheds joining the main building, but going off at angles in accordance with the ground. The walls and the tiles had been burned by the sun to a pale biscuit color. It looked as if inside it might be as hot as an oven; but even in the height of summer the stone-floored living room was cool and inviting.

But for the fact that the furniture had been there for generations, and that many offers of purchase had been refused, it was very like the sale room of the Mas Vert. A tall Provençal armoire, dark with age and richly carved, stood against one wall and faced a dresser whose shelves were filled with china. A worn old bread-bin, a pétrain, was in the angle near the door, and above it, on the wall, was suspended the cradle-like rack, the panetière, whose many carved knobs, sticking up above the fluted bars, threw fantastic shadows at night against the white wall.

On the other side, the open fireplace was rigged up with an ancient spit for the roasting of vast meats, or as many as fifteen chickens at a time; its simple machinery being made to revolve by means of a large heavy stone being attached to the pulley rope. A row of copper casseroles, graduated according to size, went all along the mantelpiece.

The devil of slothfulness, who attacks the Anglo-Saxon races in the form of comfortable furniture, found no chance in this Latin home. The chairs were stiff and high-backed, some without arms. Such amelioration as there was in the armed variety, consisting of thin pads on the seat, was an economic measure rather than a yielding to the devil,—they saved the cloth of trousers from excessive friction.

With one exception, the only pictures on the walls were almost life-sized photographs, peculiarly flat and hideous, of great moments in the annals of the family,—the grandfather and grandmother stiffly erect on the day of their golden wedding, surrounded by a wooden-faced progeny; le vieux Billau's father gazing down upon his blushing bride; Billau himself, a large small boy in knickers and socks, candle in hand and white bow on arm, radiant upon the occasion of his First Communion.

The exception was a framed drawing of Philip's of the farm seen among the olives, with the figure of Monsieur Billau bending over his hoe. Philip had presented it to him some days after his ceremonial call, to the old gentleman's great pleasure; and even now, after it had been hanging there on his wall for some months, Monsieur Billau would walk up to it from time to time and nod

his head and mutter, “Mais, tout de même! C’est fantastique! . . . C’est bien moi, ça, même la pipe!”

Looking exactly like the drawing, Le vieux Billau straightened up and leaned on his hoe. With his forearm he tilted back his enormous straw hat and wiped away the sweat from his forehead.

“Bon sang de bon sang!” he muttered. “It catches me in the back to-day!”

He took the blackened pipe from his teeth, tapped it out against the palm of his hand. It sounded as if he were hitting it against wood. Then he groped in his pocket and produced a worn pouch that bulged with tobacco. As he filled the pipe, his eyes roamed across to the Petit Mas. He muttered again. “Ah! . . . I ask myself . . .”

He nodded thoughtfully, struck a match and enveloped himself in a smoke screen that was caught by the breeze and frazzled out into nothingness between the trees. Then he spat on his hands, rubbed them together and bent again over the hoe.

Down the valley the fields were touched with new green. Here and there an almond tree had burst into pink and white flame. It seemed as if the very earth that Monsieur Billau turned up had a smell of renewal that held a quality of intoxication, of excitement. A little restless wind ran in and out of the trees, warm, provoking. The silver-grey leaves of the olives rippled like a million tiny fish playing on the surface of water. Small puffy clouds, white as down, were hurrying across the sky as though there were no time for loitering, now that spring had come.

Le vieux Billau had seen it all so many times, had felt it coursing through his veins, fiery, like new wine, driving a man in spite of himself. . . . What glorious responses had he not made in those days in the regiment? Eh, bon sang, not for nothing had they called him Le Costaud! . . . But that was all yesterday. To-day it was the other man’s turn, while he smiled at memory and stretched his old bones a little.

Methodically, unhurriedly, he worked his way along the row, reached the end, turned back again, his great shadow decreasing in girth as the sun climbed towards noon.

It was the quick rattle of pebbles on the pathway that made him look up at last, made his eyebrows go up too, as he caught sight of Madame Ricou. “Tiens!” he muttered. “She’s early to-day.”

He stopped hoeing and straightened himself hugely. Every afternoon during the last three months he had seen her go down and come up again at precisely the same hour. He had chuckled to himself and remarked that he

could set his watch by her; and now . . .

“Ah!” he said, and waited for her to draw level. Then he called down over the terraces of trees. “Bonjour, Madame!”

Madame Ricou was hurrying. She barely turned her head as she gave an answering bonjour.

But Monsieur was not to be put off. “It is for to-day?” he demanded.

Madame Ricou nodded. “Yes.”

“And the doctor?”

“He’s on his way now.”

Madame Ricou was getting ahead of him. Monsieur Billau raised his voice. “If I can do anything . . . Ce sont de gentils enfants tous les deux! . . . Ecoutez, Madame!”

Madame Ricou refused to stop; but she consented to slow down and turn her head again.

Monsieur Billau took a pace or two towards her, talking as he went. “It is no place for a man down there,—especially a husband. It is for you women, n’est-ce pas? Well, then, why do you not let me take care of him, ce pauvre bougre de Philippe, while the little lady goes through it? Hein? What do you say?” He gave a reminiscent chuckle. “A man needs a couple of stiff drinks to keep him steady at a moment like this, as you and I both know, Madame!”

Madame Ricou shrugged her shoulders. “Drink or no drink, he’ll be better out of the way. I’ll send him to you.”

“Bien! C’est ça! I will come to the gate and get him!”

Le vieux Billau left his row with the speed and agility of a younger man. First he made his way to the barn. Lifetime habit demanded that he return the hoe to its appointed place. That done, he turned to the dog which was leaping vociferously around his legs, pointed to the kennel and said, “Va-t-en!”

Without another bark, the dog ran into the kennel, turned around and stood there with his head sticking out. Then old Billau set out for the Petit Mas, muttering to himself as he went. “Diable! I know what it is! My poor Marie passed some bad hours with that first one. . . . Ah, les femmes! One has to admit, after all, that they take it in the neck! . . . And up there in the café, what sympathy did they have for me? They laughed and said she must be having triplets! Les salauds, va! . . . But at least it will not be the case with la petite. Ce Philippe est un brave garçon, mais pas costaud à ce point-là! All the same, may the Holy Virgin take care of her!”

He was making the stones rattle under his feet and presently he came to the

gate of the Petit Mas. Instead of going to it—it was no place for him to-day—he stood between the two cypresses, looking across the yard. The door was open. He could hear the voice of Madame Ricou.

“Go! Go!” she said. “There is nothing you can do, and you will help her far more by being out of the way. The doctor will be coming at any moment, and only he and I can do what is necessary.”

And then Philip’s voice answered, a voice of anguish. “But Madame . . . can’t I fetch things . . . can’t I help somehow. . . . Mon Dieu, how can you possibly expect me to leave her just now when . . .”

“Mon pauvre ami, even now you are keeping me from her by arguing! There is Monsieur Billau waiting for you. You will be better off with him.”

“That’s true! I am keeping you from her! I’ll go . . . at once. You’ll . . . take care of her . . .”

He came stumbling out of the house, white, unseeing.

Monsieur Billau met him, took him by the arm and hurried him away up the path. It was as though he were leading a wooden doll, an automaton. Only Philip’s body, indeed, was there; his mind, his soul, were back in that room with Jeanne.

“Eh b’en, mon vieux,” said old Billau, “the great moment has come, eh? In a little while you’ll be a proud father. Courage, my friend! These things always seem worse because one is helpless and unable to do a thing. But your wife is in good hands. Believe me, I know! Madame Ricou is no fool in these matters. It was she who helped my poor Marie. She will know how to help her own daughter. . . . And there is the doctor! He has left his car at the top. He is a good man too. He has helped half the population of Vence into this world for the last twenty years.”

The doctor was a small man, with grey hair showing under his black hat. He came slipping and sliding down the stony path.

“Bonjour, docteur!” Monsieur Billau greeted him from a distance. “It is no longer for me that you come down this pathway. My day is over. This is the happy man, and I’ll keep him prisoner while you do your work down there with his wife.”

The doctor’s beard waggled when he replied. “Ah, Monsieur Billau, still as solid as a rock, I see! . . . Bonjour, Monsieur Josselin! We will take good care of her, do not fear. You will excuse me . . .”

He waved his hand and passed on.

Philip’s body was still empty. He had not heard a word of old Billau’s talk, had looked upon the doctor with eyes that did not register. They were blinded

by what he had seen of Jeanne in that room before Madame Ricou put him out.

Monsieur Billau looked down at his strained face and, without another word, swept him up the entrance to his farm, pushed him through the door.

Having dumped Philip into one of the armchairs, he made two rapid strides over to the dresser and, from the left-side cupboard, produced a bottle of brandy. His hand hesitated for a bare second at the glasses . . . one or two? Two. One couldn't see a man suffer like that without needing something oneself! He poured out two generous drinks and carried them over.

"Here, my friend," he said, "swallow this! . . . Allons!"

As Philip made no move, apparently did not hear him, he put down his own glass on the table and then, like a friendly giant, slid an enormous arm around Philip's limp shoulders and put the other glass into his hand.

"There!" he said. "Now drink it!"

The contact of the cold glass against Philip's fingers produced the spontaneous reaction of raising it to his lips. For all he knew, it might have been water. He came up gasping and choking, however.

Monsieur Billau grinned. "That's the way! Let that get down to its proper level and you'll begin to feel better." He took his own glass and sipped it with a great smacking of lips. "There's something about brandy that goes straight to the point. And this is old, mon ami, older than you are. It only comes out on solemn occasions, and to-day is one that you will never forget! Here's to the little lady, and may she have an easy time!"

Philip did not drink the toast with him. He was joined together again, out of his coma, a complete unit of fear and anguish. He rose from his chair as though on steel springs. "I must go down there," he said. "I can't stay here any more. I've got to see how she's getting on."

He put his glass on the table and made for the door.

Monsieur Billau got there first. "Impossible! You must stay here. Don't you understand that you would only be getting in the doctor's way, that you would only be making him nervous to know that you were there. It wouldn't be fair to your wife, mon ami!"

"Yes, but mon Dieu, I . . ."

"There isn't any but!" Monsieur Billau broke in. "Am I not the father of two? Have I not learned something by those experiences? Come now, go back and finish your drink. You are shaking and shivering,—just as I myself shook and shivered the first time it happened. It is something we all go through, mon vieux, so you might as well learn the routine. The woman has to pay the price of nature and the man has to drink to steady his nerves,—an unequal

distribution, I admit, but one cannot rearrange these things. They were decided by the good God.”

Philip broke away from him. The good God! You couldn't start an argument like that with him now, when Jeanne was . . . He shuddered, stopped at the table and drank another great mouthful of brandy. The routine, eh? He gave a strained laugh. God knew his nerves needed steadying! What was the routine? How long did this thing last? Would they come up and tell him when it was over? Could he ever have imagined that it was going to be anything like this? . . . In April, when she was herself again! God, what a half-witted idiot! As if any woman could ever be herself again after going through this! What a ghastly exhibition of ego! He had been thinking of himself, always of himself! Why had she had to have a child? It would have been a million times better if she had never had one! The price was too great. The price of nature, old Billau called it. Damn nature! Nature took people and wrenched them to pieces, laughing at their agony! Nature drove people insane, made drunkards of them, made them torture each other, kill each other by the million! Nature went into refinements of cruelty, subtle, ironical, slow, relentless! Nature was the common enemy, the betrayer . . . like an enormous octopus whose poisonous suckers touched all men. And now it had wound one of its damned tentacles around Jeanne . . . choking her . . . dragging her down . . .

He stopped in front of Monsieur Billau, caught him by the arm. “How long does it last, this birth?”

“It depends,” said Monsieur Billau. “If everything goes smoothly, three hours, four . . .”

Philip stood very still. “Three hours . . . four . . . Nom de Dieu! Can a woman stand that? Jeanne! . . . Jeanne! . . .”

Monsieur Billau laid an enormous hand on his shoulder. “I know! I know! All the same, you exaggerate, mon ami! Don't forget that women are born for this, made for this. It is the task laid upon them from the beginning. Your little lady has just as much chance as any one of the millions of women who ever had a child. She is strong and healthy. There ought not to be any trouble. Keep your courage going! Think of the future. In a month, when she is well again, and you have her out there, sitting in her chair with the child at her breast, she will have forgotten all about this two hours! She will be gay and happy, as proud as a peacock! . . . Do you see that picture of the old ones up there? Look at the sweet, contented face of my grandmother, as she looks down upon her twelve children, and their children. Twelve, my friend! Think of that! Your little lady is merely making a beginning!” He chuckled. “Allons, mon vieux! A year from now, you may be up here again for another glass of brandy!” He

gave Philip a clap on the shoulder, his tanned old face wreathed in smiles. "Finish your drink now! Then light your pipe and march up and down! Break things if it will help to relieve your nerves; swear, do anything; but don't go down there, and keep on believing that it will be all right!"

Philip passed a hand over his face, tried to smile at the old gentleman's pleasantries. "For you it's easy," he said. "You can look back at it from a distance. But for me it's here, now, overwhelming, appalling. And she has to face it alone! I am less than nothing, impotent!"

All unconsciously he began to follow Monsieur Billau's prescription,—went marching up and down the room, clasping and unclasping his hands behind his back. "I didn't know, I didn't understand, until this morning . . . I was with her until her mother came . . . Sainte mère de Dieu! . . . And that isn't all. I saw myself . . . Good God, Billau, I can't tell you how I saw myself . . . stark . . . abject! Can you believe that all these months, when I ought to have been thinking entirely of Jeanne, my own ego has been pushing through like some loathsome plant? It isn't that I haven't agonized when she's been in pain. God knows I have! But I see now that all the time I've done it in relation to my beastly self, in relation to my own desires, my own needs, rather than those of Jeanne! I find that all unconsciously I was jumping over this ghastly danger, this torture, that Jeanne is going through now, just pushing it out of the way, as it were, as a sort of protection to this self of mine which is just as egocentric, just as brutal as the new life in Jeanne, that is fighting its way out now at any cost, tearing, wrenching, ruthless. . . . If it kills her, it will be born! That's what I've been! I'm like it now! God help me, I can't keep this accursed ego out of it even at this moment, when she's hanging between life and death. Instead of thinking only of Jeanne's desire to go on living, of the tragedy to her if this damned thing wipes her out, I'm conscious all the time of myself. I don't want Jeanne to die. I am counting on having her back,—because of my need of her, because she represents something without which my ego will suffer! . . . Don't you see? Could anything be more appalling? It's ugly and greedy! And when I think of how she has been through this, months and months without a complaint! God, how I loathe myself!" He threw out his arms in a wide gesture and flung around on le vieux Billau. "It's finished. I swear to you I'll change it all! I've taken everything as though by right. Now I'll give it all back. For the rest of our lives Jeanne shall see that I'm not blind any more. She shall see that she has taught me to understand . . . at last!"

And on he went once more, up and down, up and down. . . .

Chapter Ten

IT was the sudden explosive barking of the dog that took both men to the window.

The lengthened shadows of the olives checkered the pathway up which came the black figure of Madame Ricou, half-running, half-walking, hatless, waving helpless, reproachful arms at the animal yapping at her heels.

Monsieur Billau muttered an oath and flung up the window. "Va-t-en!" he called. "Couche-toi, sale bête!"

The dog broke off, turned and slunk away.

Philip climbed out of the window and ran to meet Madame Ricou. Monsieur Billau hurried to the door and followed.

"Well?" Philip's voice was brutal with nerves.

It seemed as if it was all Madame Ricou could do to get enough breath to reply. "The . . . child is born," she mumbled.

"Yes, but Jeanne? How is she?" Philip caught her arm eagerly. "Can I go down and see her now? Will it be all right if I merely put my head in for a minute?"

"That's why I have come," said Madame Ricou. "But you must . . . prepare yourself . . ."

"Prepare myself!" Philip gave a great laugh. "Haven't I been preparing myself for this minute for months?"

Madame Ricou shook her head somberly. "Mon pauvre ami, you do not understand! . . . I am trying to tell you. . . . It has been very difficult. . . . Her heart . . . The doctor warned her three months ago . . ."

Philip was staring at her. There was something about her manner, her hesitation, her shifting eyes that went from one man to the other. . . . His laugh died. He felt as though his stomach were slowly being tied into a knot. He had to force his mouth in order to form words. "Her heart? Three months ago! . . . What do you mean?"

Madame Ricou wrung her hands. "Ah, mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Go down quickly! Do not waste time!"

For half a breath Philip glared at her,—half a breath during which it seemed that the world was undergoing a violent earthquake. Then, somehow, he began to run, dodging trees that seemed to sway down in front of him, stone terraces that threatened to fall on top of him, tearing along the pathway that see-sawed as he went. Would it be possible to hit the opening between the two

cypresses? Would they stay still long enough for him to dash through? . . . Now! . . . He crashed into one of the trees and swerved off it into the yard . . . Good! they couldn't stop him now. He was home.

He dropped to a walk and groped his way across the yard. The door was open. Of course! They always left it open when one of them was inside, and Jeanne was there, waiting for him . . . Jeanne, about whose heart there was something they wouldn't tell him. . . . Jeanne, who had taught him the beginnings of understanding, and he was going to prove it to her for the rest of his life . . . If only that accursed earthquake would stop rocking! It was so beastly unfair to rock now when she had just had a baby. She needed rest, perfect quiet. . . . He was probably making an awful noise staggering like that along the passage. He must stop it, pull himself together. . . .

There was somebody moving inside her room. . . . Her door was open too. He put his head inside. There she was! Lying quietly! And that funny little man whose beard waggled was bending over her . . . why, of course, that was the doctor. . . . All the same, why the hell didn't he get out and leave them alone now? How could one talk to Jeanne with him hanging about? . . . "Jeanne, may I come in?" he said. That would be a hint for the man to go!

He was in the room.

The doctor looked up, made a queer gesture and came towards Philip.

"Monsieur," he said. "I am very sorry. You have come too late."

Philip blinked at him. Too late? What was the fool talking about? There was Jeanne! She was sleeping. If the idiot spoke like that, he'd wake her. Philip put his fingers to his lips. "Not so loud!" he whispered. On tiptoe he walked around the doctor, went to the bed and knelt down beside it. Jeanne! . . . One of her hands was lying outside the clothes. He bent down and touched it with his lips. . . . How cold she was! Why the devil hadn't they kept her warm? There was a hot-water bottle somewhere. Madame Ricou ought to have known where to find it. . . . Jeanne looked more beautiful than she ever had before. God, it was a shame to have made her suffer like that! Thank heavens she was resting at last, so quietly that she was hardly breathing . . . incredibly still . . . Surely that doctor . . .

Suddenly he stiffened, leaned forward with a dry gasp, staring down into her face. Under the weight of his hands on the bed, her cold hand was displaced, slipped down and touched his. For a moment he did not understand. His eyes blazed. She would look at him, now she knew he had come. "Jeanne!" he whispered.

There was no answer, except for a lament from the new life with which the doctor was concerned in the far corner of the room,—so weak and helpless,

now that it had done its first killing.

Philip's head dropped on to his arms. He knew now. . . . Presently there were voices outside,—Madame Ricou and Monsieur Billau arriving, whispering to the doctor; life beginning to press on, close in, interfering, driving, insistent.

Philip dragged himself to his feet. He couldn't go on yet. Oh, God, it was asking too much! He wanted to be alone with Jeanne. She wasn't in here any more . . . And he had got to tell her that he would go on trying to show her . . . He must give it all to her child now . . . somehow . . .

He went to the door, passed the three standing there, and walked out between the still cypresses . . . alone with Jeanne.

The tiny white clouds were scurrying across the sky, and the little restless wind began to tug at him. . . .

FINIS

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Undertow* by Arthur Hamilton Gibbs]