

# Peter Jameson

A Modern Romance

Gilbert Frankau  
1920

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*NEW BORZOI NOVELS*  
*FALL, 1920*

MOON-CALF

*By Floyd Dell*

HUNGER

*By Knut Hamsun*

Translated from the Norwegian by George Egerton, with an  
introduction by Edwin Björkman.

SEVEN MEN

*By Max Beerbohm*

YOUTH AND THE BRIGHT MEDUSA

*By Willa Cather*

HAGAR'S HOARD

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THE LONG, DIM TRAIL

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A MATING IN THE WILDS

*By Ottwell Binns*

# PETER JAMESON

## A Modern Romance

BY GILBERT FRANKAU

New York

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1920

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*To the Average Man and Woman  
of the English-Speaking Peoples*

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# Peter Jameson: A Modern Romance

## *FOREWORD*

### § 1

If you take the Central London Tube to the Bank Station; fight for your place in the lift; climb the tortuous staircase to Lombard Street; pass along that narrow, money-glutted thoroughfare, where scarlet-vested, top-hatted bank-messengers take dignified way from the sign of the Phoenix to the swinging doors of the Crédit Lyonnais: if, crossing Gracechurch Street below the clock of the London & South-Western Bank, you enter less-aristocratic Fenchurch Street and take the first zig-zag turning on your left, you will find—hidden between a stationer's shop and a grocer's—two swing doors, each with a brass name-plate from which the black lettering, "P. JAMESON AND COMPANY, CIGAR IMPORTERS," has been almost erased by forty years of incessant polishing. And if you care to penetrate yet farther round that gray curving Lime Street, past the church of St. Andrew Undershaft, into the heart of Havana cigardom, St. Mary Axe, you will still find—clustered round the maroon marble of the Baltic Exchange—the warehouses of "Schornstein & Co.," of "Beresford & Beresford," of "Samuel Elkins & Son," and others with whom Peter traded, intrigued, lunched and gossiped, between the years 1903 and 1914.

But you will not find, search the City as you will, Peter Jameson, sometime senior partner in Peter Jameson & Company, and chairman of Nirvana Limited, Manufacturers of High-grade Cigarettes. Because—whatever war may have accomplished of good or evil to us other millions whom it caught up into its vortex—to Peter it came like a great cleansing storm, terrifying in its violence, unfathomable in its purposes, but bearing him at the last, past many rocks of doubt and fear, to sure harbourage, to certainty of body and of soul—and, better even than these, to Love.

This, in so far as one man may tell another's story, is the tale of that voyaging.

### § 2

Three families—the Jamesons, the Gordons, and the Baynets—are principally



concerned in this story. All three were originally English yeomen; country, not county folk; probably peasants—in the best sense of the word. In the Jamesons and the Gordons there is an admixture of exotic Hebraic blood: that of the Señora Elvira de Miranda y Miraflores, who married a Captain Bradley of the British West India Regiment, then stationed in Jamaica, and had by him two daughters, one of whom married Peter's father in 1880, and the other—some three years later—John Gordon, father of Peter's cousin, Francis Gordon. The Baynet stock is pure English.

Peter's grandfather—Peter the First—deserted the country for the town at the beginning of the great manufacturing age (about 1840); married a "cit's" daughter; tried his luck in the City; couldn't stand it; and wandered out to the West Indies, trading first at Georgetown, Demarara, then in Bridgetown, Barbados; and finally settling down in the then Spanish colony of Cuba, where he bought a small estate near Guanabacoa, and grew tobacco—more for a hobby than a living, as he was a person of few wants, and tolerably careless about most things except his son, Peter the Second, whom he had educated in England, and to whom—on his death in the late seventies—he bequeathed the sum of £3,000, the verandah'd *hacienda*, and some hundred acres of not very saleable land.

It was on the Royal Mail steamer to Havana that our Peter's father—thinking more of the newly acquired heritage and how best to turn it into cash, than of matrimony—first met Captain and Mrs. Bradley (*née* Miranda y Miraflores) returning with their two flapper-daughters to Kingston, Jamaica. . . .

To cut a long story short, Peter the Second sold the tobacco-farm; found himself in love with Tessa Bradley; followed her to Jamaica; married her; realized that the interest on his capital could not possibly support them in comfort; and returned to England in the spring of 1882 with his wife, his wife's sister (who found garrison-life in the tropics hardly to her taste), and twenty cases of Señor Larranaga's very best "Principes" in which he had invested a considerable amount of money, and of which he subsequently disposed, owing to the machinations of his brokers and ignorance of the imported cigar trade, at a very unsatisfactory profit.

But Peter the Second—like his son Peter the Third, hero of this story—was an obstinate devil who disliked being beaten, especially over money. Taking—from an old school friend, John Gordon (who may have had ulterior motives in granting the facilities), a little room in the big, dingy offices of Gordon's Limited, General Merchants, he imported another consignment of Havana cigars; had them sampled; hired a brougham; and hawked (he was, although he had married an officer's daughter, by no means a snob) his sample-boxes round the West End tobacconist shops until he had disposed of his second shipment at a very different figure to that

received on the first.

So began the firm of "P. Jameson & Company, Cigar Importers," which—aided by the financial support of John Gordon (who married Dolores Bradley very shortly after that second shipment had been disposed of) and the boom-crop of 1884—soon needed offices of its own, two clerks, a country salesman, and all the paraphernalia of a regular business. It was not, of course—never would be—a huge affair like Gordon's, who dealt the world over and in every conceivable commodity from quinine to molasses—still it was a solid, money-making, not too arduous concern; and, moreover, both Peter's father and his salesman, Tom Simpson, whom he subsequently took into junior partnership, needed considerably less to live on than the profit which it earned.

### § 3

Peter the Third, *our* Mr. Jameson, was not born until his parents had been married nearly four years: John Gordon's son, Francis, antedating him by about a week. In both of them, you can trace the Miraflores strain fairly clearly. They are both of them of medium height; stocky rather than tall. Both have the same curious eyes which seem to change colour—from gray to darkest black—with their thoughts. Both are small-handed, small-footed, rather determined about the nose, dark-haired, intelligent-headed. But life—and war, which is the same thing—has dealt with them so differently that, nowadays, you would have great difficulty in finding more than a fugitive likeness. You would say, and perhaps rightly, that Peter is less, Francis more, the Miraflores.

Dolores Gordon, despite her husband's twelve thousand a year, presented him with no more children; but Tessa Jameson had another son—Peter's brother Arthur—born in 1888.

Meanwhile, both businesses flourished: Gordon's Limited, the larger; Jameson & Co., the sounder—providing John Gordon with a rather elaborate mansion in Curzon Street, West (to which he would return, late, tired and neurotic from the new offices in London Wall), and the Jamesons with a solid, rather tyrannous edifice in Lowndes Square, Kensington, wherein Peter's father found comfortable refuge from the reflector-lit warehouse in Lime Street. By the late nineties, Peter the First's few thousand pounds had grown—thanks largely to the sole agency for Beckmann cigars (of which more later)—into a fairly comfortable fortune, so that when John Gordon suggested to Peter the Second that both Peter the Third and Francis Gordon had better be sent to Eton College, money did not stand in the way.

The two cousins (Peter's brother Arthur went to a less exalted establishment) did not distinguish themselves greatly at school. Francis was rather too flamboyant, Peter too self-concentrated, for easy friendships. However, Peter managed to get both his "Boats," his "House Colours," and Corporal's stripes on his Volunteer tunic before he left: while Francis undoubtedly acquired there—in some mysterious way of his own—the beginnings of that literary technique in which he is now beginning to be acknowledged past-master.

From Eton, Peter went straight into the business. He had always found idleness intolerable, and Jameson's seemed—regarded as "something to do"—made to his hand. To Francis and other Etonian acquaintances, the choice appeared an amazing one: but the boy's father—lonely since his wife's death about a year before, and conscious that his other son Arthur, whatever else he might become, would never be a business man—both understood and stimulated this desire for work.

## § 4

Peter's entry into Jameson's, early in 1903, synchronized with the formation of the Havana Tobacco Company—commonly known as "The Trust"; and the attempt by J. B. Duke and his colleagues (who, having fought the English cigarette and tobacco manufacturers to a standstill, were now controlling—almost unknown to the public—eighty per cent. of the world's smoking-trade) to corner the market in Havana-manufactured cigars. Though a very small affair of outposts when considered in relation to the pitched battles which preceded it, the fight was, at the outset, not without interest to those whose livings were menaced by the billion-dollar corporation controlled from 111 Fifth Avenue, New York. To the boy, fresh from the monastic atmosphere of school, it gave just that touch of romance which his enthusiasm needed.

For Jameson's—as agents of the German-owned but Havana-domiciled concern, Heinrich Beckmann & Co—lined up with the so-called "Independents," and did doughty battle with tongue and typewriter against the invader.

Old Jameson and Tom Simpson, who, by now, had a fourth share in the concern, found the lad's keenness amusing. Both elderly men—their capital intact and their blood chilled with twenty years of money-making—they did not take the situation very seriously. Even when Beckmanns, greedy for more trade, insisted that both "Beresford & Beresford" and "Samuel Elkins & Co." should (under certain secret conditions) receive direct shipments of their goods, they only laughed tolerantly at the infringement of a profitable monopoly—leaving indignation to the

newcomer.

Indignant, Peter certainly was. There had never been an actual contract about the Beckmann brand; but the boy, accustomed to his college code, perceived something in the transaction dishonourable to the other side, weak on his own. Unreasonably as it seemed at the time—reasonably enough as it shows in the light of history—he thus early conceived an instinctive distrust, not only of Beckmanns, but of German business people in general. . . .

However, a year in the City effectively replaced the college code by the legal.

At the end of eighteen months—the “fight” resolving itself into a mere question of strong competition; each side more or less holding its own, with a slight sentimental balance in favour of those outside “the Ring”—Peter had settled down to the complacent routine of office life: ten till five, with an hour off for lunch and two Saturdays out of three absolutely workless. Sport—he was a safe shot, except at snipe for which he lacked the temperament; a good rider; and a really fine hand with the trout-fly—completed his existence. Dissipation, after one or two, experiments, he avoided—not from scruples, but because it bored him.

Then, just after his twenty-first birthday, the “old man,” never very strong, caught pneumonia and died within the week.

## § 5

The death of his father was a vivid grief to Peter. For his mother, he had never experienced more than a lukewarm affection; Arthur had always been her favourite, and Peter—even as a child—had been conscious of the preference. But the “governor,” the “old boy!”—that seemed somehow or other different. They had worked together, talked together, driven home together, drank their port of an evening at the big mahogany table in the Lowndes Square dining-room, had their little rows, made them up again. . . . “Sentimental ass!” the boy said to himself, as he sat alone in the library that first night. But there were real tears in his eyes; tears that only work could dry.

And of work, in the days that followed, there was enough. As co-executor, with Simpson, for his father’s estate, even Peter found himself sufficiently occupied. The business, the Crown lease of the Lowndes Square house, sundry outside investments—all required valuation, tabulation, preparation for probate. Death duties, auditor’s fees, lawyer’s fees—each had to be scrutinized, queried, and ultimately overpaid. Arthur—who, at seventeen, was already wearied of school—demanded an advance of trust-mones; got it; departed for Australia.

In the end Peter recognized himself absolute possessor of some £30,000 (practically all in the business); and trustee for the £10,000 in stocks and shares which became his brother's when he, too, reached twenty-one.

"You *will* be an ass," said Francis Gordon, newly returned from two years of aimless wandering on the Continent, "if you go on slaving away in that office of yours."

"Can't stand doing nothing," Peter had answered, "and, if I wanted to get married, twelve hundred a year wouldn't be enough." With both of which ends in mind, he signed a rather peculiar ten years' partnership deed with Simpson, and resumed his hardly interrupted activities in Lime Street.

## § 6

That same year, 1905, Francis's own parents both died, leaving him master undisputed of a five-figure income; and the two cousins very nearly decided on living together, till Peter vetoed the idea on the grounds that "as Francis never got up before lunch or came home to dinner, he didn't see much sense in the proposed arrangement."

Nevertheless, bachelor existence in that barrack of a house at Lowndes Square, soon began to pall. "I shan't be dining at home to-night, Smith," became the almost daily word to the elderly, dignified, parlour maid as she handed our Mr. Jameson his top-hat of a morning; and on the rare evenings when he did dine at home, it was usually in company—business acquaintances, school friends, old cronies of his father's, or—and this frequently—the Baynets.

Heron Baynet, the Harley Street diagnostician who was knighted in the 1918 Birthday List for his research-work in the treatment of shell-shock and other nervous disorders, had been one of the consultants attending Jameson senior in his illness. He had taken an instinctive liking to the young man; asked him to call. Peter, accepting the invitation, met a married daughter, Violet; a son in the Army; and Patricia—tall, blond, twenty-one, dignified, rather reserved in her speech, tolerably contemptuous of the average young man, cultivating alternately the critique of pure reason at home and the outside edge at Prince's skating-rink. . . . Twelve months after their first meeting, in March, 1906, these two married.

A marriage of affection, kindred tastes and mutual respect. A marriage which appealed to them (both had a strong, youthful contempt for sentiment) as "eminently reasonable." A marriage into which both entered with the definite certainty that there would be no passion, no misunderstandings, no petty economies, no vital

divergences of opinion. A marriage which—as most marriages—ended by utterly confuting all their original ideas about it.

## § 7

Followed two years of palship; at the end of which their first daughter, Evelyn, was born. Peter, who had hoped for a son, felt disappointment; showed it, perhaps a little too plainly: thereby heightening his wife's love for the kiddie. But the disappointment faded; the easy relationship renewed itself.

About this time, Ivan Turkovitch became a frequent visitor to the Lime Street warehouse. A quaint man—born in some nameless province of Austria-Hungary; speaking English with an amazing accent; small; paunchy; tawny-bearded; very neat in his clothes, in his habits,—he had come to England with nothing but his wits; and built up in some subterranean manner the struggling firm of “I. Turkovitch, manufacturers of Nirvana Cigarettes.”

Turkovitch, an artist in his way, loved that business; cared less for its financial harvest than the joy of running it—with the inevitable result that, being as extravagant in his factory as he was economical in his home, he invariably found himself short of capital. Peter liked listening to the little man when he talked about his “vork peoples”; visited the factory, for the first time from curiosity, for the second time out of sheer interest. His own business existence at Jameson's had settled down into a pretty humdrum affair. As senior partner by right of capital he drew a steady £3,000 a year; leaving Simpson to do the inside work and contenting himself with the selling end, which—as it meant pitting his brains against other people's—rather amused him.

But when Turkovitch finally broached the point towards which he had been finessing, he found anything but a languid young capitalist to deal with. Peter Jameson was quite willing to put up the money, five thousand pounds of it if necessary (considerably more than the Hungarian either required or expected), but on one condition only—that, as majority shareholder, he should control the business.

Turkovitch, even in those early days, found Peter,—with his ideas of press-advertising, of new machinery, of up-to-dateness generally,—rather terrifying: but in the end, pressed by many long-suffering creditors, he yielded.

To Peter, the new concern grew swiftly from a mere plaything into a passion. He felt, for the first time, the real zest of commerce, the creative joy of it. This was no inherited money-making machine; but a task that needed a man's every thought, all his energy: uphill work, worthy of accomplishment. Gradually it drew him, from Lime

Street, from his shooting, from his riding, from his fishing, from his home. So that the coming of his second daughter, Primula, seemed to him less of a disappointment than an extraneous incident vastly concerning to Patricia, but to himself little more than item of interest.

Superficially the palship between husband and wife still existed; but the woman began to feel herself, more and more, an accessory and not a necessity to this absorbed young husband of hers. His real love, she felt, was—would always be, unless some miracle happened—Nirvana.

For the plant, irrigated and irrigated again with gold, began to grow; promised a great harvest. There were difficulties of course; but these only served to intensify Peter's ardour. Tobacconists wouldn't stock Nirvana—tobacconists must stock Nirvana, he would advertise until they were forced to. The export trade was hopeless, because one couldn't get a reliable export-traveller—he, Peter Jameson, would do that part himself: and travel he did, from Christiania to Lisbon, from Aden to Shanghai, from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso. . . .

So the thirty thousand pounds in Jamesons dwindled to twenty thousand; and the five thousand in Nirvana rose to ten. But already, they were "round the corner," covering expenses. True that most of the capital was represented in the balance-sheet by that intangible mystery "Goodwill and trademarks"; true that Turkovitch grumbled and Sam Bramson, "Pretty" Bramson, the newly engaged sales-manager, required more and more travellers for the home-trade, seemed to do less and less work himself; true that old Tom Simpson began to shake his head at so much voyaging and successfully urged a heavy life-assurance: still—it grew, it grew; and Peter, working fourteen hours between the two businesses, felt success very near, gloried in it. . . .

Meanwhile that resplendent person, Francis Gordon, wrote a "novel in verse" which excited some comment; married for caprice; lost his wife; wandered off, a not too disconsolate widower, round the world; lost most of his income; fell in love; renounced love; renouncing, found his vocation; and returned to England shortly before the opening chapter of this our romance, which now begins.

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*To my American readers.—"Eton College" is what we call a "public school." Boys go at the age of 12-13 and leave at the age of 18-19. Originally founded for "poor scholars"—it has now some thousand students who pay fees of about £300 per annum each. Gilbert Frankau.*

# *PART ONE*

## THE HOME AND THE OFFICE

### § 1

January, 1914. A cold, dry, foggy, London evening. The children—after much protesting—safely asleep. All the electric lights in the big first-floor double drawing-room—pink-walled, parquet-floored, elaborately, comfortably, but by no means artistically, furnished—glowing. A red coal-fire heaped profusely on the tiled, steel-fendered hearth. And, standing before the fire, firm fine hands smoothing the folds of her low-neck, black charmeuse evening-gown, Patricia Jameson.

Not a beautiful woman, this Patricia: yet by no means the “bland, blond Kensingtonian nonentity” which Francis Gordon had once called her. Very English in the poise of the quiet head on the white, well-sloped shoulders; in the repose of the full figure; in the lines of the athletic limbs. Very English, too, about the well-formed, almost Roman, nose, the red healthy lips, the perfect teeth, the firm cheeks. Lacking, perhaps, in vivacity—unless the brown slumbrous eyes, dark and dark-lashed, were an index to something deep, something as yet but half-awakened: something which, given but its chance, might yet turn the Mother into the Mate.

But tonight a hint of trouble showed in those eyes. For Patricia was thinking. Her thoughts came to her clear-cut, logical, in orderly and courageous sequence. Sloppiness—owing to her father’s teaching—had no place in this woman’s mental outfit.

And she thought: “I am nearly thirty. . . . I have been married eight years. . . . I like this house, though it takes a lot of running. . . . I have no money troubles. . . . I adore Evelyn and Primula. . . . And I am very fond of my husband. . . .”

But here Heron Baynet’s system of common sense, of reason against sentiment, broke down—as it had broken down once or twice before when applied to the intimate relation of married life. The cold creed of pure reason did not work. It was no good for Patricia’s brain to tell her that she ought to be satisfied: her heart informed her, quite emphatically, that she wasn’t.

“Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Rawlings, ma’m,” announced Smith, the sour-faced but efficient parlour-maid.

Violet came in first—a slightly older, slightly tawdrier edition of her sister; thinner about the lips, fluffier of hair, not so neat in her over-elaborate clothes; but sprightly



—unpleasantly sprightly.

“Good evening, darling,” she cried, kissing. “Isn’t it *perishingly* cold? We walked from the Tube. *Do* let me come to that *gorgeous* fire.”

Hubert Rawlings—tall, clean-shaven, foxy-faced, five years older than his wife—followed at her heels; shook hands.

“Where’s Peter?” he asked.

“In Hamburg,” answered Patricia; and noticed, rather annoyed, the disappointment caused by her reply. Though not by any means “poor relations”—(H. H. Rawlings, “Publicity Specialist,” made quite a decent income)—Hubert and Hubert’s wife had an intolerable habit of making private life an adjunct to business. Patricia was perfectly aware that, had Peter been at home, her brother-in-law would have seized the opportunity to convince him, once and for all, that the Nirvana advertising account could be better handled by Hubert Rawlings than by Charlie Higham. Remembering a phrase of her husband’s, “I never do business with relatives: they always expect to be paid in advance,” she smiled to herself, and turned the conversation.

“Doctor Baynet and Mr. John Baynet, ma’m.”

“Then you can bring up dinner at once, Smith.”

“Not late, are we, Pat?”

“No, pater, punctual to the second.” Patricia and her father shook hands. They were not in the least alike, these two. The doctor—two inches shorter than his younger daughter—had dark brown hair, just graying; the hands of a surgeon; pince-nez; a fine forehead, and an almost colourless face, set in stern lines. Since his wife’s death (he had been a widower twelve years) the already celebrated diagnostician had concentrated on work to the exclusion of every other interest but his children. His face showed the price paid for success.

“Well, Jack, and how are things at Hillsea. I hear you’ve been disappointed in love?”

“Oh, shut up, Pat.” Jack Baynet pulled uncomfortably at his white evening waistcoat; fingered his clipped moustache; trifled with his butterfly tie. As a subaltern in the Field Gunners, almost a senior subaltern too, he disliked being ragged by his older sisters—and, most particularly, he disliked being ragged about Alice Sewell. So, of course, Violet took up the running.

“Poor dear! Fancy your own major cutting you out with her. It’s *too* bad.”

“Stark isn’t a major yet; only a captain,” snapped Jack; then, realizing a tactical error, “And anyway, I never was in love with her.”

“Dinner is on the table, ma’m,” announced Smith. . . .

Dinner, quietly served by two maids in the dark, square dining-room,—oak-panelled, lit only by electric candles, mauve-shaded, on the oval table and the huge Chippendalish sideboard—was a leisurely meal. Thick soup followed the smoked salmon, grilled sole the soup, a chick *en casserole* the sole. Talk, family gossip of no interest to outsiders, flowed—slowly at first, quicker as Peter's second-best Burgundy loosened constraint.

"And why," asked Rawlings suddenly, "has Peter gone to Hamburg?"

"I think," answered Patricia, always on guard against her brother-in-law's curiosity, "that it's something to do with cigars."

"Cigars? You mean cigarettes, don't you? He hardly bothers about the cigar business nowadays."

"Perhaps you're right," said Patricia—knowing he wasn't.

"When is he coming back?"

"Tomorrow, as far as I know."

"Do you ever see Francis nowadays?" put in Violet. "I was trying to read something of his in the *English Review* just before we came out tonight. He's a bit beyond *me*, you know."

"Francis Gordon,"—Heron Baynet spoke slowly, almost professionally—"might become a great writer, if he weren't such a neurotic."

"Oh, pater, do keep off your hobby, just for this one evening," Patricia protested. But, once launched, her father was not an easy person to stop.

"My hobby," he said, "is merely life. Not animal life only, but mental life—which is the most important. Francis Gordon's hobby is—Francis Gordon. That's where he, and most of the literary young men nowadays, are making their mistake. They're half-baked; emasculate. Instead of facing life, they run away from it; shut themselves up in their studies—usually with some equally epicene petticoat to assist their musings. Life, the battle of life, is the only thing worth writing about. Or," he added, "reading about."

Again Patricia turned the conversation: "Anyway, he's much nicer, much more human, than he used to be."

"You mean, since he lost his money," interrupted Violet.

Patricia nodded. . . .

On the arrival of port and cigars, the three men were left alone; and Hubert Rawlings, who felt himself just a little out of the picture, attempted to talk himself into it.

"Gunnery," he said to the young soldier, "must be amazingly interesting. A client of mine—he's in the steel trade—was talking to me only this morning about the

Creusot factory. He says the French field-guns are infinitely better than ours. . . .”

“Really.” Jack Baynet had been trained not to talk “shop” in mess.

“Oh, yes. My friend saw them firing tests. And he was amazed, absolutely amazed.”

“I’ve no doubt.” Jack relented a little, finding it beyond him to keep off his hobby. “I remember when our battery” (he pronounced it “bettery”) “was in India, we were ordered to demonstrate at dummy targets—just to show the infantry the effect of modern shrapnel-fire.” He paused.

“And . . .” queried his father.

“After inspecting the targets, the General thought it better that the infantry shouldn’t see them. Bad for their morale, you know.”

“If ever we do have this European war that Lord Northcliffe is so fond of talking about,” said the doctor, “it will last about a week. Modern nerves will never stand it.”

“Oh, we shall have war, all right,” announced his son.

The advertising agent and the nerve-specialist smiled cynically; demonstrated—till it was time to join the ladies—that the young man knew nothing whatever about international politics. . . .

They played family bridge, half-a-crown a hundred, Violet and her husband permanently partnered. Patricia—who had cut herself out of the first rubber—stood watching them. And again thought troubled her.

This—family parties, theatre-going, houses in Kensington, five servants, a summer holiday with the children, mornings at home and afternoons at the skating-rink—oh! it was all right, a very reasonable and nice existence. But could it go on? Obviously, it had to go on. . . . Mentally, she shook herself; laughed a little. What did she want? A lover? No, very definitely no. She was not that sort of woman; had too much self-respect. . . . What then? “Colour”—the words came involuntarily to her mind: “Colour! That’s what I need. Colour—and warmth.”

But when her family had departed, and she sat alone again in the drawing-room, Patricia Jameson took herself firmly to task. “If I don’t take more exercise,” she decided, “I shall become like one of those unpleasant creatures one meets in novels: the misunderstood married woman.”

Before going to bed, she tiptoed through the night nursery; looked lovingly down on the two dark-brown heads of Evelyn and Primula; and thereafter slept—even as they—dreamlessly.

## § 2

Punctually at nine o'clock next morning, Peter arrived.

Looking at him through the dining-room window, as he stood paying the taxi, as he walked—carrying his heavy leather dressing-bag easily as though it had been a dispatch-case—up the steps, he seemed to Patricia, above all things, an adequate person. The long, blue, belted Chesterfield over-coat—fur-lined but not fur-collared; the gray squash hat; brown gloves; ribbed socks; brown, carefully-polished brogue shoes; all betokened, in her eyes, efficiency. And when, after the usual greeting to Smith—(“Mrs. Jameson in the dining-room? Right. Just take this coat of mine, will you? And you might unpack for me at once”)—he came into the room, the impression deepened.

The cheek she kissed was newly shaven; the dark hair smooth-brushed; the moustache clipped soldier-fashion. He had—an invariable habit—taken his bath on the boat; arrived spick and span, ready for the day's work. The gray eyes were clear, healthy: unusually merry, she thought.

“Breakfast?” she asked, after he had returned her kiss. “It's quite ready.”

“Rather. Eggs and bacon for choice. Something English after all that German tripe.”

“Peter, your language is really getting atrocious.”

“Sorry, old thing. But honestly, Hamburg is the limit. I haven't averaged four hours' sleep all this week. What's happened to the town in the last six years—I don't know. They're all crazy, I think. What with old Beckmann's lobsters and young Beckmann's dressed crabs. . . .”

He relapsed into silence; seeing again the champagne dinners at *Forti's*, the red-wine lunches at the *Rathaus*, the smoky, tinselled *Tanz-klubs*, the whole nauseous pageant of heavy-handed vice and tawdry luxury with which the commercial classes of Germany were trying to ape the natural gaiety of France.

“Still, I got what I went for,” he added, as Smith brought in the Sheffield-plate breakfast-dishes, the big silver tea-pot.

They sat down.

“And what *did* you go for?” asked Patricia, serving him.

“It's rather a long story,” he began—Peter rarely talked business to his wife—“but I'll tell you if you like.”

“Yes, do.”

“Well, you know Jamesons have had the Beckmann cigar-agency for years and years. . . .”

“But those Beckmanns live in Havana, don’t they?”

“The old man, Heinrich Beckmann—he’s the senior partner—lives in Hamburg: the junior partners—his nephew Albert, who’ll inherit the business when Heinrich dies, is one of them—run the factory and the banking show in Cuba. But nothing big is ever decided without the old boy’s consent. When that bally Trust started, Beckmanns thought our old firm wasn’t big enough to handle their English market. So they took in two other concerns. That was when I first went into business. The governor never had any contract about the brand; trusted to their honour.” Peter sniffed: even after nine years the old sore still rankled. “Can I have another egg? By Jove, it’s good to be home again.”

“Really good?”

“Rather. . . .” He looked round the comfortable room appreciatively. “But I was telling you about Beckmanns. Sometime ago I said to Simpson, ‘Simpson, let’s get that sole agency back again.’ Simpson said—he’s a pessimistic blighter—‘It can’t be done.’ That was six weeks ago. The contract’s in my bag upstairs.”

He paused, preening himself, quietly but quite obviously vain. She thought him very young at that moment; more like a boy of twenty-three than a man of thirty. “But how?” she asked.

“Bluff, my dear. Absolute and unmitigated bluff. Albert’s come home—to get married, I think. So I wrote him a chatty letter, saying—well wrapped-up, of course—that we were thinking very seriously of giving up our cigar business. I said Simpson wanted to retire, and that the cigarette business was so profitable. . . .” He laughed. “Anyway, it came off. The old man wrote imploring me not to decide in a hurry; Albert wrote to me; they wired Havana, and Havana wrote to me; they invited me, at their expense—they’re as mean as they’re rich—to come over to Hamburg. I kept them waiting ten days. Then I went. Pat, you would have laughed to see me allowing myself to be persuaded—on my own terms—to sign a ten-year agreement with them.”

“But, Peter,” interrupted his wife, “was it quite”—she hesitated—“straight.”

“Straight?” He thought it over. “Yes. Just as straight as raising the pot on a busted flush. I stood to look silly if they’d called my bluff, didn’t I? And anyway, it’s jolly good business.”

They sat silent for a minute or two. And again she was conscious of his adequacy. What he went for, he got. By his getting, she and her children benefitted. That was the Law, inviolable since the days of the cave-man. Weaklings to the wall—to the strong man, the fruits of his brain, of his industry. . . .

“I’m glad about this contract, in more ways than one,” he said suddenly. “You

see, it's a certainty. And certainties are always worth having. Nirvana isn't a certainty, not yet. It's a gamble." The confident tone eased off a shade or two. "Once or twice, I've been rather harassed about it. Finance. . . ."

"We might run to a car next year now," he added.

Came Nurse's tactful knock, and the children, merry-eyed, attired for the Park.

"Hello, Daddy," they chorussed, and romped over to be kissed.

"Where have you been, Daddy?" asked Primula.

"Germany."

"Where's Germany?"

They catechized him for a few minutes; informed him of their own well-being, of a train recently purchased; kissed their mother; and hurried off—having tasks to perform, serious tasks with hoops and sticks, in which their parents had no part. In concentration on the immediate job, Peter's kiddies were uncannily like their father.

"I must be off to the office," he announced as soon as they were out of the room. "Anything on for tonight?"

"No, dear."

"Right. I may be a little late. About seven, I expect. . . ."

"He's very—American," thought Pat, as she watched him stride off, inevitable cigar in his mouth, towards the Tube.

For Patricia, like most English people at the time, recognized only two classes of Americans—the over-worked rich and the idle rich. Of the true America, of the people with ideals, the quiet folk who are found neither at the Ritz Carlton nor in the cabaret, she was utterly ignorant. . . .

"He's a splendid pal," said Reason.

But, in Reason's despite, instinct wished that he had remembered to kiss her good-bye.

### § 3

As the Tube jerked him spasmodically to Bank station Peter's mind ran over the clauses of his new contract; pondered how best to exploit it. This absolute control of the Beckmann brand gave a new interest to the Jameson business; and with that interest, came a little flash of sentiment. He remembered his first year in the City, Tom Simpson's doubting-Thomas attitude to a College boy, his father's shrewd help. . . . But the Mr. Jameson who pushed his way through the swing-doors of 24 Lime Street and down the dark passage to the warehouse, was very far from appearing a sentimentalist.

"Morning, Parkins," he said to the young clerk who looked up at him from the desk in the outside office—glass-panelled, electric-lit, heated by a glowing gas-stove.

"Good morning, Sir," answered the boy.

"Mr. Simpson inside?"

"Yes, Sir."

Peter passed on through the warehouse; cast a rapid eye over the high wooden racks piled with cigar-boxes, at the Triplex glass sky-lights, on George the old warehouseman who was pottering about, duster-in-hand.

"Morning, George. How's the rheumatism?"

"Thank you, Mister Peter, I can't complain. And are you all right, Sir?"

"Never better, George," said our Mr. Jameson; and added (to himself) "*He* won't last much longer. I must talk to Simpson about pensioning him off. Two quid a week, I suppose. Extravagance! but the old chap's earned his last bit of comfort. . . ."

Tom Simpson sat at his desk—an old-fashioned sloping-top desk of ink-stained mahogany—in the back office; where, despite the aid of reflectors, set slanting in the one high-up window, green-shaded electrics burned for nearly ten months of the year. A bluff man of fifty was Tom, fresh-complexioned and brown-bearded still; calm, of a certain limited shrewdness, but unimaginative; dressed in black morning-coat, City-tailored; gold "Albert" festooned across his ample paunch, key-chain drooping from trouser-pocket.

"Well?" he asked, looking up from the smeared typewritten pages of the Havana mail.

"Got it," said Peter laconically; hanging hat, coat and stick on the brass-hook behind the glass door—which he carefully closed.

"No!" Interrogatively.

"Yes."

"Well I'm damned." Simpson glanced admiringly at his partner. He never quite understood Peter; had always been a little afraid of his "recklessness"; had—for that reason—refused to invest any capital in the Nirvana cigarette-factory.

Peter drew the contract from his breast-pocket; and they scrutinized it together. It was written in English, rather Teutonic English, but absolutely clear.

"Who drew this up?" asked Simpson.

"I did. A German lawyer went over it for me; but it's enforceable in London."

"Good."

They plunged into details.

“What’s this. Five thousand pounds open account? Anything over that to be drawn for at six months? We don’t want all that credit, Peter.”

“Yes, we do. I may have to take some more of my capital out. The factory, you know.”

Simpson put down the contract. “Of course it’s not for me to advise you: but aren’t you getting just a little out of your depth?”

“You charge me with interest on the money which I draw out,” began Peter, temper swiftly frayed. Then relenting, “Oh, it’s quite all right, old man, I know what I’m doing.”

A huge black outline loomed up against the glass door, knocked, said in a guttural voice “May I come in?”

Entered Julius Hagenburg: top-hatted, black-moustached, patent-booted, flower at buttonhole: Hagenburg, naturalized Englishman, undoubtedly the best salesman of fine cigars in Europe—and the worst payer. What Peter’s investment in Nirvana meant to Simpson, Simpson’s credit to Hagenburg meant to Peter. Yet it was a profitable account, amazingly so. Hagenburg rarely bought less than thirty thousand cigars at a clip; would pay anything from three to seven pounds a hundred for them.

How he disposed of the goods, neither of the partners knew; though Peter, who had met the man frequently on his own Continental cigarette-expeditions, had a shrewd idea that most of the cigars—which went, under bond, in plain cases, from London to Amsterdam—eventually found their way, at entirely fictitious prices, to such places as the Sporting Club in Monte Carlo, the Jockey Club in Vienna, and even as far as the gipsy-haunted private rooms in the night-restaurants of St. Petersburg.

However, this time Hagenburg had brought money, nearly a thousand pounds of it, in “ready.”

“You will give me a receipt now, please,” he said to Simpson, who went out of the room, notes rustling in his hands, leaving Peter and his pet aversion together.

“I hear you got back the sole agency of the Beckmann brand,” said the German, sitting down and lighting a black cigar from the box that Peter pushed across to him.

“Where the dickens did you hear that?”

“It’s true then?” Hagenburg smiled.

“Possibly.”

“I can increase my business with Beckmann cigars in—Holland, if you are in a position to help me with a small discount, say five per cent. . . .”

“Now I wonder how the hell he found out about that contract?” Peter said to himself when the man had gone. But Simpson, to whom he mentioned the matter,



made light of it. "There's been a good deal of gossip about your going to Hamburg," he said. "Probably it was only guess-work."

Peter put on his hat; wondered, as he walked rapidly along Fenchurch Street, why Simpson hadn't possessed enough gumption to keep the destination of such an important journey secret. "Didn't think it mattered. Never thought I'd get that contract," he decided, turning down Lombard Court, mounting the carpeted steps to the upstairs luncheon-room of the Lombard Restaurant.

"Downstairs," in the Lombard, hatted men jostle at communal tables; steaks frizzle, crowded, on the grill; joints appear, dwindle, disappear and are replaced; waiters bustle and the girl at the cash-desk has barely time to smile. But "upstairs," luncheon is a solemn and a costly function.

At the small bar in the corner of the oak-panelled room, one hand dallying with his vermouth, eye-glassed, faultlessly attired, a miniature dude though well over middle age, stood Peter's best acquaintance (and Jameson's most aggressive competitor), Maurice Beresford of "Beresford and Beresford."

He grinned at Peter, letting the monocle fall from his eye as he did so; said laconically: "The usual Peter."

"Thanks," answered Peter; smiling a greeting to the lady behind the bar.

"We lunch together, I presume," quizzed Beresford.

"You presume correctly, Maurice."

"Toss you who pays—drinks included."

"Not much. You asked me to have a drink. But I'll toss you for lunch." The sovereign clinked on the bar-top. Peter won.

They finished their drinks; settled themselves at the usual reserved table by the fire; ordered—after some wrangling—completely different lunches: for Beresford (who possessed, despite his size, an enormous appetite) grilled sole, fricassee of veal, and plum duff; for Peter, surfeited with greasy food, cold beef and pickled walnuts.

"And now," said Beresford, sipping his whisky and Perrier, "be a good boy and tell me all you've been up to in Hamburg."

"Lies, or the truth?"

"The truth. Just for a change."

Peter cut a morsel of beef with great deliberation; decided that Beresford probably knew.

"I think I've done you in the eye this time, Maurice."

"I thought you had. We got a cable from Beckmanns this morning. Nothing definite in it: but putting two and two together, you know. . . ."

They looked at each other, and laughed. The Beresfords, both bachelors, were extremely well off, their transactions with the Beckmann factory of no great importance. Still, by his next remark Peter knew that Maurice was hit, in his business-vanity if not in his pocket.

“What I like about you, Peter,” he said, screwing the monocle back into his eye, “is that although you are every bit as unscrupulous as the rest of us, you manage to keep up a pose of old-fashioned respectability, combined with modern straightforwardness, which I, for one, find it impossible to adopt. How many cases did you have to guarantee Beckmanns?”

“Oh quite a lot,” parried Peter.

“And what is going to happen about my pending orders? Will they be shipped, or not?”

This being the crux of the conversation, Peter changed the subject; began talking about shade-grown wrappers, the new schedule of Trust prices and other mysteries unintelligible to the profane.

“It will be very unfair if they aren’t,” interrupted Beresford.

“I’ll have to talk it over with Simpson.”

“Great genius—Simpson,” said Beresford sarcastically.

“And, either way, you’ll have to pay us a profit on them. . . .”

Maurice Beresford walked back to his office distinctly disgruntled.

## § 4

Peter, on the other hand, returned to Lime Street in a state of quiet elation. Money apart, it was amusing to have scored off Maurice. Remained now to settle with the Elkinses. He called up young Charlie Elkins; asked him to come round.

“All right. Four o’clock,” said the voice at the microphone. Then “Pretty” Bramson rang up from the factory; and, listening to his report—(“fifty thousand Virginians from Singapore; twenty thousand Egyptian gold-tips from the Argentine; heaps of export orders but home trade rather quiet. Are you coming up tomorrow, Sir?”)—Peter’s new-found interest in Jameson’s suffered eclipse.

He hung up the receiver; looked across at Simpson, rereading the contract for the tenth time. Undoubtedly the selling of cigars, of other people’s cigars was—even as a sole agent—a pretty dull affair. Simpson had been sitting at that very same desk twenty, twenty-five, thirty years; would sit there till he died.

The bell rang again. Reid this time, of Reid, Chatterton & Reid, Chartered Accountants. “Mr. Reid wished to ask Mr. Jameson if next Monday would be

convenient for the Nirvana board-meeting.”

“Quite convenient, thank you.”

Entered, from the side door which led to the bookkeeping office, Miss Macpherson, chief of the clerical staff—a dour loyal Scotchwoman of forty, dressed in the usual blouse and skirt, the bad boots of her order. She carried “the post” in one hand, her note-book in the other; took the vacant stool next to Simpson; said “Your letters, Mr. Simpson,” in a firm, tired voice.

Simpson began to dictate, hesitatingly; querying this; consulting her about that.

“In reply to your favour of even date. . . .”

Peter got up; wandered out into the warehouse; began a leisurely inspection of some newly-arrived dock-samples; pushed an oily *Corona* from the centre of a ribboned bundle; lit it.

Came Elkins. “Smooth” is the only adjective applicable to the new-comer. He had a smooth voice, smooth hair, smooth hands, a smooth manner and a very smooth silk-hat. He was clean-shaven, jet-haired; looked more like a junior clerk in Rothschild’s Bank than junior partner in a mercantile business.

“Good afternoon, Peter,” he said. “What’s the trouble?”

“Afternoon, Elkins. Come inside, won’t you?”

Peter led the way into a tiny room off the warehouse: a room furnished with two chairs, a small gas-stove, and many cedar cabinets of cigars.

“Coffin department?” queried Elkins, sitting down. . . .

“I wanted to speak to you about Beckmanns,” began Peter, not acknowledging the trade jest.

“Oh, we’ve been doing very little with the brand lately. The stuff’s no good, you know. Too strong. And the dollar-prices on current sizes too high.”

“Really,” said Peter, who had for some years been drawing a small clandestine commission on the imports of both his competitors. “Then of course you won’t mind having to stop importing them.”

At this, it seemed as though little wrinkles creased themselves all over Elkins’ smoothnesses.

“Stop importing them? What do you mean?”

Peter told him; not omitting to mention that “pending orders” would not be shipped.

“But this is outrageous,” burst out young Elkins. “Positively outrageous. Why, we’ve been handling their goods for years. For years and years. Got customers for them. Customers who won’t take anything else.”

“Yes, I know,” sympathized Peter: and named them.

Elkins changed his note. "You don't really mean to cut us off, Peter."

"Of course I do."

"But we'd buy the goods from you; pay you cash for them."

"Till you'd persuaded your customers to try something else. Not much. Besides, I want *all* the profit; not just a percentage."

"But the pending orders. They're mostly sold in advance. It will make us look ridiculous. Positively ridiculous. I don't know *what* my father will say. . . ."

It was five o'clock by the time that Peter—having reluctantly promised to "think over" the matter of the pending orders—got rid of him; joined Simpson for a cup of tea.

"You know," said Simpson, "I simply can't get over this contract business." He pulled a piece of scribbling paper towards him, started figuring. "It means at least £1500 a year more profit. There's the Cunard Company—they've been buying from Beresfords. And Towle at the Midland—that's Elkins' account. . . . I must talk to the travellers about this. Hargreaves is in the suburbs today; he won't be in till the morning. I've written Mallabone to come up on Saturday. . . ."

"Oh, damn the travellers," pronounced Peter. "They're no good for this sort of job. We'll have to do it ourselves."

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He took the Tube as far as Oxford Circus; walked slowly down Regent Street into Piccadilly Circus. All about him lights blazed, motors thrummed and hooted, people jostled. London, London as she was towards the end of the Great Peace! London,—tango-dancing, theatre-going, night-clubbing London! London! City of the seven millions, where—scum that floated upwards, glistening, utterly useless—loose women and vicious politicians, emasculate authors and popularity-hunting actors, rag-time dancers and company-promoters, preened and bloated, spent and gambled, fooling away the night-time. Yet London—for all this scum that fed upon her fineness—solid at heart, worthy if deceptive capital of an Empire compared with whose achievements Rome was a weakling and Athens a nonentity.

But Peter Jameson, worker, cared for none of these things!

He looked up at the electric signs that winked and glinted on the darkness: at the "Paripan Paint" sign, and the two whirling clock-faces over Saqui and Lawrence's, at the snaky twirls of "Oxo" and the high circles of "O. O." Whisky. And he visioned—vaguely, for it was three years since his last visit—Broadway, New York: Rosbach's burning fountain, "Owl" Cigars, "Anargyros" Cigarettes, the theatre lamps and the drugstore lamps. "They, the Americans, understood advertising; responded to it. Compared with them, we were only children," thought Peter

Jameson. "Confound it, why should the home-trade of Nirvana lag behind the export?"

Then he glanced at the watch on his wrist; saw it was nearly half past seven; remembered—for the first time since leaving Lowndes Square in the morning—that he possessed a wife.

# *PART TWO*

## NIRVANA, LIMITED

### § 1

“Pretty” Bramson—black well-oiled hair, curled moustaches, blue eyes and general dapperness had earned the nickname when, as East County salesman for his cousin Marcus Bramson, owner of Bramson’s “Pulman” Virginias, he had first gone “on the road”—sat pensive in the sales-manager’s office of Nirvana Ltd., Manufacturers of High Grade Cigarettes. The room was large, well carpeted, glinting with mahogany. On the walls hung sales-charts, specimen advertisements for the Press, show cards—gaudy but efficient—for tobacconists’ windows. Through the thin partition, he heard the whirr of fly-wheels, subdued chatter of work-girls, Turkovitch’s voice raised in sharp expostulation, occasionally the thump which told him that the new “U.K.” machine—their fourth—was being swiftly erected. But “Pretty” Bramson thought only indirectly of Nirvana.

He had dined, the night before, with his cousin Marcus; and Marcus had asked, quite casually, about the factory. “Were they earning dividends yet? Why didn’t one see the stuff about more? How about the export trade?” Marcus had hinted too, barely hinted, that if at any time. . . .

“Pretty” Bramson put the temptation resolutely behind him. Jamesons had plenty of capital; could always find more if they wanted it. Besides, he had a little money put by himself. Probably, if things continued to go well, “young Peter” would let him in as a minority shareholder. Afterwards, they would float it on the public. Meanwhile, £500 a year plus a sliding-scale commission on the constantly increasing output was not to be sneezed at by a man of thirty-two.

### § 2

Peter Jameson paid his taxi; threw away the stump of his after-breakfast cigar; and walked straight through the open doors of the goods entrance into his factory.

He was neither an over-imaginative nor a romantic person, this quiet gray-eyed young man in the bowler hat and the well-cut tweed overcoat: but he never could look at that big glass-roofed building, at the work-girls in their clean smocks, at the vague forms of machinery whirling away behind their frosted-glass partitions, at the

men pricking and soldering the vacuum export-tins (plunged base-deep in hot sand to expel the corrupting air), at the great bins of sweet-smelling tobacco,—at the whole paraphernalia of this living entity he was creating—without a certain thrill of satisfaction. He had given up a good deal for this same Nirvana—leisure, money, his gun in the little Norfolkshire shoot, trout fishing, the possibility of a car. But Nirvana, almost home! was worth it.

Ivan Turkovitch bustled out from behind one of the partitions; trotted over.

“Vell, Petere. And how are you? Come overe and see de new machine. Ve are just getting him put up. Peautiful!”

The small hands gesticulated satisfaction; the tawny beard wagged accompaniment. Like the rest of his “vork-peoples,” Turkovitch wore a smock. It made him a rather grotesque little figure.

But Turkovitch’s satisfaction, as an artist, with the growth of the factory, was only superficial. As a man, a man of small ideas, he could not grasp the ultimate scheme, the big conception which inspired Peter. Frankly, it frightened him. More orders and more orders! More expenses and more expenses! What would be the end? He—Ivan Turkovitch—had never wanted a vast business; felt himself incapable of controlling it.

“Peautiful,” he said again, as they stood in the machine-room. Overhead, fly-wheels whirled, driving-belts clacked. On the clean hardwood floor, the three machines stamped and clicked at their endless tasks. Perched on high seats, girls fed the hoppers with flocky golden armfuls of tobacco. The machines swallowed it; spewed it forward, forcing it through steel tubes into a rod: drew up paper from the slow-moving reels; wrapped it about the tobacco; printed it; chopped the paper-covered rod into cigarettes; delivered them to the waiting hands of the girls who patted them into wooden trays. A shirt-sleeved mechanic tended each machine, now this part, now that. Sparks spurted as deft grindstone met swift-revolving knife. The fourth and newest “U.K.” was not yet working: by it, adjusting, measuring, screwing up a bolt here and there, stood a German workman.

For the “United Kingdom” Cigarette-machine was not made in this England, where craftsmen starved while Free Traders preached to them!

Turkovitch spoke to the German; queried something.

“*Dass ist mir verboten,*” said the man. “*Es muss genau so gemacht werden.*”

“What does he say?” asked Peter.

“He says he cannot do what I ask him. It is forbidden. Never mind, when he goes back to Hamburg, we do it ourselves. They do not know everything, these Germans.”

They passed on; through the drying-rooms; and the cutting-rooms where girls picked-over the dried leaves and “blenders” fed them into presses that forced the thick mass forward to the dropping knife; through the label-printing room; into the main factory again; past the box-making tables where more girls laboured with paste-brush and zinc-board; and the packing tables, piled high with filled boxes waiting their seals; into the stock-room.

“Rather low, aren’t we?” queried Peter, looking at the half-empty shelves.

“Very low, Sir?” said the dispatch-forewoman, busy making up the day’s orders.

“You go on with your vork, Mary,” snapped Turkovitch. The woman went out of the room, leaving them alone.

“Look here, Turkovitch”—Peter’s gray eyes had grown just a shade darker—“you know I won’t stand that sort of thing. I spoke to the girl; and she answered me. You’ve no right to be rude to her.”

The little man became apologetic. . . . “But you do not understand the vork-peoples, Petere. You have never been one of the vork-peoples. I have. De vork-peoples they do not respect you ven you talk nicely to them.”

“Don’t you believe it, Turkovitch”—the quarrel between them was an old one—“the ‘vork-peoples,’ as you call them, respect a man who respects them; who knows what he wants, and tells them how he wants it done—decently.”

Ivan, inventing an excuse, went back to the machine-room. “How on earth I shall ever be able to introduce the copartnership system into this place with that Hungarian obstructionist in charge,” thought Peter, “the Lord knows.” He stood there with his hands in his pockets for a minute or two: then, lighting a cigar, strode off to Bramson’s room.

### § 3

“Bramson,” said Peter—greetings over—“how much do you know about the manufacturing part of this business?”

“Well, Sir. . . .”

“Oh, never mind about the ‘Sir.’ You’re not a clerk.”

“Well, when I was with my cousin, I used to spend a good deal of time in the various departments.” The Jew looked up shrewdly, intimately. “Why? Is anything wrong with T.?”

“No. I was asking—for information. One-man shows are never safe. Supposing Turkovitch were taken ill, could you run the place for—say three months?”

“I ran it while he was on his holidays.”



"H'm. That's rather different. Know anything about blending?"

"Not much."

"We could get a foreman to do that," remarked Peter reflectively. "And I'm not entirely ignorant on the subject myself. How about the rest of it—printing, box-making, looking after the girls? . . . That new master-printer seems a pretty efficient kind of fellow." He broke off, said, "Don't let this conversation go any further"; and took up the routine of the day.

Bramson, in addition to his principal duty of sales-manager, acted as Peter's right-hand man in the not-always-smooth financing of the concern: so that their discussion lasted—uninterrupted save for occasional telephone calls—till the whistle blew, and a shuffle of moved stools on the hard-wood floor presaged the midday break. Nirvana provided free cooking for its employés; and the three principals shared the facility.

"Vell," said Turkovitch, peeling off his smock as he entered, "now ve have some lunch. You join us, eh, Petere?"

One of the girls brought in a table; laid it; produced three chops, potatoes, beer. The Hungarian had apparently got over his huff. "Orders is plentiful, especially de export," he said.

"Bramson and I have just been discussing that. Something's got to be done about the home trade. We must have two more travellers. The press-advertising wants gingering up. I've telephoned for Higham to come and see me this afternoon. And I think we ought to have one or two electric signs. Big ones. Flashing, if we can afford them."

"But the money? . . ." remonstrated Turkovitch.

"Oh, damn the money. Don't you worry about that. I'll find the money all right, if you'll only get the orders out quickly. That last big lot for the Argentine took nearly six weeks."

Turkovitch protested; and a wrangle ensued. Bramson sat very quiet. He was not a shareholder in the concern—yet. But, if he knew anything about anything, "young Peter" would get his own way; even if he had to buy Turkovitch out. Then that thousand pounds of savings would go into "ordinary" shares of Nirvana Ltd. . . .

"We'd better have all this out at the board-meeting next Monday," said Peter finally. "Reid will have the year's figures ready by then."

## § 4

Reid, Chatterton and Reid, Chartered Accountants, inhabited a cold gloomy

office on the fourth floor of Great Winchester House—an office by no means in keeping with their status as one of the premier auditing firms in the City. George Reid himself—a deliberate-looking middle-aged man of University education, square-chinned, clean-shaven, lined of face but twinkling of eye—welcomed Peter; led him into the “board-room”—a shabby apartment furnished with twelve wood-seated chairs, an enormous table and a rather gimcrack sofa.

“The others haven’t arrived yet. Have some tea?”

“Thanks,” said Peter. “Tell me,” he went on, after the two cups had been brought, “has Turkovitch been to see you?”

“Unofficially,” grinned Reid. “Yes. What have you been doing to the little man? He’s in a rare stew. Says he wishes he could get his money out.”

“He can,” said Peter laconically. “I’m about through with friend Ivan. It isn’t that I grudge him the eventual profits. But the chap’s no good for a show like this. He hasn’t got the spunk.”

“Well, don’t lose your temper with him this afternoon,” warned Reid, who knew Peter of old. “By the way, how’s Jameson’s getting on these days? You really ought to have their accounts audited, you know.”

“Simpson won’t. He’s very old-fashioned; says he can’t stand outsiders prying into his affairs.”

Bramson and Turkovitch came in, shook hands, sat down. Reid opened the “minute-book,” gabbled off the minutes of the last meeting which Peter signed perfunctorily. (Nirvana was a private company, the requisite number of shareholders being made up by clerks.)

“And now,” began Reid, “for the accounts. As far as I can see—there are one or two adjustments still to be made—we have managed, for the first time, to pay all our expenses and earn a small dividend.”

“Do ve pay out de dividend?” asked Turkovitch.

“Of course we don’t,” snapped Peter, “the money’s wanted for expansion.”

“Den vot’s the good of making it?” growled Turkovitch.

“One moment, gentlemen,” went on Reid. “I find, on careful analysis of the figures, that—had it not been for the high profits earned on the export trade—we should have made, not a profit, but a loss.” He gave details, and concluded, “I don’t think that’s a sound position.”

“Nor I,” commented Peter.

But here Turkovitch—tact thrown to the winds—boiled over. It was *his* business; *his* name was on all the brands; he knew quite well what “Petere” wanted; “Petere” wanted to be a millionaire; “Petere” wished to spend all the profit in some

crazy scheme of advertising; why should they advertise? the cigarettes were the finest cigarettes in the world; he, Turkovitch, guaranteed them. . . .

“Oh, shut up,” muttered Peter, exasperated.

“I vill not shut up. You are always interfering. You interfere with me and de vork-peoples. You interfere vith my tobacco merchants. And now you vant to interfere vith de dividends.”

“Damn it, *you* draw a salary of seven hundred a year; and I haven’t had a penny piece out of the concern yet.”

Turkovitch became plaintive, even less intelligible than usual. “But vy not pay out de dividend? A leetle dividend. Drei per cent on de cabital.”

“Because, there’s no money to do it with: because we’re trading on bank-credit: because. . . . Oh, you try and explain things to him, Reid,” said our Mr. Jameson hopelessly.

Reid plunged into an exhaustive bath of facts and figures. There was big money to be made out of Nirvana. Reid knew it; Peter knew it; Bramson knew it. The hopeless period of an advertising business, the pay-pay-pay-and-not-a-jitney-of-it-back stage had been passed. Now, all they needed was work, a little more capital, and—supremely—confidence. But the Hungarian didn’t, couldn’t, wouldn’t see it.

“Dis is not business, eet is gambling,” he kept on saying. “You spend and you spend. And dere are no deividends. I vish I had my cabital out of de gompany. . . .”

Reid glanced at Peter, who took the cue, screwed the butt of his cigar into the corner of his mouth, and said, very slowly:

“Look here, Turkovitch. You’re being a frightful ass. I don’t like to see any man who has worked with me throwing away a fortune. . . .”

“Fortune?” sniffed Turkovitch. “Vith no deividends.”

“*Do* let me speak for a minute. As I was saying, you’re being very foolish. But if you really mean what you say, you shall have your capital out. *I’ll* buy your shares off you. At a fair price.”

“Vot price?”

Peter, who had devoted the week-end (Poor Patricia!) to a careful study of the anticipated problem, drew a piece of paper from his pocket.

“When I first consented to join you in this show,” he began, “you were worth, at an outside estimate, two thousand pounds. For six years, you’ve been drawing £700 a year.”

“Dat,” said Turkovitch, slightly mollified already, “vos for my vork, for my experience.”

“Quite right. I wasn’t asking you to give it me back, was I? Then there’s six

years' compound interest at, say, five per cent. Call it two thousand eight hundred. I'll give you"—Peter hesitated for a moment, went up two hundred in his mind—"Three thousand pounds for your shares in Nirvana. The lot, of course."

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And so—after about a fortnight of negotiation—they got rid of the obstructionist. He went, in the end, quietly; delighted with his cheque; saying: "Now, I and my wife, ve take a little trip to Salonica. Perhaps, ven I come back, ve do some business in de leaf-tobacco, eh, Petere?"

"Right you are," said our Mr. Jameson, who had no patience with fools but never bore malice.

# *PART THREE*

## THE CREST OF THE WAVE

### § 1

“Limousine-Landaulette body would be best,” said Peter. “We want something that will do either for town work or touring.”

“How about a cabriolet?” asked Patricia.

“If it’s not too heavy for you to drive.”

It was a Saturday afternoon, the first in July; and they were lunching in the low-roofed, cabin-like grill-room of the Carlton Hotel. The brass clock on the white mantelpiece pointed a quarter to three; most of the tables had emptied; but Peter and his wife sat on. The choice—that of their first automobile—needed careful discussion.

It pleased her to see him sitting there, boy-like for the moment, liqueur-glass poised steadily in his firm hand, inevitable cigar between his lips. The six months since his return from Hamburg had not been over-happy ones for Patricia. Always, she had felt the City pulling against her, taking him from her. Always, he grew more absorbed, more reticent. But now it seemed as though, just for a flash, the pal she had married was hers again.

“Aren’t I getting a little old to drive a car?” she asked.

He looked at her carefully before he spoke; took in at one glance smooth complexion, perfect teeth, the clear eyes and the glossy hair under the gray toque. Then he said, “Don’t talk rot, old thing.”

“And either way,” she went on, “it’s an extravagance.”

“An extravagance we can afford.”

For, really, it looked as though dreams would come true. Turkovitch’s defection—owing to Bramson’s application for shares—had only meant two thousand pounds instead of the anticipated three. Nirvana’s bank, approached with a profit-earning balance-sheet and guaranteed by Peter, had loaned the five thousand for their new advertising campaign. Jamesons, in sole control of the Beckmann brand, were making more money than ever before. Only that morning, Hagenburg had placed an order on which the profit made even Peter a little dizzy.

Of course there had been difficulties. Elkins and Beresford did not surrender their customers without a struggle. The re-organization of the manufacturing staff

proved a shade less simple, Bramson a shade less capable, than anticipated. Home-trade climbed a trifle too slowly. Still, it climbed; and Peter was winning, winning all along the line. Now, only the finest of hairs divided gamble from certainty.

"An extravagance we can afford," he repeated.

"I'm so glad," she said, "not for the sake of having a car but because. . . ." For the first time in their married life, she almost felt shy with him.

"Because of what?"

"Because I know you can't bear failure."

"Failure," he laughed; then, growing serious, "No. I've no use for failures. The man who 'goes under' doesn't strike me as pathetic—only as idiotic."

"You mean the man who fails to make money."

"Good Lord, no. Money's nothing. At best, only the counters with which we are paid for winning certain games. Mine, for instance. By failure, I mean not getting what you go for. Never mind what it is—fame, money, tranquillity, distinction. A girl or a seat in the House of Lords. As long as you know what you want, *and get it*, you're a success."

"But some people don't want anything in particular."

"I've no use for that kind."

Her trained mind told her that the man had voiced his whole creed. Her woman's instinct resented it. "He didn't want *her* like that. She was only a side-issue. 'Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his'—cigarette-factory."

"Idiot" said her reason. "Idiot! You've been married eight years. . . ."

"If we want to be with Francis in time for tea," said her voice, "you'd better ask for your bill."

Peter paid; and they passed out, picking up his hat and stick from the cloak-room; climbed the carpeted stairs into the Haymarket.

It was the zenith of London's last, maddest "season"; but her pleasure crowd—the dancers in her night-clubs; the befeathered scantily-draped women of her Opera House; the placemen, the panderers and the nincompoops who made pretence of governing her—had departed; were "week-ending" in pseudo-rusticity, twenty, thirty, a hundred miles away. And real London, heart of Empire, rested quietly in the soft sunshine—glad to be free of such parasites—as Peter and Patricia made way through her empty streets to Bloomsbury.

## § 2

When a young man, who has never done a day's work except "to amuse

himself,” comes down with a crash from ten thousand pounds a-year to about five hundred, it seems to him at first as though Life (with a capital L) were finished. Later on, the adaptability of the human animal begins to assert itself; a new standard of values replaces the old one; and the *man*—as apart from his chattels—emerges. Bruised, broken or strengthened according to his nature.

Peter’s cousin, Francis Gordon, had come down with just such a crash: but in Francis’ case the human animal had more than altered conditions to which it needed adapt itself. For Francis Gordon at the very moment when Life (with a capital L) had looked its blackest, met a girl, *the* girl, the ideal to whom his soul had been, was, and would always be, faithful.

He looked up now—from the papers on the table where he sat working—at her photograph, the only one in the room.

Beatrice Cochrane! A very ordinary, very human, very idealistic American girl. The sort of girl a man may meet in her hundreds from Los Angeles to Atlantic City; from New Orleans to Flushing, Long Island; from Dubuque, Iowa to Dallas, Texas. A girl still in her ’teens; slender-handed; with pale-gold hair and pale-gray thoughtful eyes.

A very ordinary American girl, of the old Anglo-Saxon stock—but tempered and refined by struggle: child of very ordinary American parents, educated rather to beauty of thought than to “beauty roses.” But, in the mind of Francis Gordon, she stood for all the flowers; for poetry and romance, for self-sacrifice and achievement, for every decent impulse which had helped him through the black hours of crisis.

He had not married her, not even asked her to marry him. He had not—in that brief fortnight of a shipboard friendship—deemed himself worthy. It had seemed to him as though God—a visible speaking God—forbade their union; commanding His creature, Francis Gordon, abandon that dream; take up, in its stead, the burden of vocation, the Work of writing for which He had endowed him with a tiny spark of His own genius.

And so Francis—who imagined himself to have seen, for a moment, behind that Veil of God which does not lift until the time appointed—returned to London; sold his house in Curzon Street, his cars and his pictures, his gold plate and his Aubusson carpets; and retired, taking with him only Prout, his old manservant, to this high apartment at the top of the eighteenth-century Georgian building in Mecklenburgh Square.

All “literary” London knew *a* Francis Gordon, a versifier whose technique they admired, whose pose they applauded. But *the* Francis, they did not know. Nor, had they known him, would they have, at that time, admired.

For *the* Francis—the man who, for all his fine aspirations, was still utterly incapable of formulating clean thought into simple words—had conceived another dream. And this was the shape of it.

He had learned from Beatrice, and from her parents, something—though very little—of the real America. He had taught her something—though very little—of the real England. He realized, as few Englishmen of his time, how the two nations had drifted apart; misunderstood one another. And it seemed to him, in his presumption, that a few words, a trumpety poem, could set this misunderstanding right.

Of course—he was too much in love with the phantom of Beatrice for any except a prejudiced judgment—he blamed his own countrymen exclusively. Equally of course, the great poem of his projecting, became—the moment pen touched paper—an artificial web of phrases through which the man's real belief in a Spiritual Federation of the English-speaking Peoples oozed to nothingness. Still, it says something for the influence of a girl who only wrote in calm friendship, confident of his ultimate success as a writer, but by no manner of means—consciously at any rate—in love with him, that Francis Gordon should have held to this belief, unflinchingly, through all those weary months when other Englishmen—better informed on material points though utterly ignorant of the spiritual reluctance to realize that a world-crime was being committed (which reluctance alone kept America so long out of the War)—were saying to themselves, “Can't they see things? Won't they see things? Must we fight this greatest of all battles without them?”

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“Mr. and Mrs. Jameson, Sir,” announced the elderly manservant.

### § 3

Nothing in the outward appearance of the Francis Gordon who rose at the entrance of his cousin's wife, suggested the conventional (or unconventional) poet. Short dark hair parted at the side, clipped moustache, well-cared-for hands, creaseless gold-pinned soft collar, well-tailored blue suit—all proclaimed the ordinary idle young man of the period. And as such, to tell the truth, his cousin Peter—to whom, except for a certain lack of dourness about the expression, he bore an amazing resemblance—regarded him.

His surroundings, too, helped this illusion of the idle commonplace. The room was large, white-walled and green-carpeted; crowded mahogany book-shelves completely lined one wall; a spacious writing-table—scrupulously tidy—set square in the centre of two big windows—the other. Chippendale chairs, a tea-table already



laid, and a revolving bookcase filled with foreign dictionaries, Roget's Thesaurus, and other reference-works, completed the furniture. Two mahogany doors—one, through which Patricia and Peter had just entered, leading to the narrow hall—the other to the bedroom and bathroom—glowed darkly against the rough white of the wall-paper.

"This doesn't look much like poverty," commented Peter. (Francis had only just taken the flat. This was their first visit to him.)

"I don't think you'd make much of a welfare inspector, old man," replied Francis. "Fourth floor. No lift. No telephone. Geyser-bath. Shilling-in-the-slot electric-light meter. A complacent landlord. And the relics of the Curzon Street furniture. Guess again about my poverty."

"*And* a manservant," commented Patricia, taking off hat and gloves, sitting down—as by right—at the tea-table.

"Oh, Prout! Prout would *pay* to stay on, I believe. Francis Gordon and his faithful valet; or the loyalty of an old retainer. . . ."

But Patricia knew that the supercilious remark hid real affection for that "old bounder Prout." She had seen a good deal of Francis since his return to England; revised many of her early unfavourable opinions about him. The good-will was mutual: though Francis, who still thought "Pat." rather a commonplace young woman, would have been more than surprised to know how near she had come to divining the change in his mentality—and the real reason for that change.

"Who's this?" commented Peter, his inspection of the new quarters having brought him to Beatrice's photograph.

"Friend of mine," said Francis curtly. "Don't touch those papers."

"I won't touch your precious papers."

At which little passage of arms, Patricia's last doubts settled into a comfortable certainty.

Prout, bringing tea, restored harmony. They sat long over it, smoking and talking—mostly, as is the habit of near relations, about themselves.

"By Jove," said Peter—interrupting himself in the middle of a long monologue about advertising—"I almost forgot. We've taken a house at Wargrave for a month. Lodden Lodge. It's rather a decent place. Tennis lawn; river-frontage; bath, h. and c.; usual domestic offices; et cetera et cetera. You are expected to stay with us."

"*Huklum hai?* (Is it an order?)," asked Francis.

"Oh, we all know you spent three months in India," chaffed Peter. "Question is: are you coming?"

"Of course I'm coming," said Francis, "and so is Prout—if Patricia doesn't

object.”

## § 4

“Some car!” thought Peter as he stepped into the front seat; slammed the door home; said “You take her for a bit, Murray,” to the uniformed chauffeur; and acknowledged “Pretty” Bramson’s rather overdone salute with a wave of his hand. They purred out from the factory-gates into Brixton Road; swung first right, then left; headed for Hounslow.

Certainly, “some car”—a long, low stream-lined cabriolet, royal-blue in colour, the Crossley cross on her radiator. Peter had discovered her through the advertisement columns of the *Morning Post*; clinched the deal a week before. But his thought did not centre long on the new purchase.

It was the Thursday before August Bank Holiday 1914. To get away so early, had meant cramming the week’s work into three and a half days. Still, he could afford to take a rest *now*. For a few minutes, he allowed himself the rare luxury of a dream. Nirvana had arrived! July sales proved it. Nothing could stop their automatic increase. Already, the capital he had sunk was in sight again. Then—what a business he would make it! All over the world, too. . . . India, China, New Zealand, South Africa. He must have his own factory in the States, in Canada; defeat their confounded protective tariffs. . . .

“Will you take her now, sir?” asked Murray, as they wriggled out through Hounslow High Street.

“Not for another mile or so.”

Peter’s mind came back to details; wandered off them again. Nothing could stop that automatic increase. Nothing. The political situation? Blow the political situation! Nobody with any sense cared for political situations. Except retail tobacconists, to whom they furnished a good excuse for curtailing orders.

“I’ll take her now, Murray.”

The chauffeur slowed down sufficiently to allow a change of places. Peter took the wheel; opened the throttle; slammed her into “top”; and whisked off down the Bath Road.

For the first time in six years, our Mr. Jameson felt a little above himself!

## § 5

Lodden Lodge, Wargrave, is a square, comfortable, late Victorian house, ivy-

covered, backing on a quiet side-road and fronting the Thames mainstream with sloping close-clipped lawns.

Peter arrived towards tea-time; found his wife and Francis (over-immaculate in creased white trousers and buckskin shoes), just sitting down to the silver-laid sun-dappled table under the willow-trees.

"Where's your brother, Jack?" asked Peter.

"He's not coming after all," said Patricia. "I had a wire this morning. Manœuvres, I expect."

"Don't you believe it, Pat," put in Francis. "He's off to fight the good fight in Ulster. What a lark! Fancy Teddy Carson, mounted on a 'sable destrier,' charging the guns."

"Idiot!" commented Peter; and added, "Confound the fellow. That spoils our four for tennis."

"We shall be all right for tennis." Patricia filled the cups; passed them. "Violet and her husband have invited themselves for the week-end."

"Oh Lord," began Peter; but—catching his wife's eye—desisted. After all, Rawlings didn't play such a bad game of tennis; and Violet's bridge, though not pleasant, was perfect. Tea over, Peter changed into flannels; came down to find Evelyn and Primula, barelegged, muslin-frocked and sun-bonneted, waiting for him.

"We want to go on the river," they chorused, "we want to go on the river."

"It's too late for the river," said Patricia.

"It isn't too late. It isn't too late. Is it Daddy? . . ."

"They do like him, don't they?" Francis said to their mother. Peter, over-ruling her objections, had picked up the two laughing bundles; packed them into the cushioned punt; and was now poling slowly out into main stream.

"Why shouldn't they?" laughed Patricia. But, all the same, she felt a little twinge of jealousy. The children meant so much to her, so little to Peter. Yet, at a lift of the finger, they would desert her for him. . . . Perhaps it was because that finger so seldom lifted. . . . If only one of them had been a boy!

She watched her husband's strong figure, black now against the glow of the water, bending to the pole as he met the current. The punt glided under the railway bridge, out of sight.

"Of course they ought to have been boys." Francis Gordon's voice interrupted her reverie. He seemed—as often when they were quite alone,—to have dropped the mask of superciliousness. She looked at him; wondered how much he realized. A disturbing person, this new cousin of hers. Almost uncanny at times, this way in which his mind seemed to penetrate her thoughts. . . . And again that night, at table in

the long low dining-room, she speculated about this man.

He sat, facing the sunset, immaculate as ever but unusually silent. Every now and then, it seemed to her as though his eyes saw—beyond the rose glow of the horizon—into vision-land. “He’s thinking about that girl,” she reasoned, “the girl whose photograph we saw at the flat.” And then, remembering the eyes of a man she had once seen at a revivalist meeting, she began to doubt her theory of a love-affair.

Sunset darkled to twilight, twilight to blackness, as they finished dinner.

Patricia, pleading tiredness, went upstairs early; heard, as she undressed in the cool fragrance of the river-night, the sound of canvas-chairs, dragging first across the gravel, then over grass; saw the points of two cigars burning redly under the willow-trees.

“Beckmann, *Coronas*,” announced Peter. “Good, aren’t they?”

“Very,” admitted Francis.

For nearly ten minutes, neither spoke. It was a night for confidences. Silent save for the river-chuckle; star-dusted; *peaceful*. But the two Englishmen smoked on; reticent, each busy with his own dreaming: the one seeing a great business, world-wide, endless in opportunity: the other, vignettied in silver radiance against the sable background of his thought, the features of a girl—of a girl five thousand miles removed from England—a girl for whose sake and without hope of reward he had vowed himself to the dissatisfying god of Work.

“Why don’t you get married again?” asked Peter suddenly.

“Only because I can’t afford it,” lied Francis Gordon.

## § 6

Violet Rawlings, sprightly as ever, even more fluffily dressed than usual; and her husband Hubert, determined that ninety-six hours of personal suggestion should at last secure him some part of the Nirvana advertising account, arrived in time for lunch next day. The foxy-faced publicity agent lost no time in opening his campaign.

“We went to the Palace last night,” he began, almost before they had sat down to their meal. “On our way home I noticed that your new sign in Piccadilly wasn’t burning properly.”

“Really,” said Peter stiffly.

“Lobster mayonnaise, or some of these cold eggs?” asked Patricia, hoping to turn their conversation.

But her brother-in-law took no notice. “I’m somewhat of an expert on signs,” he continued. “And, frankly, I don’t think they have much selling value on a high-grade

article like yours. *I* pin my faith to full pages in the six-penny weeklies. And of course, *Punch*. Although *Punch* is a humorous paper. . . .”

“I beg your pardon,” interrupted Francis.

“I said—although *Punch* is a humorous paper.”

Francis, feeling satire useless with a creature of this type, gave up the struggle. Hubert accepted an egg, as less liable than lobster to impede talk; and continued his harangue.

Peter, who knew that Rawlings, despite his personal unpleasantness, possessed knowledge, listened interestedly—asking a question every now and then. The others started a conversation on their own.

Said Violet, monopolizing it, “Oh but we *never* leave London while the ‘House’ is sitting. I think politics so interesting, Mr. Gordon. Don’t you? Though I suppose as an author—*so* clever, that last poem of yours—you take more interest in the affairs of the heart.”

She ruffled herself, rattled on.

“But of course, politics are *the thing* nowadays. I’m afraid”—her voice dropped to the confidential whisper of the person who has no news to impart—“we’re going to have *trouble*. Not with Servia, of course: but in Ireland. *People* are saying. . . .”

“Amazing,” thought Francis, “how a nice woman like Pat. can have such a sister.”

Smith, bringing the joint, interrupted the Rawlings duo in their monologues.

“I always wonder,” went on Hubert a few minutes later, “why you didn’t take your brother into partnership. He seemed an awfully nice fellow, the only time I met him.”

“Arthur?” queried Peter. “Why, Arthur wouldn’t take a partnership in Rothschilds! He ran away from school when he was fifteen; and he’s been running from somewhere or other ever since. The last time I heard from him, he was in the Dutch Indies—planting. Wrote to ask my opinion about tobacco prospects in Java. Beastly stuff, Javanese tobacco; though they use a lot of it for making so-called Borneo cigars.”

Luncheon over, Peter and Patricia challenged the two men at tennis: Violet, languid in a long chair, alternately watched the match; and picked her way expertly through *The Tatler*. To see her own photograph in that periodical, not once but regularly, was a small part of Violet’s many unrealized ambitions: which included a knighthood and a seat in the House of Commons for her husband, a Rolls-Royce limousine (painted black and white for preference) for herself, and all the usual

appurtenances of the politico-parasitical set which both of them alternatively aped and envied. Neither she nor her husband belonged to the class who “didn’t want anything in particular”!

Peter, playing brilliantly at the net, and Patricia, backing him up accurately from the base-line, defeated their opponents in three straight sets. Followed tea, a languid paddle towards Shiplake, the dressing-gong, stiff shirts and low frocks, auction bridge. . . .

July the Thirty-first, Nineteen Hundred and Fourteen! And yet, not one of those fairly well-informed five dreamed the False Peace actually at an end. Already, the Beasts in Gray,—murder, rape and plunder in their swinish eyes,—were abroad. Already the Crime, so long premeditated, had been committed. Even as these four sat at their game, less than fifty miles away from them, up in London, the womanizers and the wine-bibbers of Westminster were scuttling hither and thither, incredulous, anxious to compromise, fearful. The scum which had floated to the surface! They trembled now, those false guardians. For they and they alone in all England feared the Beast. But more than the Beast, they feared their own People;—knowing them not, neither their strength, nor their courage, nor their infinite forgiveness.

But already (one man’s work!), silent, forethoughted, utterly equipped, the People of the Sea were wheeling to their battle-stations. Already, Anglo-Saxondom had flung its first bulwark across the world.

It was the commencement of the Great Cleansing!

# *PART FOUR*

## CRISIS

### § 1

To comprehend the deliberate sacrifice which Peter Jameson made for the cause of humanity, it is essential that you should realize both the man and the offering he brought. It was not, primarily, the sacrifice of money, but the giving-up of a great ambition. For money, regarded purely as the purchase price of material comfort, he cared very little. As a spender, he had small sympathy with the exotic luxury of his time. His amusements were essentially simple—a gun, a trout-rod, a horse, a good glass of wine. All these, he might have possessed without working.

But Peter had been picked up, while still a boy, into the fascinating game of business; and in that game he had found both work (which was vital to his temperament) and enjoyment. His personal qualities—resoluteness, concentration on the immediate job, a certain creative instinct, clear thinking, moral courage and a controlled imagination—fitted him eminently for the sport of commerce.

Nirvana Limited, which would have been to the average individual merely a machine for the making of an income, represented to Peter Jameson—at the outbreak of war—the ultimate aim in life. He loved that business, not only for the sake of what it might eventually bring him, but for itself. He loved it, like a good gardener loves his garden, as much for the labour as for the result. He had seen it grow, in six years, from starved plant to a goodly tree—fruit almost ripe for the plucking. He felled that tree deliberately, in cold blood, under no compulsion save that of his own soul. And he waved no flags to console him for the felling!

For the man was, despite the admixture of Miraflores strain, an Anglo-Saxon: responded—though he knew it not—to the blind spirit of that race which came out of Italy through France, welded itself to dour Saxon and berserk Viking, and so spread, fighting always but always fighting as an ultimate issue for Independence, to Virginia and Quebec, to the Falkland Islands and the Hebrides, to South Africa and Australasia; till it became—scarcely conscious of its own oneness—the final arbiter in the great world-struggle of Decency against the filthy doctrines of the Beasts in Gray.

And behind the man, equally resolute, equally blind to the spirit which moved her, stood Patricia, the Anglo-Saxon woman—thoroughbred, unflinching.

## § 2

England's declaration of war did not make Peter Jameson "burn to avenge gallant little Belgium," or eager, in the phraseology of the period, "to do his bit." His commercial position was too damned awkward for the indulgence of any such sentiments.

He left Wargrave at ten o'clock on the morning of August the fifth; and reached the outskirts of London in forty-five minutes. Then he gave the wheel to Murray, and began to think. Throughout, his hand had been perfectly steady at the throttle, his foot firm on the accelerator. Their speed had averaged forty miles an hour.

Behind him, in the tonneau, sat Francis Gordon, acting as always on inspiration rather than reason, decision already reached. Francis Gordon talked to himself, under his breath: first in Dutch and then in German. He was testing, not his knowledge of those languages, but his accent. "*Ich kann es tun. Ich bin einer der einzigen die es tun können*," he muttered. Then he began to recite, very slowly and almost inaudibly, the first speech from Schiller's Republican Tragedy:

Leonora. "Nichts mehr. Nichts mehr. Kein Wort mehr.  
Es ist am Tag."<sup>[1]</sup>

Peter was not talking to himself; had reached no decision. His brain went over the salient facts of the situation; weighing them up. Discarding details. Selecting essentials. The Jameson-Beckmann problem must wait. How would Nirvana be affected? Home-trade, for the moment at any rate, would collapse. The export-business might hold up. Might. Probably wouldn't. Remained the fact that if the worst came to the worst he stood to lose seventeen thousand pounds. . . . After all, people must smoke. Wars didn't last for ever. Could he see the thing through? Financially? . . .

"London & Joint Stock Bank, Pall Mall," he said to the chauffeur.

They swirled through Piccadilly; nipped round past the Ritz; slowed down St. James' Street; and pulled up.

"Afraid I can't lend you the car, old man," said Peter. "I shall want it all day. Are you coming down again to-night?"

"No," answered Francis. "Prout's bringing up my things on the afternoon train." He stepped out of the tonneau; brushed himself carefully; and walked off down Pall Mall. Peter, telling Murray to wait, climbed the flat steps to the glass doors of the Bank. They were closed: but his knock brought a commissionaire, who recognized him; opened them.



"No business today, sir," said the commissioner.

"Manager in?" asked Peter.

"Yes, sir."

"Ask him if he'll see me."

The Bank, always quiet, seemed—that morning—like a tomb. Clerks bent over their ledgers; lights burned: but no customers waited at the iron-grilled counters, no sovereigns clinked in the brass shovels.

"Step this way, sir," said the commissioner.

Peter followed him across the stone floor, through the glass doorway into the manager's parlour—soft-carpeted, lavishly furnished with dark mahogany and saddle-bag chairs.

Mr. Davis, the branch-manager, was a gray-bearded man with the clothes of a prince and the manners of a diplomat. As a West End Branch, "Pall Mall" did not seek mercantile business. They had taken the Nirvana account, officially, "to oblige their old client Mr. Jameson, whose private account they had handled for so many years." This courtesy had not gone as far as a reduction in their usual rates of interest!

"Good morning, Mr. Jameson. I half expected you." Mr. Davis rose; shook hands. "Won't you take a seat?"

"Thanks. I came to ask you about the financial position. This war, you know. The papers talk about a moratorium. I understand that to mean a suspension of credit. . . ."

"Only in extreme cases, Mr. Jameson. Only in extreme cases. Of course, we are not desirous, at the moment, of increasing facilities. We are, if I may use the expression, sitting on the fence. But my directors—I have a letter from them before me now—are anxious for me to impress on all our clients, that they do not anticipate any financial crisis. Measures, as I am given to believe, have been taken; temporary expedients adopted; by which. . . ." He went on to explain them, at some length.

"Then I take it," said Peter, "that on the resumption of banking-business. . . ."

"Matters will be exactly as they were a week ago." Mr. Davis rose again, shook hands, made his point courteously. "Naturally, Mr. Jameson, as Nirvana Limited will not be under the necessity of making payments, they will not require any addition to the overdraft which you have guaranteed for them."

"Of course not," said Peter. The interview had turned out according to anticipation. If Nirvana wanted any more money, it would have to be found in cash.

He stood for a moment on the steps of the Bank. London had not altered in a night. The straight aristocratic thoroughfare seemed a little busier than usual. That

was all. Then he looked for the gaudy sentries outside Marlborough House; saw that they were in khaki!

“The factory, please, Murray; and as fast as you can,” said our Mr. Jameson. . . .

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[1] “No more. No more. Not a word more. It is the Day.”

### § 3

To describe “Pretty” Bramson as nervous, would be a gross understatement. The man was scared stiff; had been for two days. Peter found him wandering about the half-empty building—the English workman does not usually put in an appearance till twenty-four hours after “Bank Holiday”—damp cigarette between his lips, white about the gills, alternatively fidgeting and depressed. The famous black moustaches were distinctly out of curl: the brilliantined hair lacked its usual polish.

“Morning, Bramson. You look rather out of sorts.”

Bramson led melancholy way into the private office.

“It’s all U P with us now,” he said. “We’re ruined. That’s about the long and short of it.”

“Rats!” snapped Peter, lighting a cigar.

“The Bank will be down on us for that overdraft. . . .”

“Don’t be a fool. To begin with, they can’t call in any loans. There’s a moratorium. Secondly, if they do want their money, I can pay it. Do you really think I guarantee liabilities I can’t meet?”

“I hadn’t thought of the moratorium,” began Bramson, plucking up courage.

Peter, puffing slowly at his cigar, got over the flash of temper.

“Worried about that thousand of yours?” he queried suddenly.

“No-o. Not exactly. But. . . .”

“You *are* worried. Of course you’re worried. So am I. So’s everybody else. Let me remind you that *I’ve* got twelve thousand pounds in the concern, in addition to that confounded overdraft. But we shan’t either of us save our money by worrying. For goodness’ sake, pull yourself together, man. Let’s have a look at last month’s figures. . . .”

Bramson went to the safe; opened it; took out some papers “Get a pencil,” said Peter, “and write down what I tell you. . . . Ready. . . . Right. . . . Now then: Assets . . .” He dictated steadily; picking out the amounts from the big type-written

statement. "Liabilities. . . ." The dictation continued. "That's the lot, I think. Add them up please."

Bramson read out the figures: "Assets £27,862, Liabilities, including overdraft, £22,396."

"Which means," commented Peter, "that your thousand and my twelve are worth—about five between them. Roughly forty cents on the dollar. *If* we could sell the factory as a going concern."

"You haven't taken anything for the good-will of the business," put in Bramson.

"Of course I haven't. That's the whole question. Up to the end of last month, we were making profits. That was why you bought Turkovitch's shares, wasn't it? Do you think we're going to make a profit this month?"

"We might."

"Forget it," said Peter genially. "The best we can hope for is to nurse the show through this damned war—if it doesn't last too long. Now listen to me. . . ."

He plunged into details, giving his orders succinctly. This must go: that be curtailed. Publicity account, selling expenses, manufacturing charges, clerical work—Peter dealt with each seriatim, hardly referring to the figures on the table. "As for the finance," he concluded, "I'll deal with that myself. But mind you, the whole thing's a gamble . . . Play poker, Bramson?" he asked suddenly.

"Occasionally."

"Well, if you ever put up your last table-stake to bluff the jack-pot on a busted flush—you'll understand the present position of *Nirvana Limited*."

Two minutes later the car was purring Citywards.

## § 4

Passing over London Bridge, through Gracechurch Street and Fenchurch Street, Peter saw that the City had in no wise altered. The same drays, motor-omnibuses, taxicabs and motor-cars fought their way through its streets. The same bareheaded clerks hurried along its pavements. The same hawkers proffered the same wares. Only the closed doors of the banking-houses portended the unusual.

In his own office at Lime Street nothing spoke of world-crisis. Parkins still sat at the enquiry desk. Old George was still dusting cigar boxes. Miss Macpherson's typewriter clicked and tinkled from the clerks' office beyond the stock-rooms. Simpson, just back from his chop at "The George and Vulture" showed no signs of depression. He, too, had interviewed his bank manager.

"And what did Smollett say about Beckmann's bills?" asked Peter.

"It looks as though we shall have to meet them after the moratorium," said Simpson. "You see they've been discounted through an English bank. As far as I can make out, Beckmann's aren't technically Germans at all. The firm's domiciled in a neutral country—so Smollett says. . . ."

"Do you mean to say we shall be allowed to go on importing the brand?"

"I don't see why not," said Simpson.

That there could be any patriotic reasons for not trading with Beckmanns, did not strike them. The war was not yet twenty-four hours old; and neither the obtuse Simpson nor the concentrated Peter had realized it as more than a disturber of business.

"Elkins and Beresford will be sure to try and use this to prejudice customers against the brand," suggested Peter.

"Let them." Somehow, the crisis seemed to have nerved Simpson. Peter never remembered him so decided.

"We must go slow," was his verdict. "Of course trade will absolutely disappear for the first week or so. Then it'll begin to pick up again. There'll be no difficulty about supplies. Whatever happens on land, our Navy's got the Germans beaten at sea. Go slow, and keep our resources liquid—that's my idea. . . . By the way, how about that factory of yours?"

Peter hesitated a moment—Simpson had always been rather hostile about Nirvana—then said, "I've been up there this morning. Bramson's rather rattled. We shall have to go slow there too. It's a pity the brand couldn't have had another two years' hard advertising before this happened. As it is—everything depends on how long the war lasts. If it goes on more than six months, I may have to find a partner. That means parting with a big slice of my shares. You see, I don't feel I ought to take any more of my capital out of this business."

"No. I agree with you there. Though if it became absolutely necessary. . . . By the way, you won't mind my saying so, but I never understood why you took on 'Pretty' Bramson. He hasn't got a very good reputation in the trade. And then his cousin Marcus being a competitor. . . ."

"Oh, he's not a bad little chap." Peter, like all good men of business, was over-loyal to his staff. "The only trouble is that he hasn't got much guts. But he's all right as long as you keep an eye on him. . . . Good Lord, it's nearly three o'clock, and that poor devil of a chauffeur of mine hasn't had his lunch yet."

"Had any yourself?" asked Simpson.

It was the one detail of the day which our Mr. Jameson had forgotten!

## § 5

“And are we *quite* ruined?” chaffed Patricia as they finished dinner the same evening. Prout and the Rawlings had taken the afternoon train to town, leaving her lonely and—to tell the truth—more than a little worried.

“Not quite, old thing,” retorted Peter. . . .

But that night, for the first time in years, he woke up suddenly; saw her sleeping peacefully in the white bedstead next his own—and realized that his responsibilities were not exclusively confined to the financing of Nirvana Limited.

# *PART FIVE*

## DECISION

### § 1

Passed the first week—a week of rumours and counter-rumours, barren of certainty. Mealy-souled politicians,—protected by a Navy they had done their best to weaken—gabbled high words of hope. The few trained men, laughed at for years, departed silently about their business: the half-trained set themselves to learn. For already, the spirit of the English-speaking Peoples was astir. Slumbering, the spirit awoke: a blind spirit, conscious only of resentment, of independence mysteriously threatened, of Something Wrong in the world: finding its quaint vent in shibboleth phrases, in deep drinkings, in wagging of flags: but growing, growing always, not to be denied. Already, through the domino-caf  s of London, at the long bar in the English Club at Shanghai, in dank bungalows of the Malay Peninsula, on Canadian ranches and Australian “stations,” there ran the Word: “I think I ought to go, old boy. Well, mate, are you going?”

But no Word had yet reached Peter Jameson. The City held him. For the moment, the old game played itself on.

It was a “quiet” time; but not so bad as he had anticipated. Jameson’s customers, disregarding the moratorium, paid their accounts; gave niggling orders. The week’s shipment arrived punctually from Havana. Nirvana, to the untrained eye, seemed hardly to have suffered. The four machines stamped and clicked all day; girls bent over the packing tables; the tin-men pricked and soldered as before. Only the pink slips of “unfilled orders” dwindled and dwindled, the piles of unsold cigarettes in the stock-room rose and rose.

Peter was sitting alone in the back-office at Lime Street, thinking how soon he would have to begin paying off his “hands,” when Parkins announced, “Mr. Raymond P. Sellers.”

“What does he want?” asked Peter.

“I think it’s an American gentleman, Sir. He said he had a ‘proposition’ to put before you.”

“Ask him to come in.”

There entered a clean-shaven young man with gold eye-glasses, in square-shouldered clothes, square-tipped patent leather shoes, carrying a Panama hat in one

hand and a reporter's note-book in the other, who ejaculated: "Say, Mr. Jameson, I'm real glad to meet you," in a voice which no citizen of the United States ever used on land or sea.

Peter started to shake hands; looked up at his visitor; and burst out, "Francis, you blithering idiot, what on earth are you doing in that get-up?"

Francis looked round to see if the door were closed. Then he said, in his ordinary voice, "It is a bit grotesque, isn't it? But as the special representative of an anonymous American newspaper syndicate, I think it will pass for the next few days."

"You always were a bit of a lunatic," said Peter gruffly, "but this is the limit. What do you propose doing in your fancy-dress?"

"I'm leaving for Amsterdam on tonight's boat, if you want to know," answered Francis. "After that, my plans depend on circumstances. Look here," he became suddenly serious, "this isn't a joke. I should get into the devil's own row if 'they' knew I'd been down here. You mustn't tell a soul, Peter. Honestly. Not even Patricia. I know it sounds like a penny-novelette—but most of the penny-novelettes are coming true at the moment. Word of honour, old man, you won't tell a soul."

Peter glanced at his cousin; saw that the slackness had disappeared from his face. The lips were tight-set, the eyes dark with suppressed emotion.

"Word of honour, Francis. I won't tell a soul. Not even Patricia. Why did you come here though, if it was against—" he stumbled over the word—"orders?"

"Because there's no one else I can trust. It's a question of my correspondence, and the flat. I want you to look Prout up occasionally. He thinks I've enlisted. Here"—he fumbled in his pocket—"are eight letters for him. From me. Have one posted every three weeks. I've pencilled the dates on the flap. You can get some one to post them from the country, I suppose." Peter took the letters; nodded comprehension. "There's a cheque in each of them, so you needn't worry about giving the older bounder any money. I've told him you'll call, and that he's to give you any correspondence that comes for me."

"What am I to do with it?" asked Peter.

Francis hesitated a perceptible second before saying, "I want you to open everything that comes except—letters from America. Answer them all. Say I'm away, if you like. Joined the Army. I don't think there'll be any bills. If there are, they can wait."

"And the letters from America?"

"Those, I don't want you to open on any account. Keep them for me till I come back. If you don't hear from me in six months, better say eight months, burn them.

And post this.” He took another envelope from his pocket, handed it to Peter, who saw, in his cousin’s sprawly handwriting, “Miss B. Cochrane. C/o The Guaranty Trust Company of New York. To be forwarded.”

There was the usual awkward silence which betokens sentiment among English people. Then Peter got up, walked over to the safe, pulled out his private cash-box, and locked up the letters.

“That’ll be all right,” he said. “But why eight months? You don’t expect the war to last as long as that, do you?”

Came footsteps outside, a hand at the door-catch.

“Well, good-bye, Mr. Jameson. I’m sure I’m very much obliged to you for the information.”

Mr. “Raymond Sellers” shook hands effusively; half bowed to Simpson, and departed.

“Who was that chap?” asked Peter’s partner.

“That was only . . .” Peter stopped himself in time, “an American newspaper fellow—cadging advertisements for one of their trade-journals.”

“*Tobacco Leaf* or the other one?”

“The other one,” said Peter nonchalantly.

## § 2

To Peter Jameson’s rather narrow imagination, as yet untouched by the new melodramatic world, the whole interview with Francis appeared fantastic. He could neither visualize the steps which preceded that interview—the coming of the idea, the remembering of an old school-friend in the Foreign Office, the chivvying about from pillar to post necessary for the securing of “peculiar” employment, the two days of schooling by the quiet little civilian at “S,” the final instructions; nor the resultant arrival of “Mr. Raymond P. Sellers” at a certain hotel in Amsterdam, where he waited in his clean bedroom overlooking the canal till a very ordinary-looking Dutch merchant—having closed the door carefully behind him—said, “Hello, Gordon. I didn’t know you were one of us.” . . .

No! Peter certainly couldn’t visualize his cousin in the rôle of a secret-service agent. And such a secret-service agent—Philips Oppenheim in the flesh! He remembered, of course, that Francis had always been rather a dab at languages; remembered his talking German at a not too savoury dancing-hall in Singapore where they had once foregathered.

But surely there never was a man so utterly unfitted for such a job, so absolutely



certain to make a muck of it, as Francis Gordon.

"Fantastic," decided our Mr. Jameson; and went on with his work.

### § 3

Nevertheless, the interview left its mark in more ways than the pencilled notes "Post F's letters" in Peter's business-diary.

Two more weeks drifted by; news, unsatisfactorily scanty at the beginning, grew unsatisfactorily complete. So far, the enemy had it all their own way. Business, on the other hand, showed a tendency to revive—Nirvana business especially. With the economies effected, a little more trade—provided nothing interfered with their exports—would ensure them against actual loss. Bramson had cheered up, Simpson and the cigar-business dropped back into their usual lethargy. But our Mr. Jameson, for the first time in years, felt himself lacking in concentration.

This lack of concentration, as he carefully explained to himself, was in no wise due to the bad news. As an Englishman, and one who vaguely recollected the South African campaign, he had never expected a walk-over. Things looked pretty bad at the moment. Paris might possibly fall—though it hardly seemed likely. That would be awkward, of course: but by no means an irretrievable disaster. . . .

Nor, he decided, had business anxieties affected his grip of things financial. Nirvana could be saved. The main problem had been grappled with. Now—granted his continued personal attention—it was only a question of patience. . . . Then, why the devil this strange inability to concentrate, this growing annoyance?

A good many people had begun to annoy Peter—Julius Hagenburg among others. The man, proud possessor of a British naturalization certificate taken out in 1912, had of course every right to change his name if he thought fit. But Peter could not get accustomed to him as "James Hartopp, Esq." And his loud-mouthed patriotism, even though he had squared off almost all his old account, and given a large order, somehow offended.

There were a good many such naturalized Germans in the Havana cigar-trade; many of them with sons who had already enlisted. But every time he met one of them—old Schornstein, for instance, with his "Ve must vait and see, my poy. Ve must vait and see," or Blumberg eager to explain that "De liperl barty had saved de gountry,"—Peter experienced a new prejudice.

But Jameson's connexion with Beckmanns provided the crowning annoyance of all. Peter and Simpson had decided—as soon as the legal position became clear—that it would be ridiculous to stop importing the brand immediately. They must, of

course, do their best to replace the goods with those of another factory. On the other hand, to give them up without finding a substitute, would merely mean turning over an important advantage to some less-scrupulous competitor.

Still,—whatever the “Proclamation as to trading with the Enemy” might say about “firms domiciled in neutral countries”—Peter could *not* get out of his mind that the actual owners of the concern *were* Germans. Every Friday afternoon, as Simpson dictated his careful letter to them, ending with the old stereotyped phrasing “with kind regards, Yours very sincerely,” Peter would remember Heinrich Beckmann, in his heavy boots, his black tail-coat, his hard bowler-hat, iron-moustached and curt of phrase, gobbling oysters and swilling wine at Fortis’; would see young Albert Beckmann, fat, flabby, blond, over-manicured, frothing glass at his lips, eyeing the *Tänzerinnen* in the gaudy night-club where they had celebrated the signing of the contract. “Huns,” Peter would say to himself—(the appellation “Hun” had just come into vogue)—“bloody Huns!”

## § 4

But in addition to this growing revulsion against the enemy—(dislike of the Germans had been ingrained in the man’s character since his first day in business)—the thousand emotional flea-bites of the period began to affect Peter. That he could be hearing whispers of the English-speaking spirit—the spirit that was even then driving Francis Gordon, nervous to the depths of his imaginative soul, into dangers beyond belief, dangers that had to be faced in cold blood and absolutely alone—never struck the Chairman of Nirvana Limited.

He was conscious only of a Questioning; it seemed as though every one and everything asked him something, something he could not answer.

The morning newspaper began that Questioning. It lurked, somehow or other, behind the war-news, the casualty-lists. More than one name which conjured up the face of a boy known at Eton, figured in those early columns. Challis minor, in his own house, who had held onto his position till the last moment: “dying,” wrote his Colonel to his mother, “as I am sure you would have wished him to die.” Latham of the Artillery, who had fought his gun single-handed till he dropped dead over the breech-block. Peter caught himself trying to explain to a shadowy Challis minor how impossible it was for certain people, people with responsibilities like his own, to join the Army. . . .

Evelyn and Primula too, now back at Lowndes Square, accentuated uncertainty. They could talk of nothing but the soldiers they had seen drilling in Kensington

Gardens, the motor that had dashed—astounding phenomenon—down the Broad Walk. They reminded him of the episode, trivial at the time but constantly recurring, of Patricia's brother, Jack Baynet. Jack had been mobilized with the 6th Division; had asked Peter and Patricia to visit him in Camp at Cambridge. Peter had promised to go, cried off at the last moment. One couldn't very well mingle, an able-bodied civilian *in mufti*, with men who were going to France within the week. . . .

An eternal Questioning! Everything, everybody, seemed an embodied and personal demand. Everything, everybody—the khaki, blossoming now like a brown flower at every street-corner; the boy Parkins who had to be assured that his place would be kept before he enlisted; a traveller and two mechanics at the factory who went first and asked afterwards; Miss Macpherson's eyes when she dictated the Havana mail; Pat. For Patricia grew very silent those days. . . .

By the first week in September Peter had solved the Questioning; reduced it to a question. And the question, briefly, was this: "To join up meant the almost certain sacrifice of Nirvana. Not to join up, meant the definite loss of self-respect. Which should he do?" He had no fear of the soldiering part: on the contrary—being entirely and blessedly ignorant of warfare's actualities—it seemed to him the obvious, glorious *and easy* solution of his problem. To abandon his business-responsibilities, on the other hand, implied—quite apart from the pang of giving up the thing he most loved—a lack of moral courage, a yielding to popular clamour.

Curiously enough, it was not Patricia but Hubert Rawlings who clinched Peter's decision.

## § 5

It was a month and three days since the outbreak of war. Paris—thought Peter, as he sat alone in the back office at Lime Street—was practically safe. Still, it might easily be six months before the Cossacks got to Berlin. Meanwhile. . . .

The telephone-bell jangled; he took up the receiver, heard his brother-in-law's voice.

"Peter Jameson speaking. . . . That you, Hubert? . . . Right, I'll be in if you come along at once."

Hubert Rawlings, Publicity Agent, had not been worried with any whispers of the "English-speaking spirit." The contemptible cry of "business as usual" found him a ready convert. Government officials, eager to do anything except fight, had decided on a campaign of advertising, as wasteful to the country's purse as it was degrading to its patriotism; and in Hubert Rawlings they discovered an invaluable

henchman. Posters, leaflets, newspaper-stereos—one more revolting to decent folk than the other—spawned themselves in his lower-middle-class mind, spewed themselves over London and the provinces. Officially, he made no profits on these transactions, actually. . . . And in addition, there was always the advantage of being “in with the Government.” One might get . . . Heaven knows what one mightn’t get. . . . Also, one had “opportunities.”

Such an “opportunity” brought Hubert Rawlings to Peter’s office.

He came in, silk-hatted, morning-coated, flower in buttonhole, perfectly at ease. Already his voice had assumed a faint touch of the “Whitehall manner.”

“How do you do, Peter?” he said. “I hope you didn’t wait for me.”

“Afternoon, Hubert. Take a pew. What’s the trouble?”

“I came,” announced Rawlings mysteriously, “to ask you if you’d like to have a share in a—little deal some friends of mine are interested in. I need hardly tell you it’s all fair and above-board, or of course *I* shouldn’t have anything to do with it. Still—” he dropped his voice. “Naturally, anything I say remains strictly between the two of us.”

“Of course,” said Peter.

“It’s like this,” went on Rawlings. “I, we, happen to know that there will shortly be a big demand for a certain article.” Encouraged by Peter’s non-committal attitude, he waxed confidential. “I may as well tell you what the article is. It’s overcoats.”

“Overcoats?”

“Yes. For Kitchener’s Army. You know, I presume, that owing to shortage of dye, there has been a delay in the deliveries of khaki. A very serious delay. So the men are to be provided, as a temporary expedient, with civilian great-coats. Ready-made. Do you follow me so far?”

“Perfectly,” said Peter stiffly. The other, had he been looking, might have noticed a dangerous quietness in his brother-in-law’s attitude.

“Now I, we, have an option on ten thousand of these overcoats. There are four of us in the deal so far. The coats work out, for cash, at fifteen shillings. . . . The War Office is paying twenty-five. That”—the voice became unctuous—“means a profit of . . .”

“Five thousand pounds,” snapped Peter. For a moment, old habits asserted themselves; he was tempted. A thousand more for Nirvana! Then all the emotions of four weeks blazed into cold flame. He got up from his chair, eyes black with rage; controlled himself in time; and said slowly:—

“Don’t slam the door as you go out, Rawlings.”

“But surely . . .” began the other.

“Did you hear what I said?”

“Yes, but . . .”

“Damn your eyes, will you get out of this office before I throw you out? . . .”

Rawlings went.

## § 6

Two nights later—at the very moment when the Beasts in Gray, muttering “*Grosses Malheur*” as they shuffled through darkling towns, were reeling back to the Aisne before the Armies of France and a handful of Englishmen—Peter Jameson and his wife sat over their coffee in the drawing-room at Lowndes Square.

All through dinner, he had been absorbed and reticent. Now, he put down his empty cup on the little table by the side of his armchair; took a long pull at his cigar; began to speak. For a month she had watched him; speculated about him; hoped; doubted; realized his difficulties. But she had given no hint of her feelings: this was a matter for a man’s own conscience; no woman, not even his wife, possessed the right to influence him.

“I want to talk to you,” he said.

“Yes, dear.” A little of what he must say, she knew. Her eyes kindled to the prospect of it.

“Pat,” he began, “I don’t think I can keep out of this thing any longer. It wouldn’t be”—he fumbled for the expression—“quite playing the game. But if I go, there are risks. . . .”

“Naturally.” She schooled her voice to calmness.

“I don’t mean those sort of risks. If anything happened to me, the Insurance would be paid. I went round to see the Phoenix People about that this morning.” Unaccountably, the reasonableness of the view irritated her. “I mean business risks. To begin with, there’s the factory.”

He began to talk about Nirvana; tried to show her only the financial position. His personal feelings, he felt, must not be allowed to complicate a simple issue. But the intonation of his voice betrayed the feelings behind it; and she realized, for the first time, how much Nirvana meant to him.

“You would hate to give it up,” she interrupted.

“It would be rather,” he hesitated for a moment, “a wrench. Still I’ve discounted that. Of course, the whole thing’s a gamble. But I’m not going to quit yet. After all, I shan’t go out for some time. Meanwhile, I can keep in touch. Only I won’t put any

more capital in. If Reid and Bramson between them—I saw Reid yesterday and he’ll do his best—can manage to keep her going: well and good. If not, we must cut our losses.”

“Will they be very heavy?”

“They might be. But that isn’t all. . . .”

“Oh, what do you care about losses?” her heart cried out in her. “He’s going. He’s a *man*. What else matters?” And then, suddenly, fear held her, battling down reason, patriotism, pride, everything except itself. . . .

But the man’s voice went on talking—coolly, logically, impersonally. That he was voicing the spirit of a great sacrifice, that Patricia realized the sacrifice, loved him for it, that the “pal” he had known for eight years existed no longer, had become at a word his mate, his woman to do with as he would—these things were hidden both then and for long after from Peter Jameson, cigar merchant. . . .

“So you see,” he said, summing up the case as he saw it, “it means a big risk. If the factory goes down, if Jameson’s business doesn’t improve, if Simpson won’t renew the partnership agreement in January, if one or any of these things happen, it might mean giving up this house. . . .”

Inwardly, the bathos of it made her laugh. If he could give up so much, surely she could give up her little. Reason and the training of years came to her aid. To him, she was still the pal, only the pal. Nothing more than that!

“I quite follow, dear,” she said.

“But we won’t consider the black side, old thing. Don’t let’s panic. The War may be over by Christmas. Till then, we’ll carry on just as we are. I shan’t even get rid of the motor.”

Now that the awkward task of putting the position before his wife was over, optimism held him. For a moment, the sense of having done the right thing blurred his business judgment.

“You’re a topping pal, Pat,” he said to her as they kissed good-night. . . . But Patricia, waking to the first shimmer of dawn through the chinks of the silk curtains, felt herself, for the first time, woman indeed. For now she loved him, utterly, beyond friendship: and lying there, quite still in her own narrow bed, she vowed this new love to his service in whatsoever guise he most should need it. . . .

## § 7

“The whole thing’s a farce, Pat.”

It was already three weeks since Peter had been promised his commission; two

since his “kit” had been delivered from his tailors.

Outwardly the situation between husband and wife had not altered. Reason told her that this new love she felt for him could win its reward only by patience. And she needed all her patience those days. Disorganization held no humour for Peter Jameson. His patriotism, if it could have found expression, would have vented itself in few words: “There’s a job to be done. A rotten job. Let’s do it, and get back to our businesses.” He was still—in the intervals of importuning the War Office—running those businesses; hearing telephoned reports; suggesting this, vetoing that. But more than a fraction of the old-time keenness had evaporated. The blind spirit of War had caught him, was carrying him onwards. . . .

He walked over to the bureau between the windows; picked out a telegraph-form from the racked paper-holder; began to write.

She looked at him across the breakfast-débris—calm, golden-haired, very fresh in her white blouse, her blue walking-skirt; guessed, from the bent back, the concentration in his taut brain. Looking, love leaped into her dark eyes, moistening them.

“I think this’ll do,” he said, turning so suddenly that she scarcely had time to drop her lashes: “*Colonel Thompson. Room 154. War Office. Reference our recent interview am now ready and shall be glad of instructions to report for duty. Reply paid. Jameson. 22a, Lowndes Square, W.*”

“You can’t send that,” said Patricia.

“Can’t I?” He rang for Smith, gave instructions for immediate dispatch of the wire.

## § 8

Patricia, coming in from her afternoon walk with the children, found a tawny envelope on the hall table. The telegram was addressed “Jameson,” and she opened it casually; felt her heart stop as though two fingers had clutched it; heard Primula’s voice: “What’s the matter, Mummy?” . . .

“Nothing’s the matter, dear,” she said calmly. “You and Evelyn had better go upstairs to Nanny.”

She watched them, running up the broad stone staircase, out of sight. Then she read the pencilled message again: “*Report for duty 10th Chalkshires Shoreham Camp immediately. Thompson. War Office.*”

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“What a fool I am,” she said to herself. “What a selfish unpatriotic fool!”

# *PART SIX*

## PLAYING AT SOLDIERS

### § 1

Except for the newness of his "Cavalry-cord" tunic and a slight lack of suppleness in the carefully-browned belt, nothing about the quiet gray-eyed young man in the otherwise-empty first-class compartment on the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway betrayed the civilian of a day ago. The battered valise and an old-fashioned Army basin, leather-covered—relics of a trip to the East—did not smack of the newly-joined. Close-cut dark hair, clipped moustaches, correctly-wound puttees and dubbed shooting-boots, completed the illusion. But Peter Jameson's mind had not yet cast off its old allegiances.

Rather, as he whirled Sussexwards, did those discarded problems assume acuter import. One by one he conned over the arrangements made—fortnightly reports from Lime Street, weekly statements and a bi-weekly letter from Bramson, accurate statistics from Reid; wondered if they might have been improved upon. And speculating on these things, Peter began to feel—for the first time—the real pang of parting from Nirvana. It was as though he had cut the main interest out of life; as if the entity of his creating had died. Symbolically, he seemed to see his two flashing signs, as they had been before the new lighting restrictions; "NIRVANA OR NOTHING," they had blazed. Now, they blazed no more. Nothing!

He pulled his "Infantry Training" from his pocket; began to study Battalion Drill. "A battalion in mass. . . ."

But the subconscious mind would not visualize battalions either in mass or other formations. The mind returned to its old love, refused to be comforted. The mind did not recall the morning's partings—with Patricia, careful to display no emotion,—with the children, excited at their first vision of "Daddy in khaki." Instead, it called up figures from balance-sheets, the factory working at full pressure, that dim-lit back-office in the City: till gradually, came recollection of Mr. "Raymond P. Sellers." . . .

Peter had already posted two of the letters to Prout, visited the Bloomsbury flat as promised, found everything in order. Only a photograph, a girl's photograph, was missing. And that, Peter had not noticed. But from Francis Gordon himself had come no word. The War seemed to have swallowed him up, utterly, mysteriously.

So Peter sped on, through the bright countryside, thinking of his cousin. . . . And



at that very moment thousands of miles away, in a great hotel at Los Angeles, California, a girl said to herself: "Even if he has gone to the war, it's mean of him not to write and tell me so." She stood at the window for a moment, looking out onto the sunlit lawn. Till suddenly, the lawn seemed to grow dark. "He can't have been killed," she whispered. "He can't have been killed."

It is not easy for "agents in enemy countries" to keep up a regular correspondence with the young women whose photographs they carry in their pocket-books!

## § 2

To get from London to Shoreham, you must change trains at Brighton. Peter used the opportunity to lunch at the Royal York Hotel. Seeing him alone at a table by the window, Harry Preston, most vigilant of proprietors, came over; proffered an old brandy in celebration of the new uniform.

"That's the Chalkshire badge you're wearing, isn't it?" asked Harry Preston.

"Yes, I'm joining them at Shoreham this afternoon."

The little man whistled.

"What's the joke?" queried Peter.

"Not for me to say, of course. But I've been doing business with your firm for some years; and if you'll take my advice—don't play cards with a gentleman named Locksley-Jones."

"Who's he?"

"You'll find out when you get there."

"Thanks for the hint," smiled Peter. "Have a cigar, won't you?"

## § 3

Colonel Andrews, a diffident, not unkindly man of the pre-Boer-War school, expressionless of face, and stocky of figure, stood talking to his Adjutant in the recently-occupied camp on the flat fields near Shoreham Railway Station. Rattled a taxi down the road; stopped at the gate.

"Another officer, I suppose," said the Colonel. "Might be a 'regular' by his old valise. You'd better go and look after him. I'm off home for tea. Send up to the house if you want me for anything." He strode back across the parade-ground, through the lines of tents; and disappeared.

Peter acknowledged the salute of a sentry, still in civilian clothes except for a

swagger-cane; paid his taxi; gave instructions for his kit to be dumped at the guard-tent till further orders.

“That’s the Adjutant, Sir,” said the sentry, pointing to a bow-legged figure in khaki making his way across the parade-ground towards them. Peter—saluting although the newcomer only wore the two stars of a full lieutenant,—saw a pair of puffy eyes under a thatch of sandy hair, two ears rather full in the lobe, a goodish nose, and a set of bad teeth between thin lips. “And what can I do for you?” said the other, carelessly acknowledging the compliment.

“Are you the Adjutant of the 10th Chalkshires?”

“I’m Lieutenant Locksley-Jones, at present acting in that capacity.”

“The deuce you are,” thought Peter; then aloud, “My name’s Jameson. I’ve been ordered by the War Office to join this battalion.”

“I don’t know anything about you. The W.O. haven’t sent *us* any instructions.” Locksley-Jones fingered scraggy moustache doubtfully; scrutinized the telegram Peter produced.

“All right,” he said. “You’ll have to share a tent with the other fellows. Meanwhile you’d better come and have some tea. Those are the officers’ lines,” he pointed to a row of tents by the road, “the men are over there,” his stick switched across the parade-ground, “and we mess in this big marquee.”

“I don’t wonder Harry Preston whistled,” thought Peter, as they picked their way across the tent-ropes to Mess; passed through the deserted “ante-room” where a red stove glowed welcome, into the main part of the marquee.

Scattered about in groups at the trestle-tables under the swinging oil-lamps, little knots of officers sat eating and drinking. Civilian waiters bustled about, serving them.

“Hello, Adjutant,” exclaimed a tall thin Major, twinkling face red-veined with port and the open air. “What’s this? Another budding Napoleon?”

Locksley-Jones introduced Peter deferentially; the Major shook hands; asked the usual “Done any soldiering before?”; was told “Yes, Sir. Eton Volunteers”; apologized for talking shop in Mess; and buried his nose in a large cup of boiling tea.

“Peter Jameson?” he said, emerging. “Let me think. Name sounds familiar somehow. You’re not Tessa Bradley’s son, by any chance, are you? She married a man named Jameson.”

“My father, Sir,” said Peter.

“Good Gad,” said Major Fox-Goodwin, “why I was at their wedding. Thirty-five years ago or I’m a Dutchman. Fancy, little Tessa having a grown-up son. I say, Jones,—beg pardon, Locksley-Jones. . . .”

“Yes, Major.” The Adjutant was visibly irritated; firstly by his superior’s

reception of the newcomer, secondly at the mistake (which he knew intentional) in his own name.

“Young Jameson will be posted to my company. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Major.”

“And if he knows his drills, you’re not to put him ‘on the square.’ See?”

“Quite, Major.” The acting adjutant finished his tea hurriedly; went out.

“Between you and me and the gatepost,” whispered Fox-Goodwin, “Andrews will make the mistake of his life if he keeps that young bounder in the Orderly Room much longer.”

Peter nodded comprehension; and the old man—he was, as he informed his new subaltern, “rising sixty-five”—began to reminisce. He had soldiered under “Chips” Bradley in the late seventies, or was it the early eighties? “Damned if he knew, but Chips Bradley had the best eye for a pretty gal . . . and as for his two daughters, Tessa and Dolores: bit Jewish-looking though . . . they got that from their mother of course.” He rambled on for nearly ten minutes; then called across the room. “Here, Bromley, come and be introduced to our latest.”

Harold Bromley lounged over with the unmistakable gait of the ex-Cavalryman. A tall unsmiling fellow, heavy-moustached, light-blue of eye and auburn-haired, who wore the two South African ribbons, yellow-red-black green-white, across his rather crumpled tunic.

“Leave you two youngsters alone,” announced the Major, introductions over; and wiping his gray moustache with a brown bandanna handkerchief, withdrew to the ante-room.

“Marvellous old chap,” commented Bromley. He spoke rather slowly but without any drawl. “Always reminds me of a character in Thackeray. Do you read Thackeray?”

“I’m not much of a bookworm,” said Peter; and waited for more information. He had knocked about the world enough to learn the advantage of listening much and talking little on first acquaintance. But his liking for the grave man—whom in spite of the single star on the shoulders of his high-collared tunic, he judged to be nearly forty—was instinctive.

“I’m glad you’re coming to ‘B’ Company,” went on Bromley. “The Major’s a great sport—but he doesn’t know a word of his drill; and now that he’s acting second-in-command, most of the work falls on myself and the Sergeant-Major. I suppose you know enough to come on parade right away, without bothering about recruit-drill.”

“Oh, I think so,” said Peter; and proffered his inevitable cigar-case.

Bromley accepted a cigar; and the two sat talking for a few minutes. Characteristically, neither spoke of his life before joining the army; their conversation confined itself to generalities.

“Let’s go into the ante-room,” suggested Bromley.

They found two comfortable basket-chairs near the stove. Locksley-Jones, returned from the Orderly-room, had established himself at one of the baize-covered tables, was tearing the wrapper from a fresh pack of cards. “Care for a game, Jameson?” he called across the room.

Bromley looked sideways at his new friend (the instinctive liking had been mutual); saw his eyelashes just flicker; heard him say, “No, thanks, not tonight.” The ante-room began to fill up; grew loud with talk, hazy with tobacco-smoke. The Adjutant’s rubber soon filled. Bromley, in a discreet undertone, began pointing out various worthies.

There was Captain Mosely, a great ox of a fellow, ex-Regular newly-rejoined, who sat by himself in a far corner, writing letters—the flimsy chair creaking each time he dived for ink (“O. C. ‘D’ Company,” whispered Bromley): and Simcox who commanded “A”—a fat stockbroker of forty, looking curiously out of his element among a group of very junior subalterns. There was Fanshawe (“son of Judge Fanshawe”) beetle-browed, black-locked, long of leg and short of temper, discussing Military Law with Bareton, a tall clean-shaven young lawyer, light-haired, stubborn in temperament, a puritan fanatic with a tendency to dreaming, (“they’re running ‘C’ between ’em, rather efficient fellows,” confided Bromley): and Peabody, a brown-faced kid of eighteen, looking the child in his converted cadet tunic; Arkwright, tall and lank with the unmistakable stoop of the junior master in an English Public School; Mackenzie, a round-faced Scotch boy who had been studying for “the Ministry” when war broke out—and many others. A curious team to be driven by a Colonel of limited outlook, who had made his first mistake when he decided to live out of Mess, his second when he confided the acting-Adjutancy to the astute but unscrupulous Locksley-Jones.

“Care to come round the lines?” asked Bromley. “I usually go about now.”

They found their caps and canes, sauntered out.

## § 4

Already, it was dusk—a chill dry night, moonless. Under the shadows of the trees in front of them, tents glowed—warm orange cones in the darkness. Figures passed them as they walked across the dry grass; touched caps awkwardly;

muttered "Good-night, sir."

Bromley made way towards a light that shone out like an eye from the open doorway of the first tent. Approaching, Peter saw, under it, a head in a khaki cap, bowed over an open book. The head lifted to the sound of their footsteps; the body underneath jerked itself to attention.

"Good-evening, sir," said Company-Sergeant-Major Gladeney—a fierce little alert-eyed man with the waxed moustaches of the old-time non-com.

"Evening, Colour Sergeant," Bromley acknowledged the salute. "May we come in?"

"With pleasure, sir."

They stepped over the tent-fly, and were made welcome on two packing-cases.

"This is Mr. Jameson, one of our new officers, Colour Sergeant"—it must be explained that Bromley had not yet accustomed himself to the new title of "Company-Sergeant-Major"—"do you think you can find him a good servant?"

"I think so, sir. There's a man here, name of Priestley, who was with us in South Africa. He ought to take a stripe but he won't. . . ."

"Knows the game too well, I suppose," suggested Bromley.

"That's about the size of things, sir. He's out now; but if your batman could look after Mr. Jameson for tonight, I'll send him over first thing in the morning."

"Very well, Colour Sergeant. How are the boys?"

"All right, sir. They're shaking down pretty well." He relaxed a little, put a match to his pipe. "Wonderful thing to me, sir, how they put up with things. Those boots you bought in Brighton were a God-send, sir. They may be able to march now. Before, half of them couldn't do more than hobble. And tomorrow we'll be serving out the new uniforms."

"What, khaki?" interrupted Peter.

"No, sir. Workhouse stuff, sir—at least that's what they look like to me. Blue slops and forage-caps for the most part. And a few of our old militia uniforms."

"Not the old scarlet-runners." This from Bromley.

"The identical, sir, with the old white facings. Don't know what they'll look like when we get 'em dressed up, sir. But it'll be better than their civvies anyway." He patted his own be-ribboned khaki tunic, pulled hard at his pipe.

"Any need for me to go round the lines, Colour Sergeant?"

"I don't think so, sir. Mr. Fanshawe is Orderly Officer tonight."

Bromley got up; said "Thank you, Colour Sergeant. I think that will be all then"; acknowledged Gladeney's salute, and stepped back into the darkness. Peter followed.

Walking back, Bromley linked arms; said, "Look here, old chap, you'd better come into my tent tonight. I'm a quiet old stick—but you'll find the kids a bit trying."

## § 5

So began a real friendship.

Began too, for Peter Jameson, a new life—the life which every untrained gentleman of the Empire who could spoof a recruiting doctor into passing him young enough or fit enough for service, was then living. A life neither of comfort nor—as many wrote and made much money by their writing—of good humour. A life of adults gone back to the irritation of school: save that for school-house they had sodden camps; for dining-hall, a draughty tent where fleecing contractors served half-cold meals; for schoolmasters, the incompetence of brave fellows wrongly employed.

But neither Peter nor Bromley concerned themselves over much, in those first weeks, with generalities. They realized, none better, that all was not well with the "Voluntary System," with the Chalkshires; that Locksley-Jones' influence with their Colonel continued to grow, that his pernicious example had already affected the junior officers. They realized—and went on with their work. For them, as for Fanshawe and Bareton in "C" Company, nothing save their men existed. And for every minute they lavished on their men, their men repaid them a hundredfold.

Those *men*! For, of the officers, one does not write. The well-educated, the well-off, the comfortable classes, must needs defend the country from which they draw their riches and their education: and he who did not do so—voluntarily, without compulsion or fear of compulsion—whatever his fancied responsibilities to his profession, to his businesses, to his housen, to his women or his children, is surely anathema maran atha, the moral leper, the pariah among his kind.

But those *men*! men of the People: uneducated, unwashed, foul-mouthed, drinkers and womanizers if you will; the "proletariat," product of shop and Board School, of mill and mine, of farm and factory; those *men* who came voluntarily from all the earth, waving no flags, moved only by that dumb blind Anglo-Saxon spirit which has made and unmade Kings since the beginning of time! how shall one write of these?

They had, in those early days, neither leaders nor equipment. They trained, grotesquely, with blocks of rough wood—hewn to the semblance of a rifle. They were herded fourteen, sixteen and twenty together, in leaking tents, with never a floor-board between their one blanket and the mud below. They were flung out into

our towns in suits of sloppy blue, in overcoats cobbled together by sweated aliens—a mockery on the public streets. They had scarcely any leave. Their wives and children starved because their separation-allowances were not paid. Their own food was cooked, weather permitting, in shallow trenches on the bare ground—with civilian houses fifty yards away.

And when the sodden camps chosen for them stood two feet deep in greasy slime, when neither their single blankets nor their single suits could be dried, when the fires would not burn and the sick-parade marched double-company-strong to the doctor's tent half-a-mile away—then, they were *vaccinated*, willy-nilly, and left to cure their swollen arms as best they might, jostling against each other in their crowded styes!

Till gradually that first fine enthusiasm, which made them trainable even by the untrained, oozed from their souls—even as the mud oozed up through the ground on which they slept: till all the keenness, and all the joy, and all the glory of the finest profession in the world evaporated; leaving nothing save the dour stark spirit of Anglo-Saxondom to carry them on.

And as, in mud and muddle and incompetence, these early volunteers began their soldiering; so, in blood and incompetence and disaster, most of them ended it. Yet though they grumbled, they never weakened; though the song died on their lips and the jest from their eyes, neither their hearts nor their limbs flinched from the tasks appointed.

Let library-historians give the palm to this Field-Marshal or that Statesman if they will, we who did our best for him know that it was the “common man,” “poor bloody Tommy”—on his lorry or his ration-cart, at his telephone-station or his observation-post, in his trench or his gun-pit—“poor bloody Tommy,” hungry sometimes, tired mostly, frightened to the depths of his unimaginative soul, but *enduring always*, who staved off every British defeat and won every British victory all the way back from Mons to Compiègne and all the way forward from Compiègne back to Mons again.

Pray God that he find honest leaders—for leaders he must have—in this future he has won for us!

# *PART SEVEN*

## ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

### § 1

“Take it from me, P.J.,” said Bromley, as he dumped himself down on the untidy camp-bedstead and began re-winding his puttees, “this is a damn good battalion—to get out of.”

It had rained during the night, making early parade impossible, postponing the morning’s route-march for an hour so as to enable the men to get some breakfast.

“Oh, I don’t think it’s quite as bad as that, old man. The Company’s getting on all right,” said Peter, picking up the letters which Private Priestley had deposited—according to custom—on his canvas pillow.

“I wasn’t talking about the Company. Nothing wrong there. Considering the circumstances, the way they’ve come on is a miracle. I was talking about the Battalion in general, its Adjutant in particular. You see this isn’t a new game to me, P.J. I’ve seen bad fellows ruin the finest shows before now.”

“Why can’t you leave Locksley-Jones alone? He’s not doing us any harm. Besides the Colonel’s all right—although he did tell me at last night’s lecture that ‘the machine-gun is not a weapon of precision.’”

“He wouldn’t say that if he’d been shot in the stomach by one, like I was,” commented Bromley. “Not that he’s a bad chap, all the same. But he leaves too much to Locksley. Locksley’s playing for his own hand all the time. I don’t mind his rooking the youngsters at Bridge, or running them over to Brighton in his car every night. If they’re fools enough to go with him, that’s their hunt. But when it comes to his interfering with Company Commanders in their recommendations for promotion. . . .”

“But he hasn’t done that, surely?”

“Yes, he has. I didn’t mean to tell you, but the Major put both of us in for our second star”—(the Major had actually put Bromley’s name down for a Captaincy and Bromley knew it)—“and Locksley blocked it with the Colonel.”

“Well, I don’t care about promotion anyway,” said Peter, starting to open his letters.

“Don’t be a fool, P.J. Everybody who’s any good wants to go *up*. And can’t you follow what Locksley’s game is? *I* can. He’s keeping the Captaincies for his



pals. Especially these new blighters who keep on coming down to see him in mufti. You mark my words, they'll all be turning up as officers in a week or two. Honestly, if it wasn't for the men and the old Major, I'd apply for a transfer tomorrow."

Such conversations were not unusual between them. Locksley-Jones, confirmed in his Adjutancy, was all (and more) than Bromley had hinted. But for the moment Peter had forgotten the Chalkshires.

He was reading, very carefully, a long letter written by his brother Arthur—a letter from Java, which had been two months under way. Arthur put his case very clearly. The tobacco-farm, newly established, carried a mortgage of £2000. Arthur's capital had gone in farm-implements, in seedlings, in the cheese-cloth with which he was experimenting. He couldn't realize, owing to the drop in land values. The mortgage-money had been lent by a Hun trading-house. Under the Dutch laws, they could prevent his leaving the country. "I can't even get to Singapore, unless you'll lend me the money," wrote Arthur. "I've asked them to foreclose, but they won't. The interest is 8% and they say I can make it for them as long as I stop here. Damn them!"

Peter knew enough about the tobacco-farming industry to realize that the "mortgage" Arthur spoke of must include a lien on the growing crop; enough about Hun methods of peaceful penetration to understand the seriousness of the position: decided, after railing inwardly at the untimeliness of the demand, that he would have to find the cash somehow.

"Fall in, 'C' Company," boomed Sergeant-Major Gladeney's voice. Peter shuffled the remainder of his correspondence into his tunic-pocket; pulled on his cap and gloves; switched stick under arm; and stalked out.

"Something's upset P.J.," thought Bromley, following at leisure.

## § 2

In those early days of "Kitchener's Army" week-end leave for officers was more of a habit than a privilege; and though Locksley-Jones demurred slightly at the irregularity, Friday evening found Peter, haversack at side, waiting for the 4:30 upon the bleak, dirty station of Shoreham-on-Sea.

The human animal is amazingly adaptable, amazingly restricted. Peter had been scarcely four weeks a soldier; but all the way up to town the old life seemed almost a thing of the past. Only arrival at Victoria, bright under its arc-lamps against the darkness outside, brought it back.

His mind, now concentrated on the question of whether to borrow the two

thousand from his own bank or overdraw it from Jameson's, did not allow of careless merrymaking. So that Patricia, although he fell in readily enough with her suggestion of two stalls at the Palace Vaudeville, found him curiously unaltered. He kissed her, but no more warmly than if he had just returned from a business-trip. She had expected nothing else: nevertheless she felt unreasonably disappointed. Physically, fresh air and exercise had tanned his cheeks, hardened his muscles: mentally, she could detect no change. And as they sat in the theatre, she could not but envy the obvious good spirits, the excited affection of the other couples about them.

He told her about Arthur; talked of "B" Company; answered questions about his new life readily. Nirvana, she heard, went as well as could be expected; Jameson's sales had been rather disappointing. It was nice of her to offer to drive him back on Sunday in the car; but he thought the journey home, in the dark and without a chauffeur, might be too much for her.

Simpson too, asked by wire to be in the office on Saturday, could not see much difference in our Mr. Jameson. His grip of things did not seem to have suffered. He enquired about customers by name; about Hartopp (*geborener* Hagenburg) in particular. He mentioned the partnership deed; suggested a tentative renewal—say for two years or the "duration"—on the old terms. The older man, warning him vaguely about taking two thousand pounds out of the business at such a time, met with a curt, "I don't like it any more than you do, but a fellow must stand by his own." Mention of Beckmanns evoked another flash of temper.

Bramson, on the other hand, summoned peremptorily to give up the better part of his Saturday afternoon off, found Peter rather overbearing: confided the fact to his cousin Marcus with whom he dined that evening.

Said Marcus, "My boy, you forget that you're a civilian to him now."

Whereafter, the two settled down to piquet—with occasional references to the stationary condition of Nirvana trade as compared with the leaping canteen business of "Pullman Virginias."

"Pretty" Bramson was perfectly straight: but after all "a fellow must stand by his own!"

### § 3

In the crowded Pullman car of the last Sunday night train back to Shoreham, Peter fell in with his Colonel. The diffident, kindly man—usually shy with his subalterns—offered a whisky-and-soda; grew a little talkative.

"I wish I were out in France," he confided. "I'd rather be a Major out there than a Colonel in England any day. But the powers-that-be won't hear of it. It looks like a long war, Jameson—a really long war. But of course it might end tomorrow—and then one would never have had one's chance."

"Do you think we shall be going out soon, sir?" Peter asked the stock-question from pure habit.

Colonel Andrews began to talk the other side of war, the difficulties of finding seasoned wood for rifle-stocks, the lack of dyes for khaki. His outlook, if limited, was—except on the question of machine-guns—extraordinarily sound: and Peter, when their homeward way separated in the rain at the cross-roads by the cycle-shop, found difficulty in realizing how so decent a chap could have let himself be misled into taking Locksley-Jones for Adjutant. . . .

Turning into the Camp, Peter could see immediately that something must be wrong. Although it was nearly one o'clock in the morning, lights glowed in most of the officers' tents. Across the blurr and rain drizzle of the parade-ground, under the acetylene flares by the latrine-buckets, figures moved, lanterns swayed. He heard voices calling.

"What's up?" he asked the sentry.

"Trouble over in the lines, I'm afraid, sir. They do say as 'ow 'D' Company's flooded out altogether."

Peter stumbled across the darkness towards his own lines; nearly collided with a dripping figure in gum-boots. A torch flashed in his face.

"That you, P.J.?" said Bromley's voice. "Been out on the tiles, and come to have a look round at the picnic?"

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing much. Only most of the Camp flooded; about twenty tents blown down; and half the men soaked to the skin. 'A' and 'D' have got it worst. Hark at Mosely's voice."

They heard it, raised like a foghorn above the din: "Now, then, you chaps, form up, will you? Never mind your blasted blankets."

"Come and have a look-see. It's worth while. Reminds me of a stampede in South Africa." Peter had never known Bromley speak so crisply.

They pashed back to the lines; found confusion indescribable. Mosely had by now got his company into some sort of order; they stood there, dripping and shivering, faces white under the big flare, unlaced boots flopping as they stamped on the lime-washed slime: but Simcox's lines looked as if a tornado had struck them. Tents lay in writhing coils; from under them, men crawled, mud-soaked and cursing;

the stockbroker, in gum-boots and pyjamas, a "British Warm" coat to complete the costume, alternately damned their eyes and adjured them to "buck up"; his subalterns scuttered about, still half asleep, laughing and quite useless. "C" were already away, making for the railway-station. Peter heard Bareton's high voice shepherding them, "Don't straggle there. Keep together," and a man in the rear four grousing, "Bloomin' fine weather for ducks. . . ."

"But what's happened to *us*?" he asked Bromley—for "B" Company's tents stood dark and deserted.

Bromley chuckled: "Oh, they don't catch *me* that way, P.J. *Our* men are all tucked up comfy round a big stove in the Schoolhouse. *I* saw this coming at about half-past eight: so I sent Gladeney to find a good billet; routed the chaps out; posted a sentry to tell the leave-men where to make for. . . . And *we* slacked our tent-ropes when the rain started."

"Why didn't you warn the others?"

"I did; but they wouldn't listen. I'm a quiet old stick, I am." He chuckled again, with all the "old soldier's" delight at having scored off his colleagues.

Far away, on the high road, they heard the roar of a car; saw the glare of a single headlight; watched it nosing for the Camp gates.

"That's our friend the Adjutant," commented Bromley, "back from one of his little jaunts to Brighton."

The engine stopped; the headlight was cut off. A minute or two later, Locksley-Jones' bow-legged figure came waddling towards them. Bromley flashed the torch in his face; and they saw his puffy eyes flinch as the light struck them.

"Who are you?" he called.

"Friend." Bromley, a little above his usual grave self, had gone clean back to South African days. The amenities of home service were, for the moment, completely in eclipse.

"Oh, it's you, Bromley, is it? What's all this skylarking?" blustered Locksley.

The situation was curtly explained to him; and he turned for advice—as weak men will in a crisis—to the stronger character.

"What do you think I ought to do?"

"*Do!*" said Bromley contemptuously. "*Do?* Well, if I were you, I should go to bed. This is a *man's* job."

"He'll never forgive you for that," said Peter, snuggling gratefully between his Jaeger blankets.

"My part!" chuckled Bromley across the darkness of the tent.

# *PART EIGHT*

## DISSENSION

### § 1

A man and his wife can occasionally (if they are very circumspect) conceal matrimonial disturbances from their servants: but, in a Regiment, the slightest tension between officers is known to the lower ranks almost at the moment of its occurrence. Mess-waiters gossip; batmen gossip; the Sergeant's Mess gossips: between a parade and a parade, twelve hundred men are taking sides in the quarrel of two. And the Chalkshires were no ordinary peace-time regiment: volunteers to a man; of different social gradings but almost every one a Londoner; intensely curious about their new profession; it did not take them long to discover—"B" Company especially—how matters stood between 2nd Lieutenant Harold Bromley and Captain and Adjutant Locksley-Jones.

By the time that the late-November rains (and various hints in the Press about "the scandalous state of some of our Camps") drove the Chalkshires out of the Shoreham slime into billets at Worthing Green, a suburb of Worthing-on-Sea, bets were being freely laid (in beer) on the result.

"Bet any of you," said Private Longstaffe, who had been a bookmaker's clerk before he joined, "that old Bromley downs the blighter before we're a month older." He looked furtively round the snuggery of the "Dog and Bun."

"Well, per'aps he will; and per'aps he won't," said Peter's batman Priestley—an old soldier with curling moustaches and a roving eye. "Anyway, I 'ope 'P.J.' won't go if Bromley has to."

"P.J.'s orlright." The verdict came from a little man in the corner. "'E's orlright: though 'e does damn and swear like 'ell. My sister, she works for 'im up in the Brixton Road. "'Addick,' 'e says to me the other dai—you know the wai 'e 'as of cockin' 'is cigar up in the corner of his mouf,—"'Addick,' 'e says, "'aven't I told you a 'undred bloodstained times not to crosse your bloodstained bootlices?" 'You certainly 'ave, sir,' I says. 'Then why the 'ell,' says 'e, 'don't you do what you're told?' 'Ee don't know I know 'e's got a factory. . . ." This secret knowledge seemed to give Private Haddock a peculiar satisfaction.

Conversation meandered on.

## § 2

Meanwhile, Peter and Bromley—ignoring though quite conscious of Locksley’s growing animosity—went on with their jobs.

The two friends billeted at a low white cottage in the village street, about a hundred yards from the Mess—now established in two parlours and a long, bare dining-room at “The Feathers.” Bromley’s prophecy about Locksley bringing in his own pals was already coming true; they arrived almost daily, and the War Office added aspirants of its own. By the first week in December, officers numbered fifty.

Inevitably, cliques formed. The tiny differences of English “caste” (imperceptible to a foreigner) drew these together, separated those. Still, with few exceptions, all were keen. Without Locksley, Andrews might have driven them comfortably; made his selection at leisure; jettisoning the less trained when the Battalion proceeded overseas. But Locksley-Jones, an intriguer by instinct rather than design, shrewd without character, self-seeker and not patriot, made harmony impossible. One by one, he succeeded in securing the promotion of his favourites, posting them over the heads of men like Fanshawe and Bareton; who grumbled but carried on—loyal to their men at all personal costs.

So far, however, Major Fox-Goodwin had prevented any such interference with “B” Company. But the average Englishman’s distaste for trouble prevented him from forcing-through Bromley’s promotion to Captain.

## § 3

Peter, who, unlike Bromley, had not quarrelled openly with Locksley, and whose experience of bossing men did not include being bossed himself, failed to realize the exact position. During the day, work occupied him: through the long evenings when they sat together in the lamp-lit study, his mind was busy with other problems.

He discovered himself, for the first time in his life, missing Patricia—not the woman Patricia, but the pal Patricia: looking forward eagerly to her letters. Murray had enlisted—she wrote. She herself was busy; had taken up volunteer war-work; driving soldiers-on-leave across London in the car. But she accepted his suggestion that they should spend Christmas together at the Royal York.

But Patricia was not the main problem. Deliberately, Peter had postponed decision on the Nirvana gamble till the completion of the year’s trading. But instinct already warned him of the worst. Reid’s dissected statistics revealed, all too clearly, a serious decline in the export-business. Home-trade held stationary—but could

hardly remain so on their limited advertising. Bramson's letters had lost "snap": he deplored, without suggesting remedies, the increase of competition—especially from his cousin's travellers. "The Pullman business is going ahead. They're not cutting down *their* advertisements," was the burden of his cry: a cry which did not deceive our Mr. Jameson.

Peter realized perfectly, had done for some time, the danger of employing a competitor's relative. On the other hand, if it became vital to sell out, that very danger might be turned to advantage. Marcus Bramson would not let his cousin lose a good job ("*and* the best part of a thousand pounds," argued Peter) if there were a chance of acquiring Nirvana as a going concern.

But the ease with which, he felt, he could dispose of the business was poor consolation at best. Although decision had been reached, and reached irrevocably, before joining the Army, Peter could not contemplate without emotion the cold fact of giving up his factory.

The thing had meant so much to him; meant much still. If only he could save it! But Arthur's two thousand precluded drawing another penny of capital from Jamesons: and, though it was not impossible to secure money in other ways—on his assurances for instance—the gamble would be too dangerous. . . .

To Peter, considering these points over the wreckage of tea, and Bromley, plunged as usual in a book, entered—on an afternoon early in December—Jack Bareton of "C" Company; said, "Hallo, you chaps. Just thought I'd look you up," and dropped onto the horse-hair sofa in the corner of the tiny sitting-room.

"Don't see you round often," commented Bromley. He pushed the cigarettes across the table, and added: "What's the matter?"

"Locksley." The newcomer's voice was curt; but his eyes, the eyes of a fanatic, blazed. "Locksley, blast his dirty soul."

"Oh, chuck it," said Peter, "I'm sick of Locksley."

"So am I; so's Fanshawe; so's every decent chap in this show. If you two came into Mess a bit more often you'd know. But he's gone too far this time." The tone became shrill. "Too damn far altogether; and I'm going to have him out of this battalion or go myself. The man's a blasted traitor. A traitor, I tell you."

"Easy on, Bareton," Bromley spoke very calmly. "You can't make accusations like that about him."

"I can. And I do. He said just now, over tea, right in front of everybody, that we should lose this war."

"We probably shall," put in Peter.

"It depends how these things are said. He *meant* it, I tell you. He *meant* it. And

damn it, oh, *damn* it”—there were tears in the man’s eyes—“my governor was killed yesterday! Killed, I tell you. At Ypres. And all these bastards here can do is to talk about their bloody promotions. . . .”

Bromley got up; put his hand on Bareton’s shoulder. “I’m awfully sorry, old chap,” he said gruffly, “but your governor wouldn’t want you to lose your head, you know.”

The man pulled himself together with a huge effort; took a cigarette; puffed at it in silence. Came a knock on the door, and Fanshawe, tall, beetle-browed, obviously on the trail of his friend.

“Hallo, Fan,” said Peter.

“Hallo, P.J.” Then to Bareton, “Oh, here you are, are you? I’ve been looking for you everywhere. Come down town and have a drink.”

“I’m going to see the Colonel first,” said Bareton stubbornly.

“No, you’re not. You’re coming to the Club with me.” Fanshawe walked over, pulled his friend to his feet. “Come on, you old ass,” he said kindly. . . .

They went out.

“Poor devil,” said Peter, “he must have bolted straight here from Mess. . . .”

“And Fanshawe followed him.”

Both men, though neither would have admitted the fact to the other, were on edge.

“Fanshawe was right not to leave him alone,” went on Bromley. “You never know what a chap will do when he gets into that sort of state. Thank goodness, I’m a quiet old stick, I am.”

He shook his big frame; tugged at his moustache; sat down again. Peter lit a cigar. But neither Peter’s smoke nor Bromley’s book could keep Bareton out of their minds. He seemed to be still on the sofa, blazing tears in blazing eyes.

“Let’s call up a taxi and go into Brighton,” said Peter suddenly. “I can’t stick this room any more tonight.”

Bromley looked up from “The Newcomes”—“We’ll share it, then.”

“No, we won’t. My taxi and my dinner. Go and get your slacks on. I’ll run out and telephone for the car.”

## § 4

The Hotel Metropole at Brighton is a monstrous edifice of red-brick and iron balconies, which leers stolidly across an asphalt “Front” to the sea. The stone steps of its entrance, occupied of a morning by fat couples in wicker chairs, lead under a



glass-roofed portico, through a revolving door past the mahogany "Reception Offices" to a narrow hall—fire-placed and crowded with comfortable Maplesque upholstery. Beyond, are marble corridors, lifts, and a dark lounge which opens out into a vast conservatory of glass-and-iron work, wherein the band plays and love-birds (some caged, some in coats and skirts) twitter behind dusty palm-trees.

In front of the fire-place in the hall, cocktail in hand, looking down on his wife's blond head, stood "Weasel" Stark of the Gunners.

His nickname fitted the dapper fresh-complexioned little soldier well. He had reddish hair, inclined to curl: eyes of clear cold blue: flat auburn moustache over firm lips. The tight long-skirted tunic, beltless for dinner, fitted like a skin over the muscled shoulders, the in-curved back: his slacks fell straightly creased to shining brown shoes. His hands—clean capable hands—showed a hint of freckling, the suspicion of auburn fluff. The domed forehead betrayed intelligence. A brand-new D.S.O. ribbon completes the picture.

Alice Stark (once, as Alice Sewell, the object of Jack Baynet's none-too-stable affections) was a comfortable little person, brown-eyed, a little rabbit about the mouth. Her low dress, blue and girlish, revealed excellent shoulders, firm arms and slim hands.

The pair had been married six months: three of which the husband had spent on active service. A wound in the foot, now almost healed, had re-united them.

"Almost time for dinner, I think," said the Colonel, putting his empty glass on the mantelshelf behind him.

"Yes, dear." Alice looked up; saw, pushing squirrel-wise through the revolving door, a familiar figure.

The figure came towards her, and she recognized—after a minute's hesitation at the disguise of khaki—our Mr. Jameson.

Bromley, following leisurely, heard her say, "Is it really you, Peter?" and then, "This is Douglas."

"How do you do, sir," Peter shook hands, introduced his friend.

"Cocktails, I think," remarked the Weasel.

"Who is he?" he asked his wife, while the two were depositing hats and coats in the cloak-room opposite.

"Peter Jameson. He married a great friend of mine," she whispered.

"Better invite 'em both to dinner."

Alice nodded: and the invitation was accepted over the cocktail glasses. They passed through the glass door into the dining-room—Bromley, always shy with strangers, last—and were escorted through the crowd to an empty table.

Said the Colonel, handling the wine-list, "We can manage a Magnum, I think."

They settled down to hors d'œuvres and gossip.

"Are you on leave, sir?" Bromley ventured his first remark.

"Leave? No such luck. I'm commanding one of these Kitchener Brigades." He gave the number. "Southdown Division, I believe they call it."

"Then we are going to have some Artillery," put in Peter. "I was told at the War Office, when I applied for my commission that there wasn't going to be any Artillery with the new Armies."

"Who told you that fairy-tale?" said Stark.

"A Colonel Thompson."

"Oh, Cocky Thompson. Just like him. Pulling your leg, of course. So you joined the Infanteers, thinking the war would be done before you could get your kit. And you"—he turned to Bromley—"you're a Cavalryman if ever I saw one!"

Bromley explained himself: the Colonel, who never put questions without a reason, following sharply.

"Like the Chalkshires?" he queried suddenly: and gathered, from the tone of the answer, all he wanted to know. The Weasel, in addition to having one of the best heads for strong liquor in the Gunners, was no mean judge of a man. Also, the "fourth Southdown Brigade" of the R.F.A.<sup>[2]</sup> needed officers badly. He let his wife change the conversation.

"And how does Pat like you're being a soldier?" she said to Peter. "Fancy her being only a subaltern's 'poor thing,' and me a 'Colonel's lady'! Does she come down here often?"

"She's coming down for Christmas."

Bromley and the Weasel began to talk horse; the dinner went on. . . .

"And Francis?" asked Alice. "What is our Francis Gordon doing for his country?"

Bromley broke off from a discussion on "Birdcatcher blood," said "That isn't *the* Francis Gordon, is it? The chap who wrote 'The Nut Errant'?"

"Extraordinary," thought Peter, having explained the relationship, "how many people *do* know that weird cousin of mine." And he wondered, for the fiftieth time, what could have happened to Francis. But of Mr. "Raymond P. Sellers" and the Amsterdam trip, he said nothing. . . .

Dinner over, they settled themselves with coffee, liqueurs and cigars, before the fire in the hall. The band was playing in the Winter Garden, the hall almost deserted.

Stark, whom two cocktails, the best part of a bottle of fizz and three liqueur brandies had left quite unmoved, began a tactful catechism. He wanted to know the

number of subalterns in the Chalkshires; what chance they had of promotion: who their Colonel was; and how they got on with him: if Peter knew anything about horses; and why he had given up fox-hunting. Having assured himself on these points, he threw his cigar into the grate, and asked suddenly:

“I suppose neither of you two would care for a change?”

Bromley said, “I don’t quite understand?” Peter, who had followed the drift of the conversation almost from the first, did not speak.

“Well, quite *entre nous*,” began Stark, “I’m eight officers short of my twenty-four. I’ve written to Dawson at the W.O. and he says”—drawing a letter from his tunic-pocket—“‘Why not hunt about among the Infanteers? They’re hundreds over establishment in your Division.’ . . . So I thought perhaps. . . .”

There fell a short silence: then Peter said: “It’s the men I’m thinking about;” and Bromley: “I shouldn’t care to leave the old Major.”

“Well, take your time about it. There’s no hurry. We’ve only got fifty horses out of our seven hundred so far.” The Weasel pulled down his tunic; rang the bell; ordered three whiskies and sodas, a lemonade.

Shortly afterwards, with a “See you two again, I hope,” from the Colonel, and a “Yes. Do come in and dine with us, won’t you?” from his wife, the couple stepped across to the lift, shot upwards out of sight.

“Another drink?” asked Peter, lighting a cigar.

“Not much.” Bromley, a little flushed about the gills, tapped a cigarette on the back of his case. “That Colonel friend of yours must have a head like a balk of teak.”

They settled themselves comfortably in front of the fire. It lacked five minutes to half-past ten. Thought Bromley: “P.J. doesn’t realize how near we are to a bust-up. If anything happened to the old Major, Locksley would soon put his foot on *us*.” Thought Peter: “If ‘B’ Company weren’t so jolly good: and if we hadn’t made it ourselves: there might be something in a transfer.” But the evening had yet to provide its finale.

“Hallo, P.J.” interrupted a voice.

Peter looked up; saw the bow legs, the unpleasant features of Locksley-Jones. The fellow came over to the fire; stood with his back to it; said—taking no notice of Bromley—“Care for a drink, P.J.?”

“Thanks. No.”

“Devilish pretty woman you were talking to just now. Wish you’d introduce me, some time. . . .” Peter did not answer: he thought, suddenly, of the tears in Bareton’s eyes.

“By the way,” went on Locksley, taking no notice of the snub, “have you chaps got a taxi? My car’s broken down. The magneto’s gone wrong, I believe. If you have, I’d like a lift. . . .”

Bromley never moved.

“I’m sorry,” said Peter, very politely, “but our taxi only holds *two*. However”—he glanced at his wrist-watch—“You’re in nice time for the last train.”

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“That’s put the lid on it,” remarked Bromley in the darkness of the jolting car: and, just before they went to sleep, “Mark my words, there’ll be some trouble in this ruddy Battalion.”

There was!

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[2] Royal Field Artillery.

## § 5

It started with Bareton. Bareton, disregarding both Locksley and his new Company-Commander (a full Lieutenant by right of being over thirty), went straight to Colonel Andrews. He told the Colonel, very respectfully until he began to lose his temper, that on no account would he, Jack Bareton, continue to serve in the same regiment as Locksley-Jones. The Colonel asked him, very mildly, why he objected to Locksley.

Said Bareton—they were alone in the Orderly Room—“With all due respect to you, sir, the man isn’t fit to hold His Majesty’s Commission.”

Said the Colonel, “If you have any accusation to make against my Adjutant, you must make it in his presence. Meanwhile, go back to your billet and consider yourself under open arrest till I send for you.”

The Mess seethed.

On the following day, Jack Bareton (without his belt) confronted Locksley before the Colonel’s table:—Major Fox-Goodwin, as temporary second-in-command, lounging, slightly contemptuous, by the fireplace.

Decided the Colonel, having listened to ten minutes of tight-lipped vituperation—all true, but entirely incapable of proof, and some clever dialectics for the defence: “It doesn’t, er, seem to me, Bareton, that you’ve made out any case at all. It seems to me that, er, having heard the Adjutant’s explanation of what are, er, obvious misconceptions on your part, it’s your duty to apologize.”

Jack Bareton stood very quietly for six seconds. Then he said: "As I am not satisfied with your ruling, sir"—he was, it will be remembered, a lawyer by profession—"I believe I am entitled to call for a Court of Enquiry."

The Colonel sent both juniors out of the room. "What had we better do?" he asked Fox-Goodwin. The Major's eyes twinkled.

"Get rid of 'em both, me dear fellow. Get rid of 'em *both*."

"I can't do that. Locksley's a very capable fellow, very capable indeed. Locksley's saved me a great deal of trouble."

"Has he?" thought the Major. But discipline is discipline.

"A Court of Enquiry won't do the Regiment any good," went on Andrews. "Besides, it might break Bareton. Bareton's a good subaltern, and a patriotic chap. . . . I hate trouble," he added pathetically. . . .

Bareton, re-called, found himself alone with the Major who said: "Look here, me lad, take a tip from a fellow who's old enough to be your grandfather. Don't you press this Court of Enquiry. Ask for a transfer, see!"

"But it's so damned unfair, sir."

"I know that as well as you do, me lad. But we've got to think of the men. . . ."

A week later, Bareton *and* Fanshawe transferred to the Reserve Battalion. (Fanshawe died at Festhubert: Bareton still lives—all that the Hun prison-camps have left of him).

But matters did not end there. Locksley-Jones, confirmed in his position, sent for Peter privately. Peter, who was shooting on the miniature range at the time, finished his score with a "highest possible"; looked about for Bromley; couldn't find him; strolled very slowly to the Orderly Room. Locksley, alone, went on writing for a clear minute. Then he said, "Oh, is that you, Jameson? I just wanted to have a private talk with you. You know, you're a very clever fellow, Jameson. But you're not clever enough to tackle *me*."

Peter deliberately took off his cap, and sat down—at the Colonel's table.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I must take your word for that. Go on."

Our Mr. Jameson was not an easy person to "discipline"—especially if one happened to have put oneself in the wrong by making the talk unofficial.

"Can't we pull together, P.J.?" went on Locksley. "You know I can do you much more good than your pal Bromley. There's your second star, for instance. . . ."

Peter couldn't help admiring the audacity of the fellow. He wanted to consolidate his position; didn't care how, so long as he achieved his purpose.

"And supposing I were to tell the C.O. what you've just suggested?"

"He wouldn't believe you—any more than he believed Bareton. The old man's

as weak as water. You know that as well as I do.”

Peter controlled the impulse to hit Locksley in the face, and asked: “Is that all?”

“Oh, of course”—Locksley fell into the trap—“when we come to alloting the Captaincies. Let’s see”—he referred to a list—“you haven’t got any Captains in ‘B’ yet. If the Major goes. . . .”

This was news indeed. Now, Peter saw the plan whole. With complacent Company-Commanders and a weak Colonel, Locksley’s position would be unique.

“Is the Major going?” he asked—playing for time.

“Between you and me and the gatepost”—Locksley winked—“the W.O. has just asked if he is ‘considered fit to command a battalion.’”

Thought Peter: “What a swine! Still—if it weren’t for Bromley, I’d accept. I could run the show as well as most people.” Said 2nd Lieutenant Peter Jameson: “There’s a good deal in what you say. But I must have a little time to make up my mind. By the way, you don’t object to my taking a day or so extra at Christmas.”

“Not a bit, my dear fellow, not a bit.”

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Meanwhile, men died in Flanders.

# *PART NINE*

## TWO EXCUSES FOR FAILURE

### § 1

Peter's Patricia was essentially a simple woman. The early training received from her father, her education, her first nine years of married life, had all taught her the necessity of "balance," the advantage of reasoning things out for herself—but they had only developed, not altered, her original character: the matehood and the motherhood in her.

This new love for Peter, suddenly (and as she now believed reasonlessly) conceived on the night he informed her of his decision to apply for a commission, had struck deep roots. But, as yet, it gave neither leaf nor blossom.

Always, she felt conscious of it. Nearly always, the consciousness irritated her. To begin with, married women with completed families—she argued—ought to have got over that sort of thing. Secondly, there was no likelihood—"very little likelihood" corrected instinct—of the love developing into a mutual passion: they had become too set in their matrimonial comradeship for any such occurrence. And thirdly—this formed the main irritation—her sudden change of feeling towards the man was not *reasonable*.

One might—she decided—hate a husband because he wouldn't fight for his country. One needn't on the other hand fall madly in love with him (after eight tranquil years) just because he decided to do the right thing. Besides, he hadn't "gone out," yet—perhaps he never would. For Patricia's experiences in driving tired mud-stained men from the cold darkness of Victoria Station to their outlying homes, had taught her the sharp difference between training in England, however uncomfortable, and the rigours of active service: taught her that difference better than her brother Jack's careful letters from the front itself.

Resultantly, she arrived at the "Royal York," (tooling the Crossley like a professional chauffeur), very much on her guard.

### § 2

Brighton-on-Sea's first war-Christmas betrayed no lack of prosperity. Its hotels, booked up weeks in advance, its saloons, its piers, its theatres and its picture-houses

palpitated gaiety. From their billets in Shoreham Town and Portslade, in Worthing and beyond Worthing, the Southdown Division poured in a constant stream of blue-clad men and khaki-clad officers: London sent flappers and chorus-ladies, middle-aged business men and elderly idlers, frisky matrons and demure maidens. The whole town seemed one strolling, dancing, theatre-going, drinking promenade.

"Preston must be making a lot of money," said Peter, as he and his wife took their first meal together in the crowded dining-room.

"I suppose so." She had never known him quite so absorbed. "Is there anything the matter, Peter?" she went on.

"Lots. I'll tell you after lunch. I wrote you about Alice being here, didn't I?"

"Yes, but you didn't say where she was staying."

"At the Metropole. We're to dine with them this evening. There's a dance or something, I believe."

He was enormously glad to have her with him: but far too occupied about regimental and other matters to shew it. The handsome woman sitting opposite to him—tight chinchilla motor-bonnet and plain Lovat-tweed tailor-made accentuated both figure and fairness—summoned many eyes in that room: but not her husband's.

Luncheon over, they settled themselves in the little apartment leading off the lounge; drew chairs to the fire: and he sketched for her the position as between himself and Locksley, Bromley and Locksley, the regiment and Locksley.

Her limited experience of men could not grasp it.

"But, Peter, it all seems so childish. Like a lot of boys at school. And surely, with people being killed every day, this is not the time for you others to quarrel."

"You're perfectly right, old thing. That's what I told Harold only last night. What makes me mad is that one man can do so much harm. Honestly, if it weren't for Locksley I believe we should never have had any of this trouble. As it is," he paused a moment, "we two have decided to get out."

"But isn't that," she said the words deliberately, "an admission of failure?"

"I suppose it is," he reflected. "But what am I to do? It wouldn't be playing the game to accept promotion over a friend's head." . . .

"No. I suppose not." She began to realize that his seriousness had its reasons. "But the men?" she asked.

"I know." He grew very silent. In those three months Peter had learned a great affection for "B" Company, which he had watched grow from a mere mob to an orderly body; a body to be moved at will and by a word. Individuals too, he would be sorry to part from: Gladeney, Sergeant Atkins, his servant Priestley, "long" Longstaffe who started the choruses from the leading "four" in Number Five platoon,



a funny little chap called Haddock, always untidy but always willing. "It's best for them, though. Rows between officers don't do the men any good. But you're right about it being a failure, Pat. I suppose that's what's making me so mad."

Only then, did she quite understand. It *was* failure: but failure excused by loyalty: loyalty to a friend, loyalty to his sense of playing the game, loyalty to that intangible thing—the spirit of a regiment, against which individuals do not count.

"I'm sorry." She laid a hand on his arm. He took it, rather shamefacedly: said "Come on, old thing. Let's go out for a walk."

### § 3

They walked straight out of the hotel into the arms of a voluble stout little civilian, with eyebrows like the horns of a stag-beetle, a blue silk muffler round his throat and a bowler hat, not quite clean, crammed down over his big head.

"And how are you, Mr. Jameson? Very glad to see you, I'm sure. My cousin Sam told me I might run into you down here."

Peter introduced Marcus Bramson, owner of Bramson's Pullman Virginia's ("the cigarette you *must* try") to a slightly standoffish Patricia.

"A fine fellow, your husband, Mrs. Jameson. Everybody in the trade is proud of the way he enlisted. Right at the start, too. I was telling my cousin Sam, only the other night, how grateful he ought to be to work for such a man."

They couldn't get rid of Marcus! He stood there, looking like a strapped mummy in his tight overcoat, pouring out compliments and trade-gossip alternately.

"Poor young Schornstein. He's been killed, you know. Sam Elkins gave his car to the Red Cross. I'm an old man, worse luck. Still, I'm trying to do my bit. And Mrs. Bramson, she's running a canteen.

"Well, I mustn't be keeping you like this," he said at last. "We're spending Christmas at this hotel. So if you're passing again, drop in and take a drink with us. I'd like to have a little private talk with you, Mr. Jameson," he added, as he wrenched off his hat and passed in through the glass doors.

"Quaint old bird, Marcus," announced Peter, still smarting under the compliments. "Did you see what he was driving at?"

"No." Patricia swung down the crowded parade. "I only thought of his clothes. How *can* he afford to stay at the 'Royal York?'"

"Marcus must be worth at least a quarter of a million. He's one of those chaps who simply can't help making money. And he spends nothing. They live in an eighty-pound villa at Maida Vale, keep two servants, and take a holiday like this three times

a year.”

They threaded their way out of the crowd; made towards Hove. It was a mild, misty afternoon: sun hanging low and scarlet over a dun sea.

“And what *was* he driving at?” she asked.

“Nirvana.”

“But you’re not going to sell it, Peter?” She looked round at him; but his eyes avoided her.

“I’m afraid so, dear.”

They walked on.

“Failure again!” he commented bitterly.

Now, she was loving him madly, reasonlessly. And she couldn’t help him. He had gone back beyond her reach, into the old world: the world of denied accomplishment.

“Failure,” he repeated.

“It isn’t.” Her eyes lit. “It isn’t. It’s splendid. To give up something you really loved for the sake of your country—*that* can’t be failure.”

“Oh, *the country*. . . .” The word was almost a sneer. This man’s patriotism lay deep down in his nature, a thing of whispers and suggestions, a thing to die for but not to discuss.

“The country!” he went on. “We don’t want to lose you, but we think you ought to go’. . . . And once you have gone, we’ll take devilish good care to snaffle anything you’ve left behind you.”

“You don’t mean a word you’re saying.” The hostility in her tone caught his ear. In eight years, they had never quarrelled. This Patricia was as new to her husband as to herself. He walked on in silence.

“You could resign your commission, I suppose?” She said it purposely, meaning to provoke him.

“Resign! Damn it, woman, you don’t know what you’re talking about.” It was the first time he had ever sworn at her. Inwardly she laughed.

“I’m sorry, old thing,” he said a minute later.

She stalked on haughtily. She was flirting, deliberately flirting, with her own husband. And she felt a fool. Rather a delicious fool, though. Suddenly, he became aware of her; acutely, physically almost. . . . Then the custom of years overwhelmed both.

“The trout,” remarked Patricia, “took the May-fly with a rush. . . .”

He caught her meaning at once. “But you shouldn’t rag about that sort of thing, Pat.”

“You deserved it. And besides, you lost your temper with me. That means a forfeit—fizz for dinner.”

They had drifted back—neither quite realizing—to the early days of their marriage.

“There’ll be plenty of bubbly tonight, without my standing any.” He began to talk about Alice’s husband. She countered with a relation of Violet’s sudden prosperity. Peter had not told about his quarrel with Herbert Rawlings: Pat objected to criticism of her relatives—even when she knew the criticism justified. His little mood of bitterness passed; leaving only a caustic humour in its wake.

“Great man, that brother-in-law of yours,” he laughed. “I saw his picture in one of the illustrateds last week. They called him ‘a patriotic war-worker.’ I think. Something of the sort. . . .”

## § 4

They returned for tea in the lounge; and were unavoidably buttonholed by Marcus Bramson, looking shabbier than ever in a greasy tail-coat and elastic-sided boots.

“Mrs. Bramson would be so glad to know you,” he told Patricia, “but she’s lying down at the moment. So you won’t mind, Mrs. Jameson, if your husband and I have a little talk?”

He drew a chair to their table, began to gossip. Tea over, Pat accepted the cigarette he offered; leaned back in her sofa. They made a curious contrast: her husband, workmanlike in his khaki, cigar in the corner of his mouth, very deliberate, (it was the first time she had ever seen him talking business to a stranger); and the voluble little old man, wheedling, gesticulating,—but never missing a point.

“That cousin of mine,” began Bramson, “he’s always been a bit of a waster, you know. Good fellow, excellent salesman—but no head for money.”

“Oh, come,” began Peter.

“Nice of you to stand up for him, Mr. Jameson. Very nice of you, I must say. But I know him better than you do. Now, between you and me”—the voice dropped—“he’s not doing you any good.”

Much as Peter hated the idea of parting with Nirvana, he could not but appreciate Marcus’ opening.

The old man paused. “I always did wonder” he went on reflectively, “why you wanted to bother yourself with that factory. It isn’t as if you hadn’t got another business. A rich young man like you don’t want to trouble himself about making

cigarettes. Now Jamesons, that's a good business, that is. . . ."

"Trying to buy me out?" The attack came suddenly—and to Patricia, unexpectedly.

"I wouldn't mind." Bramson lit himself a cigarette. "I'm always buying businesses, I am."

He waited for his opponent to speak; waited vainly.

"Well? What do you think about it, Mr. Jameson?"

"To tell you the truth," prevaricated Peter, "I've never contemplated such a thing."

To the woman-mind of Patricia, the conversation grew more and more fantastic; seemed like the game of cross-purposes and crooked answers she had played as a child. "Here"—she reasoned—"were two men, one of whom obviously wanted to buy, the other to sell. Why, then, all this finessing?"

Gradually, she lost interest; began to think of her kiddies. What a shame they should be left alone for Christmas. She blamed herself a little, her desire to be alone with Peter. . . . Six o'clock! And she hadn't unpacked yet. . . .

Both men got up to bid her *au revoir*: sat down again. She could hear their voices as she waited for the lift.

"*You* don't want to be bothered with it, Mr. Jameson. Not now you're in the Army. And I'd pay you a good price. I would *reelly*."

## § 5

Unpacking Peter's haversack in the warm, lighted bedroom with the drawn blue curtains and the two brass bedsteads, Patricia found a bundle of correspondence addressed "Francis Gordon, Esq., 10 Mecklinburgh Square." A postcard, an American picture-post-card, dropped out of the bundle: lay, address downwards, on the carpet. The colouring and design—a large white hotel set among palm-trees—caught her eyes; and she could not help reading the handwriting underneath: "*A happy Christmas. It's a long time since you've written. Why? B.C.*"

Patricia had asked herself the same question many times in the last months. Nobody knew exactly what had happened to Francis Gordon. Except Peter. She felt certain that Peter knew. But Peter wouldn't say; contented himself, in reply to verbal enquiries with: "All I can tell you, is that he's all right." Her letters on the subject, he had calmly ignored. . . .

## § 6

Colonel Stark's Christmas Eve dinner-party at the Metropole did not belie his reputation for bibulous hospitality. A tray of cocktails, poised unsteadily on a tiny table, opened the proceedings; sherry accompanied the soup; Chambertin followed Niersteiner ("patriotism," announced the Weasel, quoting Bismarck, "stops at the palate"), Bollinger preceded port and brandy.

They sat down, a round dozen of them, to a round table, red with holly and white with mistletoe, in a private sitting-room on the first floor: three married couples, the Starks, the Jamesons, Colonel and Mrs. Mallory (a jolly old Artillery "dug-out," well over seventy, with red cheeks, white moustaches, and a pink and white wife, five years his junior, to match): Harold Bromley, very shy with Mrs. Armitage, a sprightly middle-aged widow, alternately horsy and languorous: Torrington, a fair pale dark-eyed boy, who wore the three stars of a Captain, and told Patricia, when she asked what his brick-red medal-ribbon betokened, "That's the Vic. C.,<sup>[3]</sup> Mrs. Jameson": Purves, fresh from Oxford, with a budding moustache and a Balliol drawl, still self-conscious about his subaltern's kit: Lodden, a fierce-looking black-moustached Major of Territorials, who appeared in a frightful rage about the world in general: and Pettigrew, a silent youngster, not in the least shy, who twinkled whenever one spoke to him.

They ate; and they drank; and they talked; slowly, and except for Lodden, without any undue excitement.

Said Lodden to Mrs. Mallory, stabbing furiously at his last morsel of fish: "But the thing's a scandal. A positive scandal."

"What's a scandal?" asked the Weasel from the opposite end of the table.

"I was talking about the Foreign Office, Colonel. They tell me that cotton's pouring into Germany, simply pouring in, through Holland."

"Oh, I thought you meant a really amusing scandal, Major," put in Mrs. Armitage.

"Plenty of that about in Brighton, if one looks for it," scowled the Major.

Everybody laughed: and Lodden, distinctly pleased with himself, attacked the next course. The Burgundy arrived: and with its outpouring, talk quickened. The two Colonels fell into an argument about who won the Grand Military Steeplechase in '93; Mrs. Armitage, abandoning Bromley as hopeless, turned her attention to Pettigrew and Purves,—repartees snapping back and forwards between the three of them; Mrs. Mallory did her best to smooth another grievance of Lodden's; Peter and Alice talked Devonshire, her county.

Said Torrington to Patricia, "I hear your husband may be coming to us, Mrs. Jameson. If he does you must come down to Brighton and stay."—*sotto voce*—"I'll find you a horse to ride. It's against regulations, of course. . . ."

"How did you know about Peter?" smiled Patricia, looking her stateliest in black velvet.

"I'm helping the Colonel in the office. Light duty, you know. He told me he meant to get your husband and that other chap, Bromley. The Colonel usually gets what he goes for." He looked meaningly across at Alice, and added maliciously. "By the way, aren't you Jacky Baynet's sister?"

"Yes."

"Jacky was devilish cut-up when the old man married Alice. . . ."

Waiters brought in the champagne, three magnums.

"I am perfectly certain," drawled Purves—in the middle of a hush—to the widow, "that any more wine will have a most intoxicating affect on the party."

"Turn his glass down, Mrs. Armitage." This from the Weasel. "We musn't let the children get into bad habits."

Mrs. Armitage obeyed: and the two struggled amiably together, Pettigrew twinkling over the fray.

"Peter," lisped Alice, bubbling glass at red lips, "Douglas is so keen on you and your friend coming to *us*."

Our Mr. Jameson, whose head was very nearly as good as the Weasel's own, drained his bumper before replying. "Oh, we're coming," he said.

"Douglas will be pleased. Douglas dear," she called across to her husband, "I've got you two new officers."

By now the whole table, not excepting Bromley, were in that pleasant state when the better-class Englishman becomes almost as talkative as the average foreigner.

"Don't talk shop in mess, me dear," beamed Stark: and to Mallory, "How long did it take you to discipline your wife, sir?"

Mallory, ("Sir" by right of age), looked across at his Hetty, said: "Hopeless task, Stark. Hopeless task."

By general request, the ladies did not rise with the port. They drank the King-Emperor's health, proposed by Purves as the most junior officer present: a Merry Christmas (Colonel Mallory); and "*Gott strafe* Germany," (Major Lodden).

The Weasel looked at his watch. "If you youngsters"—he winked at Mallory—"want to dance, it's about time we went downstairs."

Alice rustled out with the ladies: her husband came over to Peter and Bromley; said: "Better come to my office, both of you, the day after tomorrow."

"I don't know if I'll be able to manage it, sir," replied Bromley. "I may be on duty."

"Then get some one else to do your duty," snapped the Weasel. It was the only sign he gave, during the whole evening, of an alcoholic consumption which would have put any ordinary man under the table.

"Rummy devil," confided Torrington to Peter and Bromley, as they strolled downstairs. "I was in his battery at Le Cateau. Brave! My hat—" this from a V.C. —"if his wife knew how he really got that D.S.O. she'd have a fit."

"Tell me," said Peter. But Torrington, who won his own "gong" at the same time, grew suddenly shy; broke off the conversation.

They descended to the cellar-like dancing-room, found it crowded. Rag-time thumped; lights blazed; couples slithered. Purves, too gentlemanly for words, was already partnering Mrs. Armitage: Pettigrew had taken the Colonel's wife: Mrs. Mallory, despite her husband's jocular entreaties, refused to dance: Major Lodden was grouching to Patricia.

"How about another liqueur?" suggested Torrington.

"I don't think we'd better join the Gunners after all," laughed Bromley to Peter: but he went to the bar with them just the same. There, they found the Weasel, drinking brandy-and-soda.

"You youngsters had better not drink any more tonight," he commanded. "Why aren't you dancing?"

"I'm not sure, sir," from Torrington, "that I quite approve of officers dancing in their khaki."

"I'm quite sure I *don't*"—the Colonel's blue eyes hardened—"but the ladies insist."

They stood chatting till the music stopped. None of the four had drunk too much: but each of them, according to his capacity, had had quite enough. Bromley detailed a South African experience; Torrington capped it with a story of the Retreat; the Colonel listened professionally.

Peter had arrived at that mellow stage when he could regard the failures of our Mr. Jameson from a standpoint of pleasant detachment: in which state he decided that our Mr. Jameson was inclined to take life a little too seriously. During the remainder of the evening—except for the last "John Peel" which Torrington claimed—he and Patricia danced accurately with each other. . . .

## § 7

They walked home together, arm-in-arm, down the darkling sea-front. A moist breeze blew in their faces: and she clung to him. Their old-time friendship seemed to have renewed itself. The man felt supremely contented: the woman—a trifle off her guard. . . .

And then, they found Marcus Bramson waiting up for them!

He was prowling about the half-lit lounge, purpose in his eye; insisted they must come to his sitting-room; be introduced to Mrs. Bramson; have “one little glass of something, just to celebrate Christmas Day.”

“Confound Marcus,” yawned Peter as—some hours later—he struggled sleepily between cool sheets, “it must be about two G. M.”

“Half-past,” corrected Patricia, combing gold hair before the slanting mirror. She came over; kissed him according to custom; climbed into her own bed; switched off the lights.

## § 8

Peter’s leave lasted four days; and Marcus Bramson haunted every hour of it.

They found him in the lounge when they came down to breakfast, still there—eager for a chat—when they had finished; they ran into him, asking for letters at the porter’s lodge, as they went out for their morning walk; he and Mrs. Bramson, an over-awed woman of the middle-fifties, met them on the Front; trailed them back to lunch; followed them to the Metropole for tea; sat next to them at dinner; pursued them to the Hippodrome; waited up for them late, prevented them going to bed early.

On Boxing Day, when Peter and Bromley returned to the hotel from their first official interview with Colonel Stark, eager to discuss the arrangements made—the letter Stark had written to Andrews, the letters they must write to Andrews, their interview with General Blacklock, Commanding Southdown Divisional Artillery—it was to find Patricia wedged between Marcus and his wife, virtually a prisoner.

Escape, except in the car—and it rained two days out of the four—was impossible.

Once even, the persistent old man waylaid Patricia alone; and she had to listen, for a long half hour, to his protestations: “You see, Mrs. Jameson, it’s like this. I know my cousin, Sam. He’s a waster. A good fellow, but no head for figures. And your husband had much better sell that business now. He’ll lose a bit; but he’ll lose



more if he waits. Honestly, Mrs. Jameson, I'm not thinking only of myself—nor Sam neither. I like your husband. He's a patriotic chap. And I'll pay him a good price. I will *reelly*. Only he's so obstinate. Won't you use your influence with him, Mrs. Jameson. . . .”

“The funny thing about Marcus,” laughed Peter when she told him of the interview, “is that he feels he'll be doing me a kindness. Marcus isn't a bad old boy at heart: but my word, he is a bore.”

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Patricia, driving Londonwards through the rain, could not make up her mind whether the Bramsons had been a bore or a godsend. Falling in love with one's own husband has its disadvantages!

# *PART TEN*

## GUNS, COUNTING-HOUSES, AND COUNTER-ESPIONAGE

### § 1

If ever man needed power of concentration on the immediate job, and, allied thereto, that particular quality only described by the crude Anglo-Saxon word "guts," it was Peter Jameson during the two months during which the War Office dilly-dallied over his transfer from the 10th Chalkshire Battalion of the Line to 4th Southdown Brigade, Royal Field Artillery.

The year's figures and a conference with Reid confirmed the worst about Nirvana Ltd. Their export-trade had begun to feel the shipping-difficulties; dropped weekly. Home sales were stationary; tending downward. The thing had lost momentum. Without more capital it must continue to slow down, eventually stop. Capital at the moment preferred war-bonds to cigarette-partnerships. The Bank pressed for a reduction of overdraft. And "Pretty" Bramson, as Peter phrased it, had "barely enough spunk to endorse his salary-cheque."

So Marcus got his way. Peter fought him, pound by pound, and clause by clause, to the last farthing, the last signature. The agreement, as finally drafted, was flawless; the price, all things considered, a liberal one. But the gamble had cost, not including interest which the money might have been earning for years, ten thousand pounds—a third of Peter's original fortune. In addition, it cost part of a man's soul!

They signed the ultimate document at Brixton: Marcus friendlier than ever; Peter, biting on an unlit cigar—the good gambler, taking loss with a smile. Afterwards, they walked the factory together, old proprietor introducing new proprietor—explaining this labour-saving dodge, suggesting that improvement. And nobody, not even Patricia, realized the bitterness fought down, the courage that had to be nailed to the mast.

Bitter work, bidding one's dreams good-bye!

The Jameson position, too, required concentration. The partnership deed between Peter and Simpson—a deed by which in case of one's death the survivor could retain all the capital in the firm, paying out only interest—had expired. Under the peculiar circumstances, Peter wanted it to continue as before, for the "duration." He was heavily insured, heavily enough to make good the Nirvana loss: and the

balance of his fortune, should he be killed, would be safe under Simpson's management. Simpson objected. "In the unlikely event of *his* dying, with Peter still on service, who would manage the business?"

They compromised by renewing for two years, subject only to the condition that, if Simpson died first, Peter must pay out his widow in cash. "Payment to be made within twelve months of the valuation of the estate being completed."

And then there was the irritation of Beckmanns. Try as Simpson would to replace it, many customers still insisted on the brand. Hartopp (*geborener* Hagenburg) in particular! Hartopp's turnover had increased threefold. "How he disposes of the stuff," said Simpson, "is a perfect mystery. I believe myself that half of the cases we ship to Copenhagen and Amsterdam for him, eventually find their way to Germany. But what can I do? The man's got a Government export-licence—and I can't stop him taking advantage of it."

"How much does he owe us?" asked Peter.

"Five thousand at the moment: but I've got some big orders pending."

"You're sure he's all right."

"Absolutely." Simpson wagged brown beard. "He's paying at ninety days to the second."

For the past year, thanks to seven warless months of excellent trading, Jamesons had made almost their usual profits: but Peter's capital account—with the closing of the Nirvana gamble and the money lent to his brother Arthur—showed a big drop; stood at considerably less than twenty thousand pounds.

It seemed only prudent to try and let furnished the house in Lowndes Square. The Rawlings', hourly more prosperous, would have taken it gladly: but Peter refused to negotiate with them. Eventually he secured as tenant from March quarter-day a prominent Belgian *embusqué* whose rent barely covered expenses.

Add to these circumstances the arrival of Arthur Jameson, demanding assistance of every kind from the loan of a dress-suit to the introductions necessary for a commission in the Flying Corps—and it will be seen that Peter's civilian occupations (though he was honestly pleased to see his brother again) were neither pleasant nor un strenuous.

## § 2

Patricia felt she could help but little, console even less. For it must be remembered that all such difficulties were dealt with in days of leave, extorted from a sulkily-reluctant Adjutant; failing that extortion, by telegraph, letter and long-distance

telephone. The bulk of those two months, Peter had to live with his regiment. And the regiment provided no antidote for annoyances.

Major Fox-Goodwin's promotion to the Command of the Chalkshires newly-formed twelfth Battalion, and the transfer-application of his two senior subalterns, gave Locksley, who accepted this answer to his *pourparlers* in silence, his chance. Bromley and Peter, Peabody and Arkwright, found themselves swamped out with full lieutenants, all eager for promotion to Captaincies.

It was already understood among the men that "Mr. 'Arold 'ad 'ad enough, of that there Locksley; and 'P.J.' 'e'd thrown his 'and in too." At the slightest opening, the Cockneys would have shown on which side their sympathies lay. But no such opening was provided.

The two friends carried on loyally, helping their not-too-competent seniors towards efficiency.

And always, the Company improved. By now, it had khaki uniforms (though not its equipment): and a long rifle, servicable though not "Service Pattern," for every man. It had, too, a band of its own—three flutes and two drums—to which it marched merrily along the sea-front.

Bromley, less externally occupied than Peter, grew very grave those days. It weighed on him to give up this weapon he had forged, to feel that other hands would carry it into action. To Bromley—not realizing his friend's reticence in troubles—P.J. seemed positively heartless. He cursed about Locksley every now and then; avoided him at Mess or on the streets; drank rather more than usual; but gave no other sign of being harassed either about the loss of "B" Company or the loss of Nirvana.

It was P.J. who suggested applying to Torrington for some "books about this new gunnery game," P.J. who insisted that they must study them together, "so as not to look bally idiots when our transfer does come through."

And study they did—four hours an evening—for the whole two months.

It will be observed that the Weasel proved himself no mean judge of a man's keenness when he picked out these two over a magnum of champagne!

### § 3

About this time, there arrived at the Stazione Centrale of Milan—one cold and foggy north Italian morning—an emaciated, unshaven priest, dressed in dusty *soutane* and a black shovel hat; a priest whose hands were dusty and bleeding, whose eyes shone glassy with sleeplessness, whose feet—as he limped down from the crowded third-class carriage—were shod in cracked boots, soles worn to the

welt, uppers caked and terraced with layer on layer of drying mud.

Humbly, but in excellent Italian, the priest enquired of a surly *facchino* his way to the Via Rasori; and having been told in guttural Milanese to make for the *Galleria*, to take the “*Via Dant’*,” and then the “*Via Boccacc’*,” limped out into the fog. Had that fog been less dense, the *facchino* might have noticed a hole in the priest’s shovel hat, a hole possibly made for ventilation purposes—for it had been drilled clean through the black furry felt, in at one side and out the other.

The hole was two days old; and had not happened to the hat in its passage across the *south* frontier of Switzerland—but considerably further north, on one of those dark and rainy nights when sentries fire first and challenge afterwards.

Our priest limped out of the station, thanking God for the fog, through the dank gardens (from instinct he avoided main streets near railway stations), past the Hotel Cavour, and Finzi’s shuttered dress-making shop, past the dark bulk of the Scala Theatre, through the huge empty Arcade, and across the Piazza del Duomo into the Via Dante. . . .

He had no more money in his pockets, having calculated to report at Berne: but instructions as to compromising Consuls or Legations in neutral countries were particularly explicit: and in the Swiss Capital a gentleman with a turned-up moustache had evinced peculiar interest about his movements. At the Franco-Swiss frontier, other moustached gentlemen might be waiting. So the last of our priest’s notes—he experienced some difficulty in getting change for the five German “marks”—had paid for the journey from Chiasso to Milan.

It was ten years since his last visit to the city, but he managed to find the Via Boccaccio which runs past the Dal Verme Theatre, and followed it—rather painfully for he wanted to go to sleep on every bench—till he saw, hung at the corner of a high stone house, a shield, white lettered on a red ground, “His Britannic Majesty’s Consul General for Lombardy and Venetia.”

“*Gott sei Dank*,” said the priest—and, then remembering that it was no longer necessary to *think* in German, “Thank God!”

He slinked past the porter’s lodge—the consulate is on the first floor—dragged himself up the marble stairs; and rang the bell.

Mr. Towsey, brown-bearded, short of stature, determined of eye, opened the door himself. He had just made his early cup of tea; his mother was still in bed; their servant gossiping downstairs.

“*Ma cosa vuole a cuest’ora?*” he said.

“*Console Inglese?*” asked the priest.

“*Si. Ma cosa vuole?*”

*“Lasc’entrare. Non posso parlarvi qui.”*

The door closed behind them.

Mr. Towsey led into a square bare room, safe in one corner, desk near the window.

*“Ebbene?”* began the consul.

“For the Lord’s sake give me a cigarette,” said Francis Gordon.

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He had no papers to prove his identity. His eyes kept closing all the time he talked. The hand which held the cigarette shook like a jelly on a plate. He would neither say whence he had come, nor why, nor how. But he knew exactly what he wanted: he wanted Mr. Towsey—he said it over and over again—to send a telegram, a telegram in Embassy cypher addressed to the British Foreign Office for transmission to I. D. War Office. Also, he wanted to go to bed until the answer arrived.

“But hang it all,” said the Consul, “I don’t know anything about you. You turn up at seven o’clock in the morning. You start by talking Italian. Then you ask for a cigarette in English. Now you want me to let you use our secret code-book, and to pay for the cable out of government funds. . . .”

“And after that,” yawned Francis, “I want to sleep in your spare bed-room till the answer arrives.”

Mr. Towsey felt himself in an awkward position. Italy was still neutral; the diplomatic situation growing hourly more complicated. Then he looked sharply at the bedraggled weary man in the black *soutane*; decided to take the risk.

“Here, write your telegram,” he said, pushing paper and pencil across the desk. “I suppose you don’t want to code it yourself.”

“Oh, Lord, no.” Francis, eyes dizzy with sleep, wrote rapidly. *“Please inform I.D.W.O. that No. 63 has arrived consulate Milan with important information. Stop. Can arrangements be made for him to be met at Modane by car and proceed direct to G.H.Q. France. Stop. Please request consul here to advance one thousand lire for clothes and travelling expenses. End.”*

Said Mr. Towsey, reading it, “I think I’d better address this to Mr. Montgomery. . . .”

But Francis Gordon had fallen fast asleep.

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He awoke, some fifteen hours later, frightened out of his wits; remembered that the need for fear had passed; crawled off a sofa; fumbled about for the electric switch; clicked on the light.

The noise of his getting-up disturbed his host from the deciphering of a cable which read, "*Please advance to person for whom you sent cable No. 3426 any monies he requires. Stop. Order him proceed Modane soonest possible and report to French authorities who will have full instructions. Montgomery.*"

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"I'm most awfully obliged to you, Mr. Towsey," said Francis Gordon next morning: a clean-shaven Francis Gordon dressed in a green ready-made Italian suit, bright yellow boots on his feet, bright yellow bag in his hand. "Just as a last favour, would you mind having these posted for me."

He handed over three letters, one—which began "My dear Beatrice, I have to apologize for leaving you so long without news"—addressed care of the Guaranty Trust Company, New York; the second to "P. Jameson, Esq.," and the third to "H. T. Prout, 10 Mecklinburgh Square, London W."

Then, having shaken hands with his host, he lit a cigarette, and strolled creakily downstairs to the waiting taxi. . . .

## § 6

Francis' letter reached his cousin on the morning Peter and Bromley saw their transfer gazetted in the *Morning Post*. The answer to it, a packet containing two letters and a postcard addressed "Poste Restante, St. Omer," was in Peter's pocket as they stood in the Chalkshires' Orderly Room, bidding Colonel Andrews good-bye.

"I'm very sorry you're both leaving me," said the Colonel. "Very sorry indeed."

"We're sorry to be going, sir," from Bromley.

"I'm sorry we're leaving, sir," from Peter.

They shook hands with the diffident kindly man, saluted; clanked out, booted and spurred—the Gunner grenades already on their lapels; ran into Locksley-Jones.

"Hallo, you chaps," he stuttered. "Just off. What?"

"Yes," said Bromley grimly. "We're going to a show where they've got a *soldier* for their Adjutant. It will be quite a change. . . ."

But when—(having said good-bye to Mr. Smith, the Regimental Sergeant Major, to Gladeney and Sergeant Atkins and Corporal Pearson, to Peabody and Arkwright and Mackenzie, Mosely and Simcox and half a hundred others who came crowding round the bar at "the Feathers," to their two servants who stood watching the train as it slid out of Worthing Station towards Brighton)—the two friends at last settled themselves in the corner of a first-class carriage, they both grew very silent—

thinking how others would lead into action those hard-drinking, hard-swearing Cockneys who sang, as they marched:

*“It’s a long vai, ter get ter Berlin,  
Ter pai back all we owe.”*



# *PART ELEVEN*

## MEN AND HORSES

### § 1

The Southdown Divisional Artillery, at the time Peter and Bromley were transferred, owned its full complement of men, its khaki, some officers, a handful of horses, a few old French 90-millimetre guns dating from 1868 (“guns” by courtesy, as they had neither breechblocks, firing nor sighting apparatuses), a few ammunition caissons to match, and a scratch collection of harness, begged, borrowed or stolen according to possibilities.

Weasel Stark’s command had been billeted in Brighton since its formation: the horses at various livery-stables; the gunners and drivers—Yorkshiremen for the most part—in squalid terraces at the back of the town; the senior officers at Prince’s or the Metropole; the juniors during the intervals between “Cook’s tours” to the Front, gunnery-courses and telephone courses—at a small private-hotel which they monopolized.

Stark’s personality pervaded the Fourth Brigade. He had his own theories on training, on gunnery, on discipline: theories essentially simple, disregarding the means for the end. A believer in decentralization, he rarely interfered with subordinates: when he did so, his strictures—which he couched in the most illuminating profanity—were usually heeded. His lectures invariably began, “Now if you young subalterns will only burn those sanguinary books and use a little commonsense;” he rode as hard as he drank; protected his juniors from his superiors; never forgot a face and would forgive anything in the world except lack of keenness.

At the moment, Stark was—to use his own expression—letting ’em have their heads.

### § 2

Four subalterns sat over the remnants of their dinner in the dark narrow dining-room of the “Lyndon Hotel.” Outside, rain fell—gently but audibly—on the stone pavement.

Said Archie Hutchinson, a whippet of a fellow, buff in colour, thin-shanked, brown-eyed, “horse” written all over him: “There’s a devilish good little bay come in

with that last draft: but I don't fancy any of you lads could ride him."

"Bags I for Beer Battery"—(Gunners usually adopt the code terms "Ack," "Beer" and "Don" instead of A. B. C.)—"if it's a bay," said Pettigrew, blue eyes twinkling in brick-red cheeks. "Do you think he'd carry P.J.?"

"Just about." Hutchinson concentrated on the problem. "P.J. might be able to manage him. P.J. isn't a bad horseman. Of course, he hasn't got very good hands. . . ."

"Oh, we all know you're the only chap in the Brigade with good hands," put in Archdale—a fair-haired boy of eighteen—maliciously.

"You shut up, Brat. *You* can't ride anyway. . . ."

"Who is P.J.?" asked Merrilees, a solemn young man of twenty-six, with eyes like an owl and the shoulders of a student, who had been transferred from Colonel Brasenose's Brigade (the 3rd Southdown) that afternoon.

"Do you mean to say," chuckled Pettigrew, "that you've never heard of our Mr. Jameson? Our Mr. Jameson," he cocked his cigarette into the corner of his mouth—a very tolerable imitation of Peter's mannerism—"the Captain Kettle of the 4th Brigade. Our Mr. Jameson is some gunner, I can assure you."

"Really." Merrilees had no sense of humour.

"Also," went on Pettigrew, "our Mr. Jameson has a car—some car! And a wife—*some* wife."

"Brat" Archdale, who had developed a violent attack of calf-love for Patricia, blushed violently.

"I like P.J.," remarked Hutchinson, pouring himself a second glass of port.

"So do I," said Pettigrew, "but he's a quaint bird."

"Who's a quaint bird?" Purves poked a wonderfully brushed brown head round the door; drew his long body after it; sat down to the table.

"Our Mr. Jameson."

"Undoubtedly," pronounced the Oxford man in his best Balliol drawl, "undoubtedly. As you say, Pettigrew, a quaint bird. But efficient. Very efficient. His language, on the other hand, reminds me very strongly of our friend the Weasel's. He doesn't talk much, but when he does talk. . . . You should have heard him in riding-school this afternoon. Sergeant Murgatroyd positively blushed."

"Sergeant Murgatroyd, like all these old Army fellows, pulls his horses about too much. No hands!" The speaker, of course, was Hutchinson.

There came a smart rap on the door; and a crisp voice asked, "May I come in?" Everybody rose.

"Rather, sir. Have a glass of port, won't you, sir? Take a chair, sir. Won't you

take off your things, sir?"

Colonel Stark, very slim and red-haired, looking—except for the lines about his eyes—almost a boy himself, accepted the many invitations. Purves filled a glass for him, and they all sat down again.

"Where's that fellow Straker?" asked the Weasel. "In his room? I wonder if one of you chaps would mind fetching him for me. Conway anywhere about? Out, is he?" A chuckle. "At the Palladium, I suppose. . . ."

The Palladium is Brighton's most palatial picture-house. Its attraction for the petticoat-loving Conway was well-known. Every one laughed: and the Colonel beamed round the table.

"We shall have to get Conway married, sir," remarked Purves: and went off to find Charlie Straker.

"I suppose you youngsters know we're moving into camp next week."

"Yes, sir," from Pettigrew. "Shoreham, Captain Torrington said."

"Correct, Pettigrew. And then I shall start gingering you all up a bit. Especially 'B' Battery." The Colonel turned to Merrilees. "You're going to 'C,' young man. Did Colonel Brasenose teach you how to ride?"

"I—I think so, sir," said Merrilees shyly.

"We never 'think' in the 4th Brigade, do we Hutchinson?" This, a reminder of the horsey one's last attempt at manoeuvring a battery, drew a twinkle from Pettigrew.

"No, sir."

Charlie Straker arrived: tall; clean-shaven, curly-headed, with big hands and a pronounced stutter. A promoted ranker, once in Stark's own battery, he had recently come home to take up his commission.

"G-good evening, sir."

"Evening, Straker,"—Stark had come to the Mess with one of his usual definite purposes in mind—"I'm going to take you round to the Jamesons'. There's an old friend of yours with them, and very anxious to see you."

"Who, sir?"

"Jacky Baynet"—a less tactful man might have said "Captain Baynet"—"he's home on leave. You remember him, of course."

"R-rather, sir. He recommended me for my first stripe. I—I'll go and get my things on at once, sir."

"If you young subalterns only knew a quarter as much as Charlie Straker," remarked the Weasel, as the ex-ranker clattered upstairs, "there'd be second stars on a good many sleeves. . . ."

"Damn good chap, the C.O.," said Hutchinson, when the four were alone again.

“Pretty good seat on a horse too.”

The remainder agreed.

### § 3

“Who’s my best subaltern, Straker?” asked the Colonel as they strode through the darkness.

The other hesitated. “C-Conway’s very good, sir.”

“And what about Bromley? He’s seen service, you know. . . .” Stark stood still for a moment. . . . “I wish to goodness you’d learn to read a map, Straker. Can’t put you in for promotion till you can.”

“I—I know. I’m rotten at it, sir.”

They walked on.

“Jameson’s c-coming along very well with his gun-drill, sir”—Charlie Straker, by virtue of knowledge, acted as unofficial instructor to the Brigade—“and he’s r-rather good with horses.”

“I’ve got other plans for P.J. Between you and me, Straker, Torrington’s fed-up with being indoors. And I can’t very well have a V.C. for Adjutant. He wants to go back to a Battery. My opinion is that he’s too ill to command one: still, I’m going to try P.J. in the Orderly Room. He’s been running offices all his life, and he ought to be able to pick up the work. . . .”

Arrived at No. 6 Brunswick Terrace, the flat which Peter and Patricia had taken when they gave up the house in Lowndes Square, the Weasel led way up the one flight of stairs; and pushed open the front-door into a rather ornate hall. They peeled off their mackintoshes; hung caps and riding-canes on the crowded hat-stand; and walked into the drawing-room.

Alice Stark and Patricia were sitting on the sofa under the rose-curtained window. In front of a small fire, stood Peter—miraculously without a cigar. Jack Baynet, a little aged by ten months of active service, lounged in a big armchair, glass at his side, talking to Bromley.

“Filthy stuff that new Boche gas,” he was saying. . . . “Hello, Straker. Congratulations on getting your commission. . . .” He got up and the two shook hands. . . . “Lucky devil not to be in that last show up at Wipers. The Zouaves sneaked most of our horses when they panicked. . . .”

The five men began talking “gas”—which had just been employed for the first time. Soon, Alice joined them, leaving Patricia alone.

Looking at the five in khaki, listening to the military “shop,” she could not help

contrasting that evening with one, over a year ago, when she had entertained Jack and her father in the big drawing-room at Lowndes Square. Peter, she remembered, had been in Hamburg! And now, Peter was a soldier. They lived in a different world: a world of new values. Somehow, she felt years younger. . . .

"If it hadn't have been for the Canadians, the Boche. . . ." she heard her brother's voice calmly detailing undreamed of heroisms.

A world of new values, of wider horizons! And for sign of it she, Patricia Jameson, the most reasonable of young women, had fallen in love with her own husband. She wanted to—to surrender herself to him, just once, body *and* soul, utterly, absolutely, to tell him that she was his—*his*—his woman to do with as he would. . . .

Patricia reined in imagination as a rough-rider reins back a pulling horse.

"They just stuffed their handkerchiefs over their mouths and hung on. Discipline? That's what I call discipline—just hanging on."

"You'll be fighting in respirators next." The Weasel's voice interrupted her brother's story. . . .

Imagination got away with her again. Happy? Yes, in a way she was happy. Only. . . . Why didn't Peter realize things? Why couldn't Peter work a little less strenuously? He took soldiering as he had taken business. It *absorbed* him. When he mounted his horse of a morning—Driver Jelks holding out the stirrup—his face wore the old "office look." . . . Of an evening, he studied his new profession. . . . And of course, he was smoking too much. . . . The children said Daddy was worried. . . . How did they know? . . . Perhaps he still regretted Nirvana. . . . Oh, why couldn't she console him—time, time flew—and soon, a black hand must stretch out across the sea, take him from her—perhaps for ever. . . .

"You're looking very serious, Mrs. P.J." Bromley lounged across to her.

"Am I?" she smiled at him.

"You won't desert us when we go into Camp, Mrs. P.J.?" He pulled gravely at his moustaches. "I was just wondering if you'd help me with the Mess. Colonel says men are no good at these things. You might help a fellow, Mrs. P.J.?"

"Why don't you get Mutton's to do the whole thing for you, Mr. Bromley?"

"Colonel says we ought to do it ourselves. It trains the cooks, you see. But I don't know much about it. In South Africa, we ate when we could. . . ."

They began a grave discussion on crockery, mess-furniture, groceries, the wine-cellar: a discussion which lasted till the party broke up. Jack Baynet had taken a room at the Metropole; walked home with Alice and her husband. Bromley and Straker stayed for a last drink; departed together.

“Rather amusing, I thought”—commented Peter to his wife—“that first meeting between your brother and Mrs. Weasel. She looked as though she’d like to kiss him.”

“My dear Peter. . . .”

“Well, didn’t she?”

Patricia looked her husband straight in the face. Then she said deliberately: “You don’t know much about women, old thing. Alice is madly in love with the Colonel. She’d no more dream of letting another man kiss her than,” a pause “*I* should.” She marched out of the room, gold head high.

“I wonder what’s worrying Pat?” thought Peter as he picked a small cigar from the box on the mantelpiece; took up his “Manual of Field Engineering,” and began to study section 39, *Cover for Artillery*.

## § 4

Nevertheless, Patricia enjoyed those weeks at Brighton, the surreptitious rides on government horses provided by Torrington, the occasional visits to “morning stables,” the talks with Alice, the convivial tea-parties at her own flat.

One by one, she grew acquainted with most of Peter’s brother officers; with Lodden, always irascible, querulous, good-natured but utterly lacking in self-control; with the semi-invalid but still bloodthirsty Torrington; with “Brat” Archdale and horsy Hutchinson; with the ever-twinkling Pettigrew and his particular pal Conway, a riotous black-haired six-foot fellow from the Federated Malay States who used to say, “Believe me, Mrs. P.J., we’ll make that husband of yours see life before we’ve done with him.”

Good days! and even when the Brigade moved out to Shoreham, the good days continued. Patricia used to motor over in the Crossley, sometimes with Alice (who stayed on alone in Brighton), or the children, sometimes by herself. Gunner Horne and his unclean brother cooks knew her; would bow to her judgment on such abstruse points as the using-up of soup-bones in the big copper of the Officers’ Mess Hut. (For the hutments had been built at last: Shoreham Camp was a by-word no longer.) Mr. Black, the keen little wax-moustached Regimental Sergeant Major, knew her too; and Sergeant Murgatroyd, the enormous Rough Rider with the worsted spur on his arm; and Bombardier Pink, a trusty grizzled old Yorkshireman, who supervised the fodder as if it were pure gold.

By now, nearly half the horses had been decanted, protesting vigorously, at Shoreham Siding; were picketed out in long lines on the flat ground below the

hutments: and Patricia grew to love those sounds no horse-soldier ever forgets—the whickering and the whinnying which follows the command “Feed,” the tossing of head-collars and stamp of hooves on turf as nose-bag slings are slid over laid-back ears; the deep snuffle of nostrils as muzzles plunge to corn.

Good days indeed! For already the formless mob which Stark had led out from billets in Brighton took shape under his hand. Harness began to arrive, and water-carts, and dark-green limbered wagons that stood ranged orderly in the still gunless gun-park. The Ammunition Column, that sink whereto all batteries sent their least efficient, had been formed; and a sleepy regular Major named Billy Williams, with moustaches like Harry Tate and an astounding capacity for bottled Bass, put in charge of it. Lodden, alternately bullying and apologizing to his subalterns—Brat Archdale and a wild young Irishman called O’Grady—commanded “A” Battery: Torrington, V.C. with Pettigrew and Straker adoring at his heels, “B”: Reggie Conway and the silent Merrilees, still lorded it over a captainless “C”: while “Don” Battery, usually known from its three juniors, Hutchinson, Hall and Halliday, as the “three H affair,” still awaited a master—by general prophecy, Bromley, then away on his gunnery-course at Larkhill.

Peter Jameson, master of men since boyhood, saw this new entity growing; began, in his pride of it, to forget civilian troubles. Stark, true to his words with Straker, had taken P.J. into the Orderly Room—not yet as Adjutant but only on probation.

To Conway or Pettigrew, outdoor fellows, the work would have been dull, desk-tying: but for one brought up in the City, the employment had its fascination. P.J. assisted by the meticulous R.G.A. clerk—Sergeant Barber—ran his Orderly Room as he would have run a business—filing-systems, card-indices, a diminutive stenographer (picked unwillingly from the Ammunition Column), type-writers. . . . And, the day’s work over, there was always Driver Jelks waiting with “Little Willie” (as Peter christened the frisky wicked-looking bay which Hutchinson had selected for him), and a long kicking scamper across the Downs, and Driver Garton, his red-cheeked yellow-haired Orderly, waiting with hot water for the rubber bath in the bare wooden cubicle which Peter, by right of his position on “H.Q.,” occupied alone.

One by one, other officers joined them: Percy Rorke, a pert lad, fresh from school, christened by common accord, “Monkeyface”: a jovial Irish doctor, Ted Carson by name: a few undistinguished subalterns whom Stark sent to plague Billy Williams in the Ammunition Column.

Purves, as Orderly Officer to the Colonel, began to pick his Headquarters Staff

of Signallers: Corporal Waller ("Lewis" Waller of course), who had been a telephonist in private life; Gunners Seabright and Pirbright (bosom friends, constantly scrapping, known by their intimates as "the Poluskis"), Driver Nicholson (a wireless operator by profession) and the rest.

So May warmed towards June, and the remarkable days slid by. The Brigade grew—not even Stark realized exactly how—towards efficiency. If only they could get one—just one—real 18-pounder gun! But that was denied them; so volunteer parties of officers and men would take wagon on Saturday afternoons to Preston Barracks at Brighton, and there pay limber-gunners good half-crowns for the privilege of half-an-hour's peering through real dial-sights, half-an-hour's clicking at "practice" breech-blocks.

They took their work in deadly earnest, these stubborn North Countrymen; studied their gun-drill pamphlets by themselves; were ill folk to discipline by such officers as they suspected deficient in knowledge.

But even Stark's most ruby language, they accepted with a smile. He knew his job!

## § 5

To Peter, sitting alone at his wooden table in the bare Orderly Room Hut one evening, monthly list of promotions before him, cloud of cigar-smoke round his head, came Bombardier Pitman—clean-shaven, lantern-jawed, destined to succeed Sergeant Barber, whose duties would take him to the Base once the Brigade reached France, in his clerkdom.

"There's an Infantry Officer asking for you, sir," said the Bombardier in broadest Yorkshire.

"Ask him to come in."

There entered Peabody of the Chalkshires, grin on brown face.

"My word, P.J.—you are a swell."

"Think so?" Peter looked up from his list.

"Rather." Peabody threw cap and cane on the bare floor; drew himself up a chair; lit a cigarette. "I thought you'd like to hear about Locksley—beg his pardon, Locksley-Jones, *Mister* Locksley-Jones. No longer 'Captain and Adjutant,' you will observe."

Bromley, just back from the Larkhill training course, lounged through the door in time to hear part of the last sentence.

"What's that about Locksley?"



“Got the boot,” said Peabody laconically.

“How?” asked the two Gunners simultaneously.

“Nobody quite knows. One day he was in the Orderly Room—and the next, he just wasn’t. Of course, there have been heaps of rumours. . . . The C.O. gave us one of his ‘pi-jaws’ yesterday—you know the way the old man lisps when he lectures—all about ‘the honour of the Regiment.’ I think he knows pretty well what Locksley has been doing, because he said—rather decent of him I thought: ‘Of course I understand some of you have had a good deal to put up with’ . . . I believe,” Peabody shook his young head, “that there must have been something wrong with the Battalion accounts.”

“Then he ought to have been court-martialled!”

Bromley nodded confirmation of Peter’s epitaph on Locksley’s career. “Come up to the Mess and have a drink, kid,” he added to the Infantryman. The three walked out; up the steep dry slope of turf to the Mess Hut.

Various officers were disposed about the big deal-boarded room: Lodden, in front of the cold stove, was cursing to Billy Williams about the *Lusitania*—“Oh I dunno,” purred the big Major, “What do you expect of *Germans*?” “Brat” Archdale and “Monkey face” lounged in two huge arm-chairs, sipping manfully at their vermouths: Merrilees, in another chair, studied Italy’s declaration of war in the *Daily Chronicle* with wrinkled brows. From the officers’ huts across the grass, came the alternating buzz of two telephone transmitters—Conway and Purves talking to each other in Morse.

“I say,” announced Peabody shyly, when the three had settled down to their drinks, “what I came over for was this. Slattery—you remember him—he’s our new Adj.—wants you two to come over and dine at our Mess tomorrow. Now that Locksley’s gone. . . .”

He let the prepared speech trail off into silence.

“But what about the C.O.?” asked Bromley.

“I think”—Peabody very nearly blushed—“it was the C.O. who suggested it to Slattery.”

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Next evening when they rode over—the Chalkshire Mess was a bare six hundred yards away, but as Gunners it became the pair to arrive mounted. Private Haddock, in full khaki and equipment, stood sentry in the roadway; banged hand against rifle-stock, and beamed ecstatically as they slid from their horses. Arkwright, three stars on his arm, schoolmaster stoop more pronounced than ever, met them outside the hut; led them in as an Ambassador conducting distinguished foreigners.

And somewhat as foreigners they were received; shyly by Colonel Andrews, unemotionally by Simcox, bluffly by Major Mosely. There was a feeling of stiffness in the air. Outwardly the mere entertainment of two junior subalterns; inwardly, the ceremony betokened reconciliation, an acknowledgment that the 10th Chalkshires had a debt to pay, was paying it.

Nobody mentioned Locksley; no one proposed a toast; but all the faces down the two long tables seemed conscious of a special occasion. . . .

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A great white moon burned over the tin roofs of the hutments as the two mounted their horses; walked them slowly across the sleeping camp.

“I always said”—Bromley broke silence gravely—“that, except for Locksley, there was nothing wrong with the old Chalkshires. They’re a jolly fine crowd—now. And when we do go out. . . .”

“If we ever *get* out,” from Peter.

“They’ll give a good account of themselves. Curious, isn’t it, that if it hadn’t been for that fellow, we might still be with ‘B’ Company. Both Captains, perhaps.”

They dismounted; led their horses—groom following—down the hill.

“Did you realize when we transferred,” asked Peter, voicing a thought that had just arisen for the first time in his mind, “that one would be more comfortable, safer perhaps, in the Gunners?”

“No.”

“More did I. But all those chaps seemed to think so. I wonder if it’s true.”

“I should doubt it.”

Both were destined to remember that conversation, in the very near future, at the Disaster of Loos!

# *PART TWELVE*

## CONCENTRATIONS

### § 1

A woman may forget her love, a child its mother, but no Gunner ever quite forgets his first long route-march—the clink of chain and the thop of hooves on the roadway, crunch of wheels and rattle of waggons, the men's faces on the limbers, the smoke of their cigarettes curling into the air. . . .

It was early June when the fourth Southdown Brigade left Shoreham for its final concentration at Aldershot; and for three sun-drenched days, the mile-long column rolled on its way, inland from the sea, across the swelling weald, by white cottages where children waved and cheered, through sleepy villages and woods damp with early dews, halting to water at shallow pools on green commons, rolling on again in the warm glow of afternoon, horse-heads nodding in unison, traces taut, “numbers one” riding proudly behind their waggons.

True, they had no guns as yet: true that Lodden's water-cart overturned on the steep upward slope out of Happy Valley: true that Stark growled at them for clumsy tailors: that fat Doctor Carson, red-cheeked and nearly white-haired, fifty if a day, grew so stiff he could hardly climb to horse:—still, they were moving, moving slowly towards the job for which each had joined, Active Service.

For these were volunteers, still eager for adventure: and though, in after days, there came the time when realization turned that eagerness to misery unutterable, to horror and the fear of maimings—nevertheless the spirit lived on, dour, untameable, ultimate arbiter of the World's destinies. . . .

Those three days, even unemotional Peter felt the uplift of the game. “Little Willie” danced and pranced, tossing his white silk head-rope, shaking at bit-chain; the Doctor, riding stiffly on a broad roan mare, cracked time-worn jokes, pulled steadily at his whiskey-filled water-bottle; Purves, trotting up and down the column, knees still a little uncertain against the saddle-wallets, made the passing of Stark's simplest order into a full-dress parade.

Something in the continuous movement of it all, in their aloofness from everyday life, jolted Peter's mind—for the first time since he had set forth, subaltern of an hour, from Lowndes Square—clean out of the commercial groove in which it had so long been running. He forgot the old things, remembered only the new. His chagrin at

the loss of Nirvana found healing. Behind, rolled this new entity which he was helping to create—an entity of flesh and steel and the open air. Ahead, lay adventure. . . .

## § 2

And on the third evening, the Brigade wound slowly across the bridge, past the lake and under the fir trees, till their wheels raised the soft dust along the path road to Deepcut Barracks.

Alice and Patricia and Peter's children watched them as they came. To the children, it was all excitement; they waved to the horsemen, to the dusty limber-gunners trudging the little slope. Better than lead soldiers, those real playthings! But to the two women, the end seemed very near.

Each in her own way; grave, the one—with her white frocked daughters beside her; moist-eyed the other—thinking of her child to be—they resented this new world, that would so soon tear their men-folk from them, leaving nothing to hope for save the comfort of pencilled letters, the joy of snatched "leaves," and always, defying comfort, lurking behind joy, fear—the fear of the telegram!

## § 3

Very often, through that June and July and August of 1915, Patricia regretted her decision to share house with Alice. Their red-brick villa among the dusty pine-trees held no chance of privacy; always, it seemed to Patricia, horses and grooms waited by the laurels before its door; always came visitors—of a morning, of an afternoon, of an evening—to the communal lunch-table, to tea, and drinks after tea, to dinner and drinks after dinner: always they were playing bridge, or preparing sandwiches for field-days among the heather, or listening to long talks between man and man. . . .

No privacy! It seemed to her as though they lived at a boarding-house of which she were proprietress; Peter only an occasional guest.

For now, work and equipment so crowded on the Brigade that our Mr. Jameson entirely forgot, in his concentration on the immediate job, the job which he had left behind him!

## § 4

Reminder, a blow straight between the eyes, took the form of an “express” letter, addressed in Simpson’s crabby handwriting and brought over from the Orderly Room to the crowded Mess where Peter was snatching tea. He slipped it, unopened, into his tunic-pocket, went on talking to Torrington and Bromley.

Torrington, far too ill to go out, but determined not to stop at home, his pale face white with overwork, his eyes pin-pointy, was expostulating about the non-promotion to warrant-rank of his acting Battery Sergeant-Major; Bromley, newly promoted Captain to command “D” Battery, wanted to know how soon they would be doing their firing practice.

All down the long table—Billy Williams and Lodden wrangling at its head—men chattered, cups clinked, flies hurled themselves at the covered jam-pots. From the near-by road, came the jingle of teams returning, the hoot of General Blacklock’s car.

“Time I was getting back,” said Peter.

He passed out through the low ante-room; picked up his cap; clinked across the gravel, up the two wooden stairs into the office. The day’s Orders awaited signature on his desk: he signed them; shouted for Driver Norris, the stenographer; handed him the six copies; sat down; took the letter from his pocket; opened it.

Half way through, he put the crabbed sheets on the table; took out his case and lit a cigar. Then he finished the letter; read it through again.

“Hell,” said our Mr. Jameson. “Hell!” . . .

The tale, as related by Simpson, resolved itself into a very ordinary swindle. Hartopp, as the naturalized Hun Hagenburg called himself, had placed a big order for Beckmann cigars; shipped the goods to Amsterdam before payment became due . . . and followed them on the next steamer. He had, as he wrote with the sublime effrontery of his race to Simpson, not the slightest intention of returning to England or paying for the goods till Germany had won the war!

For the first time in his business career, Peter knew the inclination to panic. Thought stampeded. Why should this happen? And at such a time? Blast all Germans! Simpson never ought to have trusted Hagenburg. He, Peter, had always warned him that Hagenburg was a wrong ’un. This was the result of serving one’s country. Damn one’s country! Other people didn’t worry about their ruddy country. Look at Rawlings—the patriot of Whitehall. To Hell with Rawlings. . . .

He pulled himself together; stuffed away his emotions into that waste-paper basket of the brain which scientists call the subconscious mind. Now, thought came consecutively.

Simpson gave no figure of loss: but the last time Peter was in Lime Street,

Hagenburg's account stood at five thousand. Simpson had spoken of larger orders pending. Therefore the loss must be more than five thousand. Eight? Ten, perhaps. Jamesons could just stand ten. Only just. Simpson appeared panicky. He had better go up to town and see Simpson.

Peter pulled a telegraph pad towards him; wrote a deliberate wire to Simpson's private address at Harrow; called "Driver Norris!"

A bullet head poked itself in at the doorway, said "Yes, sir."

"Go and find Driver Jelks. Tell him to take a bicycle and get this wire off sharp. Then go over to the Mess; find Mr. Purves; ask him if he'd mind coming over to see me for a minute. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir."

A few minutes later Purves, with a mock salute and a drawled "Did'st send for me, P.J.?" came into the room.

"I say, old man, I've got to go up to town tomorrow"—it will be noticed that Peter took Stark's leave for granted—"So you'll have to cancel that telephone parade of yours."

"Oh, I say . . ."

"Sorry. I'll be back in the evening. It's rather important."

"Nothing serious, I hope." Purves noticed that P.J.'s voice was a trifle grim.

"Oh, no. Just something in the City that needs my personal attention."

Neither that night, as the four sat down to their usual set rubber, nor next morning as she drove him in the Crossley to Farnborough Station, did Patricia—put off with the same explanation—suspect the unpalatable truth.

## § 5

The Lime Street offices had altered but little. They seemed—as Peter, booted and spurred, clinked through the doorway—a shade gloomier, a shade dustier. A tumble-haired office-girl occupied Parkins' reception-box. No George—pensioned six months since—pottered about the cigar-racks. The piles of boxes had shrunk to mere remnants of their cedar selves. But otherwise the place was unchanged: looked the same, smelt the same as the first day Peter joined his father in the city.

Only Simpson, sitting in the dark back-room, had become an old man! He seemed to have shrunk: lines streaked his face, white hairs his beard. At sight of him, Peter's anger evaporated. "Poor old Tom!" he thought, "poor old Tom!"

"It was good of you to come up at once." The old man looked at the soldier, drew a little comfort from his obvious strength. "This has been my fault, right from

the start. You were always against giving the fellow credit. I was talking to my missis about it last night after your wire came—and she thinks—I think—as it's all my fault—that I ought to stand the whole loss. . . .”

Peter turned away to hide his feelings; made great play of hanging up cap and riding-cane. The offer touched him keenly. It was fine—damn fine—the offer of a white man. But. . . .

“Don’t be such an ass, Tom. I’m just as responsible as you are.” The face above the khaki collar showed no trace of emotion.

Simpson protested; was cut short with a curt, “Forget it, Tom. I wouldn’t let you stand more than your share if you were worth a million. All I came up for was to see if I could be of any use.”

“There’s nothing much to be done, Peter. The man’s gone; the cigars are gone; the money’s gone.”

“Can’t we bring an action in the Dutch courts?”

“He’ll be over the border by now; selling the stuff in Germany. It’ll be worth a small fortune over there. Perhaps it serves me right for going on dealing with Beckmanns. Probably they put him up to it. There have been some ugly rumours about the Beckmann firm lately. I didn’t want to worry you with them. But people say young Albert gave a dinner-party to celebrate the sinking of the *Lusitania*. I wrote to them about it. Of course, they denied it. Here”—he pulled a document from the basket on his desk; handed it to Peter.

The document, a statement sworn before the British Consul in Havana, contradicted the rumour, “that either Señor Albert Beckmann and/or any member of the *Cuban* firm of Beckmann y *Compania* had ever adopted a policy hostile to Great Britain and her Allies, and specifically that they had never celebrated in any way the sinking of the *Lusitania*. . . .”

“It reads like a lie,” said Peter.

“It is a lie,” said Simpson.

“And what are we going to do about it?”

“About Hagenburg?”

“No. About Beckmanns.” Peter’s voice grew steely. “We must cut ’em out, Tom. Not another case. Do you agree?”

The older man hesitated a moment. “Supposing they ship their goods to some one else.”

“Let ’em, Tom. Let ’em. When I come back after this show’s over, it won’t be to buy goods from any dirty Hun—Cuban or otherwise. You’re with me? Right. Then let’s get down to business. How much has this bastard done us in the eye for?”

“About nine thousand, five hundred.”

“Phew!” Peter whistled. “Let’s get out the private ledger and see exactly how we stand.”

For half-an-hour, they pored over the cold figures.

“It means,” said Peter, summing them up, “that we’re worth about fourteen thousand pounds a-piece. Lucky you didn’t have a Nirvana of your own, Tom. What? Question now is: Can we run this business on a capital of twenty-eight thousand?”

“I think so. We’ve got five thou. on deposit; and the Bank will lend us the rest. Goods are selling almost as soon as they arrive, too. That’ll help.”

“We shall have to cut our drawings down, though. At least I shall. You always were economical. . . .”

They settled, after some discussion, on £750 a year each, the firm to pay and debit Peter’s account with his Life Assurance Policies; and Peter, with a final: “Now for God’s sake, don’t worry, Tom,” went back to Aldershot. . . .

“Did you get your business settled all right, dear?” asked Patricia, meeting him in the dusk.

“Quite all right, old thing.” He climbed aboard; and she swung the car round the big station Square. “I wanted to talk to Simpson about your allowance while I was away,” went on the man.

She recognized half truth from the tone of his voice. “Oh, the kids and I won’t want much,” she said, switching gear-lever into top. . . .

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That night, for the only time Patricia could remember, she woke to hear her husband murmuring vaguely in his sleep. . . . Her father could have told her that it was the sub-conscious mind—wastepaper-basket of the brain—striving to eject its suppressed emotions.

## § 6

And P.J. went back to his work—a little dourer; a shade less patient; rather more inclined to drop over to the Mess for a cocktail at 11 o’clock; to stay there for lunch; and sit about in the ante-room, listening to Bromley’s grave surmises and the laughter from the billiard-room where the “Brat” and “Monkey-face” played perpetual fives on the dilapidated table, before going home to his dinner.

In his own way, as a pal, as a partner, Peter “loved” his wife; admired her; felt towards her the protective instinct of average male to average female. Had she been



altogether away from him in those days, he would probably have missed her presence acutely. But knowing her waiting for him just round the corner; feeling that he had "let her down" (as he phrased the comparatively small allowance to which she agreed so cheerfully); anxious above all things to avoid the sentimentalities of departure; the man withdrew himself, confined their intercourse more and more to the commonplaces of matrimony.

All Patricia's real love for her husband, all the yearning to take him in her arms, make him understand that in good luck or evil she was *his*, his mate against the world, suffered and suffered damnably. She grew to envy Alice. Alice with the easily suffused eyes and the child in her womb. She even grew to resent her own children, their perpetual, "Daddy's going to France to kill Germans." But neither the mate nor the mother in Patricia flinched: as pal or as play-mate, she did her duty, laughter on her lips, gold head held high.

And so they came to the last day.

## § 7

Four fifteen P. M.! A gray August afternoon. Peter, confirmed in his Adjutancy, cigar in mouth, stood on the steps of the office-hut. Behind him, gutted to the last paper, lay the Orderly Room. In front, the gun-park showed a serried mass of vehicles—the spidery Headquarters telephone-waggon, wires gleaming red on their drums, black and white poles poking out behind; fat mess-floats, loaded and overloaded; A. S. C. waggons, piled high with fodder and biscuit-boxes, tarpaulin-topped; low limbered ammunition-waggons, mackintoshes strapped to their seats, heavy with fodder-bales, new saws in their leather cases, yellow against dark-green paint; guns, covers shrouding breech and muzzle, canvas water-buckets and grease-boxes dangling from hooked-in limbers. . . .

Peter heard the hoot of a horn from the roadway past the Mess; a car streaked up to the Orderly Room. Out of it, dashed an excited Staff Officer from Divisional Headquarters.

"Good afternoon, sir." Peter saluted.

"Afternoon. Afternoon. Your Colonel in?" said Colonel Starcross, a heavy man, white with rage, shaking with excitement, perspiration beading lined forehead under gold-rimmed cap-peak.

"No, sir. He's at home."

"At home. At home. Good God, on an afternoon like this. Why hasn't your first half battery started? Good God, why hasn't it started yet? . . ."

Peter looked calmly at his wrist-watch. "First half of 'Don' Battery hooks-in at 4:30, sir. Head of column passes barrack-gates at 4:50 P. M."

"Christ in Heaven! You'll never be in time. The 3rd Brigade's not entrained yet. Half the traffic of the South of England's disorganized. Colonel Brasenose ought to be relieved of his command—relieved of his command, I tell you."

"This isn't Colonel Brasenose's Brigade, sir," said Peter stiffly.

Colonel Starcross stamped on the gravel: "Don't argue with me, young man. Don't argue with me. Go and turn your men out. Turn 'em out, damn it."

"It's exactly four-thirty, sir," announced Peter imperturbably. Even as he spoke, they heard Bromley's whistle, saw him striding, fully equipped, across the gun-park. Came now, from their tin stables, two by two, drivers between, the harnessed teams. Came, at the double, the dismounted men, filled haversacks flopping at their sides. . . . Five minutes of crisp commands, backing horses, bobbing heads, bending bodies.

"Ready, Sergeant Major?" Bromley's voice rang clear across the turmoil. "Ready, sir."

"*Stand to your horses.*" The ex-Cavalryman swung to his saddle.

"*Prepare to mount.*" Boots grope for stirrups, hands clutch saddle-peaks and limber rails.

"*Mount!*" Bodies rise and turn; saddles creak; hooves protest; chains jingle. Bodies drop to their places; fidget for a second; sit stiffly to attention. Bromley, seeing a red-gold cap on the Orderly Room stairs, shouts "Sit at ease"; trots over; swings up hand and elbow in the Gunners' salute.

"Right Section, Don Battery, Fourth Southdown Brigade. May we march off, sir?"

Colonel Starcross acknowledges the salute, says: "Yes. Yes. Do—for God's sake."

"*Right half Battery. Advance in column of route from the right. Walk—March!*"

Pat of whip: zip of trace tightening: creak of wheel. Slowly, the six-horse teams, the two guns and their loaded waggons, file by. Last of all, swinging hand once more to the salute, rides Bromley. . . .

Peter looked at his watch. "Four forty-eight P. M. sir."

Starcross looked at Peter: "What's your name, young man?"

"Jameson, sir. Peter Jameson."

"Well, you may tell your Colonel, with my compliments, that his Adjutant might be a damn sight worse. Sorry I blinded at you. Been up four nights running."

He hopped back to the car; streaked off down the road. "Lucky thing it wasn't Lodden's crowd" thought Peter.

And day wore on to night. For it took eleven trains to move the seven-hundred and thirty-one officers and men, the five hundred and thirty-nine horses, the sixteen guns and hundred odd waggons of the old-time Artillery Brigade with its Ammunition Column.

## § 8

Eleven-thirty P. M.! Already, D and C Batteries, and the three clumsy sections of Billy Williams' Ammunition Column were away into the jingling darkness.

Peter had come home to dinner; departed again. Upstairs at the villa, Patricia could hear Alice sobbing gently, and Stark's deep voice, the parade-rasp clean gone out of it, "Don't cry, sweetheart. For God's sake, don't cry." . . .

"I mustn't cry for Peter. Not until he's gone," thought Patricia. She tip-toed upstairs; slipped into a cloak; stole out of the house.

The night had cleared; stars twinkled through the fir-trees as she made her way down the sandy road. From the General's house and the big Mess Hut, lights streaked thinly; she could hear men's voices. A soldier was singing, far off, up the hillside towards Blackdown. She came to the sentry-box at the gate; passed unchallenged.

In the gun-park electric torches glowed, went out again. She was aware of hooves stamping, chains jingling, men moving everywhere. A hurricane-lamp, hanging at a stable-doorway, showed up the shadows of soldiers, standing to shadowy horses.

She heard Torrington's voice, "B Battery. Prepare to mount. Mount!"

Boots clapped on gravel; shadows swung to saddles; a mare neighed.

*"Column of Route from the right. Walk—March! Right Incline. Steady that leading team."*

They came towards her, lumbering through the gloom; filed by.

"That you, Mrs. P.J.?" called the last horseman.

"Yes, Captain Torrington."

"Good luck."

"And good luck to you all." They were by now. She heard a voice, "Mind that water-cart"; heard the curse of a driver as wheel shaved gate-post. Dust rolled back; choked her. . . .

"Dear God," she thought, "can I stick it?"

Another voice hailed her. "That you, Mrs. P.J.? I suspected as much. Come to bid the hero Adjutant farewell?" It was Purves—and she hated him. "He's in the Orderly Room. By that light."

"Thank you, Mr. Purves."

She walked very quietly to the gleaming doorway; climbed the two steps; looked in.

"Hello, old thing," said Peter. He had just opened a little packet of revolver cartridges; was slipping them into the pouch of the laden Sam Browne spread out on the table under the acetylene lamp.

"Bet you a fiver I never fire any of these in anger." He picked up one of the brass cylinders; stretched it out to her. "Did you see B's first section go off? Looked well, didn't they?"

"Yes, awfully well." She found voice somehow.

"Come and have a look at Little Willie. I've got nothing to do for another hour. . . ."

He took her arm as they crossed the parade-ground. Their hands touched; clasped; released each other. In the gloom and odorous warmth of his stall, the rugged bay stamped restlessly on the tiled floor, flirted with his stable head-collar. "Queen Bess," Peter's second charger, eyed them imperturbably from the loose-box railings. Peter gentled the bay; caressing the soft muzzle with his open hand.

"Some horse, my Little William, isn't he?"

"Rather." Now she had herself well in hand.

They left the stables; wandered arm-in-arm across the gun-park; past Divisional Office, shuttered and silent; till they stood in darkness under pine trees.

"Pat, old thing," he said suddenly, "you're not nervous about my going out, are you?"

"No," she lied, "not a bit. Only—it will be rather dull without you." She could feel the heart inside her thumping—thumping. . . .

"I'm sorry about the money, Pat. But we'll make another fortune when the war's over."

"Of course, dear." Oh, but this was Hell—Hell unutterable.

"And, Pat"—he caught her hand, drew her towards him—"we've been jolly good pals, haven't we?"

"Yes, dear," she whispered, resting for a second in his arms.

"You ought to be in bed, you know, Pat. It's very late."

"Ought I?"

"Yes." He bent down; kissed her, quietly, tenderly, on the forehead, then on the

lips. She steeled herself to give no cry.

“Good-bye,” she whispered. “And, boy, boy, for Heaven’s sake take care of yourself.”

“Trust me!” said our Mr. Jameson. . . .

And so they parted.

# *PART THIRTEEN*

## PREPARE FOR ACTION!

### § 1

After a fortnight's inactivity at the Base, the Southdown Artillery, split into half Brigades for war-training, marched three days till they came by Aire and Lambres and Mazinghem, and long-streeted Lilliers and the railway-tangles of Chocques to their last rest-billets behind that section of the firing-line which lay between the Double Crassier, the spider-tower Pylons of Loos, and the fall pit-shaft buildings of Fosse Eight.

"Well," said Torrington, "what do you think of it so far, P.J.?"

The three blond women of La Jaudrie farm had spread mattresses on the stone floor of the churn-room; and on these, curled up in their valises, candle guttering between them, the two were lying.

"Can't quite make up my mind," reflected Peter. "It all seems so extraordinarily casual. We've had no post, our rations have been twenty-four hours late all the way up, our own staff threw most of the officers' valises off the G.S. waggons the day we started. . . ."

"Oh, that!" Torrington laughed. "You'll get used to the Staff when you've been out a bit longer, P.J. Mustn't take 'em too seriously you know. These Seventh Division birds don't seem too bad."

"No," admitted our Mr. Jameson. "I must say that Staff Captain man knows his job. I've got quite a decent shanty for H.Q."

"That little house behind the battery-positions?"

"Yes."

Torrington fumbled under his canvas pillow; found his cigarette-case; stretched arm and shoulder out of blankets to light a "Gold-flake." He looked very ill: black eyes bright with fever; pale hair damp on damp brow. The anaemic lips over the prominent teeth quivered as he drew in the smoke.

"Feeling pretty rotten," he announced.

"You never ought to have come out."

"No. . . . I don't suppose I'll last very long. But I had to have another cut at the Boche. Besides, it doesn't look well for a B.C.<sup>[4]</sup> to hand his battery over to some one else as soon as it's ordered abroad."

“Well, I think you’re a damn fool,” said Peter. Every one in the Divisional Artillery, from General Blacklock to his own Battery Sergeant Major, had tried—and tried in vain—to keep Torrington at home.

“Possibly. It’s this marching that does me in. I’m as stiff as the devil tonight.” He turned over uneasily in his “flea-bag.” “You don’t want to go to sleep yet, do you?”

“No. Give me one of those filthy gaspers. All right, don’t you move; I’ll get them.”

They lay smoking for a few minutes. There are few reticences on active service; and soon both felt the need for intimate talk.

“Does it hurt much—being wounded?” asked Peter.

“Like hell. At least, mine did.”

“Where were you hit?”

“Oh, about sixteen places. Like to hear about it?”

“Rather.”

This is how Torrington told his own story: “It was right at the beginning, you know. Second day of the retreat. Our infantry—Buffs—were entrenched on the forward slope of a hill. I was doing F.O.O.;<sup>[5]</sup> and like a fool I tried to observe from the crest. Boches! My hat, you should have seen ’em. Millions of ’em. Like—like gray ants. Stark was with the guns. I got in some topping bursts; must have knocked out hundreds. The Infanteers were simply mowing ’em down. Pity we hadn’t any Emma G’s.<sup>[6]</sup> Then their guns go to work. First shell landed over the trench; got me in the head; killed one of my signallers.”

“What were you using?”—asked Peter—“visual or the telephone?”

“Telephone. My other signaller kept on sending down the orders all right. . . . I managed to get the blood out of my eyes and we gave ’em gun-fire. That kept the devils back a bit. Then they spotted *me*. Turned a machine gun on me. First bullet got me in the calf of the leg. Next one in the shoulder.”

“How long was that after the first shell hit you?”

“Dunno. Must have been about an hour. I should think. . . . Then they got my signaller, and I had to do the telephoning myself. . . . I don’t remember much else; except crawling round and round in a ring. You know—like a rabbit when you shoot too far behind. Then some one started singing ‘God Save the King.’ God, how I cursed that fellow. I remember saying to myself, ‘What’s the bally fool singing for? There’s nothing to sing about.’”

He paused a minute, eyes curiously bright, cigarette singeing stubby moustache.

“Just before I went off altogether, I found out who’d been singing. It was myself! Funny, isn’t it? Fancy crawling round and round on one’s elbows, singing ‘God save

the King, ' in the middle of a battle."

"Very funny," said Peter, sorry for present sickness, but imagination only vaguely stirred by bare recital of the past. "How did you get away?"

"Oh, that was where the Weasel got his D.S.O."<sup>[7]</sup> Now that he told another's story, Torrington grew a little more explicit. "He came up, under direct rifle and machine-gun fire, *on his horse* mark you, as soon as I stopped telephoning. They killed his horse for him, and he got a bullet through his ankle: but he managed to get us both away somehow—he's as strong as a mule you know. Damned if I understand how he managed it: we only had one leg between the pair of us. . . ."

He leaned forward, stretched a hand to the candle: as he blew it out, his pajama slipped from his neck and Peter saw the sullen weal of a bullet-wound on the shrunken shoulder.

"Wonder you've got the nerve to go into action again," commented Peter across the darkness.

"As a matter of fact, the mere idea of marching up to those gun-pits tomorrow night, scares me to death," said Torrington, V.C.

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[4] Battery Commander.

[5] Forward observing officer.

[6] Machine guns.

[7] Distinguished Service Order.

## § 2

Next morning,—Stark pre-occupied, Peter rather sleepy, Purves and the Doctor swapping jokes with Horrocks the newly-joined veterinary officer (a horsy over-toothed young man in white breeches and enormous spurs)—the Headquarters breakfasted in sunshine at a trestle-table under the vine-leaves: and at half-past ten, rode out across the vast cobbled yard, through the red gates, right-handed towards Hinges, left-handed towards Béthune.

Behind them—Mr. Black prancing proudly on a thin chestnut mare, Lodden cursing as usual, Torrington drooping in his saddle, the men smoking at ease—came the horses and carts of the Headquarters Staff, the guns and ammunition waggons of Batteries A and B.

"This is hardly the conventional idea of going into action for the first time,"



drawled Purves, trotting up beside Peter and the Colonel.

The Weasel jerked up red head from the map on his saddle-peak: "What did you expect, young man?" he asked crisply.

"Oh, I don't know, sir. Gun-fire on the skyline, I suppose; and patrols riding forward to scout the way. . . ."

"Well, suppose you trot on; and see if the level-crossing's blocked or not."

"Very good, sir."

"Can't ride for toffee," commented the Colonel, as his Orderly Officer clattered forward.

They rode on, through clean sunshine, past clean white houses, across the railway lines; emerged on the main road; swung left. Soon they could see the roofs of Béthune in front of them.

A long train backed slowly across the road. The column halted. The train went on; likewise the column. Now they were in the outskirts of the town.

Down the untidy street, trotting slowly towards them over the greasy pavé, came a young Staff officer, very gorgeous of boot and tab, rifled groom trotting behind him: a Staff officer who saluted the Weasel with a fine flourish, and said:

"Excuse me, sir, but this is the fourth Southdown Brigade, isn't it?"

"It is. Half of it anyway. What do *you* want with it?"

"Can I speak to your Adjutant, sir?"

"Certainly. Speak to the whole damn column if you like. Here, Mr. Black, pass down the word for the Adjutant."

"Colonel wants the Adjutant. Colonel wants the Adjutant." The words went dwindling down the line.

A minute or two later our Mr. Jameson clattered up on Little Willie, looked at the face under the black-peaked hat, and said, "Good God, it's Francis. Where on earth did you spring from?"

Peter introduced his cousin, a little gaunter, a little browner, but immaculate as ever, to the Colonel. The three rode on, talking together. Soldiers and rare civilians stared incuriously at them from the narrow pavements; lorries rumbled by; an occasional dispatch-rider, phutting past, disturbed the horses.

"How did you find me so quickly?" asked Peter, preliminary greetings over.

"You wrote me when you sent on," imperceptible pause, "those letters, that you were transferring to the R.A. And of course *we* knew the moment you landed in France."

"Who's *we*?"

"G.H.Q.," said Francis casually.

“My aunt, you are a swell. Why didn’t you write and tell me where you were? I haven’t heard from you for months.”

Francis explained that he had only just officially joined Intelligence, that his uniform had been bought a week since in Paris, that he was attached to the First Corps. . . .

“What have you been doing since March?” asked Peter.

“Oh, various jobs I’m not supposed to talk about. . . .”

“Then don’t talk about ’em, young man,” put in the Weasel.

“And why are you attached to the First Corps?”

“To interrogate prisoners after this new show.”

Purves, very *affairé*, came trotting up to the Colonel. “Don’t we turn off to the right here, sir?”

“We do, my Purves, we do.” They rolled off the main street into a quiet square; threaded their way southwards out of the town, through market gardens, into flat cultivated country.

“Where are you bound for?” asked Francis.

Peter pulled out his map, pointed to a little green patch, “Batteries are going to that wood. We’re marching up by daylight to Annequin. See that little house at the end of the railway, just under Fosse Nine? That’s us.”

“Square F 25?”

“That’s right.”

“Well, I must be getting back,” said Francis. “I’ll come and look you up one afternoon.”

“Why not come to dinner the day after tomorrow,” invited the Colonel.

“I’d like to very much, sir. About half-past seven. Very good, sir. Good-bye, sir. So long, Peter”; and Captain Francis Gordon, wheeling his horse, trotted back into the town.

Headquarters marched on, dropping the batteries outside Verquigneul; till they came to the hundred-foot slag-cone of Fosse Six; and on, across yet another railway. Now they saw, for the first time, their own sausage balloons, hanging directly above them, and—very far away and tiny—the flash and slow puff of anti-aircraft shell bursting round an invisible ’plane. The men, newcomers all, pointed to the marvel, chattered about it. “Wonder if they got him. Not they. There he goes.” The few old soldiers by the roadside took no notice.

And so they came, down a rutty road black with slag, past a shattered wall of red-brick, under the vast shadow of Fosse Nine. The Weasel held up his whip, and the column halted.

"It's quite all right, sir. The position's well under cover," said Peter.

"I know that," snapped Stark, "but it's no use letting these fellows get into careless habits. Tell 'em to dismount, Purves. And then go along and explain the danger of halting at a cross-roads. Have 'em come up two at a time. You've selected your forward wagon-line, I suppose."

"Yes, sir. Just behind the Fosse."

"Good lad. Don't keep more than six horses there, though. Now you, Jameson, come along with me. Never mind your precious Little Willie. Jelks'll look after him."

They dismounted; walked forward. On their left stood the half of a red house, riven with shell-fire. ("Cross-roads!" commented the Colonel): three hundred yards in front, screened by a fold in the ground from enemy observation, rose a few tall trees; thereunder, heaps of white clay, the disused French gun-pits already echoing to the tools of battery fatigue parties.

From a sunken hedge on their right, came a double report, the flash and smoke of a piece discharging. Involuntarily, P.J. started.

"Four point seven," explained Stark. "Used to call 'em Long Toms in South Africa. Let's go and see if your pal Caroline's got that omelette she promised us."

They turned off to their left—Stark casting a quick eye across the field below the Fosse at the men already unlimbering the telephone-waggon—came to a low shuttered house,—first of three on the road; knocked on a white door in the wall.

"*Bon jour, mon Colonel. Vous arrivez tôt.*" A thick-set peasant-wench, neither uncomely nor over-cleanly, led them through a draggled garden under a rusty iron-work arbour towards the house.

"*Et l'omelette, ma petite?*" The Weasel spoke French perfectly, with only the slightest trace of accent.

"*Sere prête dans dix minutes, mon Colonel.*"

They passed through the bare narrow hall into a shuttered room, empty of furniture save for a huge table. Through one wall, heavily shored with great balks of timber, a narrow doorway led to the cellars below.

"If we were Germans," remarked Stark, unbuckling his belt, throwing it crashing on the table, "*we* should sleep down there; the family upstairs. As it is. . . ." He left the sentence unfinished, implying the Englishman's usual contempt for his own chivalry.

*Monsieur le patron*, a stubble-cheeked gaffer in shirt and trousers, shambling in; hoped they would be comfortable; shambling out again. Followed, hilariously, Doctor Carson.

"Well," he said, in broadest Belfast, "I'm a proud man this day. We're in action

at last.”

Purves arrived; and the mess-box; Gunner Horne the cook, looking rather less cleanly than usual; Peter’s batman, Garton; and the Colonel’s Bombardier Michael, a nervous little fellow, clean-shaven, who had been a footman in private life; finally Caroline with an enormous omelette, a bottle of nameless wine. . . .

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“Make ’emself damn comfortable, I notice,” growled Lodden that evening, as he left Headquarters for the gun-pits at the foot of the field below the house.

“Wish I were on the ruddy Headquarters,” grouched Gunner Mucksweat, heaving against the reluctant wheel of “B” Battery’s No. 2 gun. “Me too,” answered his mate, as the axles jammed in the narrow doorway of the pit.

But Mr. Stanley Purves, as he watched from his upstairs window, the endless upsoaring of Véry candles; as he heard the occasional crackle of a two-miles distant machine-gun; wished by the Lord Apollo and many other classical deities that he were back at Balliol. For it seemed to Mr. Stanley Purves’ imagination that every lurid flash on the far horizon must be a gun directed unerringly at his personal self and he envied P.J., who slept soundly and unimaginatively on his camp-bed in the corner of their bare and unprotected sleeping-room.

Which paragraph may serve to explain Stanley Purves’ subsequent vogue—among elderly civilians—as a soldier-poet of the let-me-like-a-hero-fall category!

### § 3

Two evenings later, when Francis Gordon arrived—in a purloined Vauxhall car—to dinner, he found the half-Brigade settled down to desultory action.

Already the little house at Annequin, was linked by black “D. 5.” telephone-wires to 7th Artillery Headquarters way back in Sailly-La-Bourse, to the as-yet-unoccupied battle-headquarters at the château of Noyelles a mile on their right. Forward to the gun-pits, and backward to the top of the great Fosse where Straker had established an observation-post in one of the many tunnels burrowed through the slag, ran other wires—very red and new on their supporting poles. Already Lodden and Torrington had spied out the dun plain, the white chalk-furrows; talked learnedly of Hun strong-points—the Pope’s Nose, the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

The first “post” had arrived, been sorted eagerly on the bare floor of the Mess-room; Mr. Black had discovered whence to draw rations; guns had barked away enough ammunition to necessitate fresh supplies from Billy Williams’ subaltern Murphy, in charge of the Ammunition Column Section behind Fosse Six; men had

seen their first shells crash to ground on the Vermelles road.

But as yet—though nominally attached to another Brigade for “training in trench-warfare”—Stark and his two batteries were nobody’s children. No infantry asked them for retaliation; no General panicked round their ammunition-dumps. And they were too far behind the trenches to attract hostile shell-fire.

“So far”—as Peter explained to his cousin, in the dragged garden—“a picnic!”

“You wait till September the twenty-fifth!” said Francis.

“Oh, is that the date?”

“Didn’t you know? Why every housemaid in Béthune can tell you that much.”

It was then September the eleventh!

The two cousins passed into the Mess-room. M. de Morency, a tall French interpreter, black-moustachioed, the bronze sphinx of his calling on the lapel of his khaki tunic, had arrived the day before; stood superintending the lighting of the lamp, Bombardier Michael’s arrangement of the dinner-table.

Peter introduced his cousin, and the two began a voluble conversation in slangy French. Stark stamped down from his upstairs bed-room; Purves and the Doctor arrived together.

“Lodden and Torrington are late.” The Weasel looked at his watch. “Phone down for them, will you, Purves?”

The Balliol man stepped to a tiny, black telephone on a shelf in the corner, began buzzing on the key. “Is that you, Beer Battery. . . . Oh, is Captain Torrington there? Just left for H.Q.—with Major Lodden. Thanks.”

Shortly afterwards, the two arrived; and dinner began with “Gong” soups served in enamel mugs. Followed tinned salmon, mayonnaise sauce and lettuce salad prepared by Caroline, a large ration joint of beef, baked potatoes, rice-pudding. They drank sparingly, from newly-bought glasses, of white wine. Talk ran steadily on the forthcoming operations.

“I hear we shall use gas for the first time,” announced the interpreter.

“And a damned mess we shall probably make of it.” Lodden wiped black moustaches contemptuously with his paper napkin. “Don’t you think so, Gordon?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know much about actual warfare,” remarked Francis, “you see I’m on the Staff.”

Everybody laughed.

Said Colonel Stark: “If you ex-civilians had been willing to pay for a decent-sized Army in peace-time, you might have had officers capable of managing large bodies of troops in war.”

“Then you admit, Colonel?” . . . began Lodden.

“My dear Major, I admit nothing. Let’s have some port. Any coffee, Morency?”

“*Mais oui, mon Colonel.*”

Peter produced a newly arrived box of cigars; the bare room soon grew hazy with smoke. The gaffer and Caroline, dragging a scrofulous boy by the hand, dived down through the timbered doorway to their bedroom in the cellars. Outside, it was very still—only, every now and then, a gun boomed faintly.

Torrington had drawn his chair towards the two cousins; Purves joined them, and Morency. Stark, Lodden and the Doctor kept to the head of the table.

“Damn good fighter, the Boche,” remarked Torrington, *à propos* of nothing in particular.

“Damned swines!” The remark seemed to burst from Francis’ lips. “If you knew as much about them as I do. . . .”

“What do you know about them, young man?” put in the Weasel from the head of the table.

“Well, sir”—an undercurrent of emotion rippled the controlled voice—“I don’t claim to know *much*; but I’ve spent six of the last twelve months in their country.”

“You’ve what!” A simultaneous gasp ran round the room. Francis repeated his preposterous assertion: “I was staying at the Bristol in Berlin just after they beat the Russians at Tannenberg. I saw the crowds round the huge war-maps in Unter den Linden. I’ve seen the Zeppelin sheds at Tondern. And I’ve seen the camps where they keep our prisoners.” His voice dominated the room: nobody else spoke, wanted to speak. “I don’t pretend to be a fighting soldier. It isn’t my job. But when I hear people talk about the Hun as a clean fighter; when I think of the things I’ve seen him do. . . .” He bit off the words, fell silent.

“Then you were in Germany when war broke out,” said the Weasel, after a pause.

“No, sir. I got in afterwards. . . .”

Peter looked at his cousin; remembered old days, remembered the tango-dancing, night-club-haunting Francis of Curzon Street; marvelled that this should be the same man. For the tale Francis told that night—in half sentences, not boastingly but as a soldier discloses his job—carried conviction. Of himself, of how he had been hidden for three weeks in Amsterdam, coached in his part, smuggled not once but many times and in varied disguises across the frontier—Francis told nothing. He contented himself with bare statements. At Essen, in January, he had worked for a month. . . .

“What on?” interrupted Stark, still doubtful if this young Staff officer were not joking.

"A new patent carriage for the 77 field-gun, sir."

"What part of it?"

"Principally the cradle for the buffer. '*Rück-rohr-lafetten-auflauf*,' they call it."

Stark, technical expert, asked no more doubting questions that evening: and Francis went on talking for nearly half-an-hour.

"But how the devil did you get into the prison-camps?" asked Lodden.

"As a priest," said Francis simply, "an Austrian priest. That was my last trip. I'm not going back again if I can help it."

"I should think not," from Torrington, "you must have been scared stiff."

"Scared. Lord, I should think so. But the worst moment I ever had was in the Winter Garden at Berlin. You don't know it of course. It's a kind of theatre with stalls in front, and behind—on a big raised dais—tables for dinner-parties. I was in the promenade, right at the back. And they sang their old Hymn of Hate. Phew! It made me sweat, absolutely sweat with funk. Five thousand of them—on their feet—roaring like, like hyenas. . . ."

At half-past ten, the party broke up; Lodden, and Torrington (who had refused to desert his battery dug-out for a comfortable room at Headquarters) returning across the fields to their gun-pits: Purves, the Doctor and Morency retiring to bed.

"Do you mind if Peter drives home with me, sir?" asked Francis, "I'll send him back in the car."

"All right,"—the little red-headed soldier looked up from his newspaper—"I'll hold the fort till my Adjutant comes back."

The two cousins strolled out, found the car waiting. "All quiet on the Beuvry road?" asked Francis of the chauffeur.

"There were a few shells while you were at dinner, sir."

"Well, don't switch on your headlights till we're through Beuvry."

They climbed into the comfortable limousine; and purred off through Annequin village, shuttered and asleep; swung to the west.

"Heard from Pat?" asked Francis.

"Yesterday. She's with her father."

"Let me see, that's Harley Street, isn't it? I'll drop her a line myself tomorrow. One can't write much on these 'hush' jobs. I've been in Spain, the last three months. By the way, Peter, you're grown very silent since I saw you last. . . ."

Peter lit a cigar, and his cousin saw, in the light of the match, new lines on the firm face, a trace of gray in the dark hair: "Oh, I've been having a pretty thin time, one way and the other."

"Money?"

“Yes.”

“Where’s Arthur?”

“Arthur came home. He’s in the R.F.C.<sup>[8]</sup> somewhere or other. Rummy devil. Rather like you. Never writes letters.”

They came without mishap into the great Place of Béthune; and Peter saw, black by moonlight, round holes in the shining roofs—sole sign of long-range bombardment.

The car stopped. “This is my billet. Come in and have a drink, old man.”

They passed up a flight of stairs; Francis drew matches from his pocket; lit candles on the mantelpiece. Between them—like a saint’s picture on a shrine—stood a photograph, a brand-new photograph of Beatrice Cochrane!

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<sup>[8]</sup> Royal Flying Corps.



# PART FOURTEEN

## ATTACK!

### § 1

Half past nine at night, Friday, September the 24th, 1915!

In the quiet roomy library of Doctor Baynet's home in Harley Street, London, Patricia sat talking to her father.

"He says in this letter, that they aren't in action yet." The gold head lifted from the pencilled scrawl she had been studying: the dark eyes looked quietly towards the man at the littered desk.

"I'm glad of that, my dear," said Heron Baynet; and went on with his work.

### § 2

Nine-thirty, "pip emma," on the last day of the Loos bombardment.

Outside the little house at Annequin, cigar between his lips, Peter Jameson stood watching the show. All round the eastward horizon, gun-flashes winked and blazed, lighting up the sky. Far to southward, beat the continuous drum of French seventy-fives, firing *la rafale*. Every half-minute, from one or other of the pits below the shadowy trees in front of him, spurted a flash of orange, followed by the bark of an 18-pounder, the dwindled hiss of flying shell, the faint thud of its alighting. In the pits themselves, laboured tired and grimy men, sleepless for three days and four nights;—an orderly labour, unhurried: shell to open breech, breech-block clanged home, eye to dial-sight, hand to range-dial: "*Set*," "*Ready*," eye to watch, fingers to ear-drums, "*Fire*," roar of piece discharging, rocking carriage, stink of cordite, "*Repeat!*"

So men laboured, unhurried but unsleeping, at Vermelles and Noyelles-Les-Vermelles, at Cuinchy and Noeux-Les-Mines, northwards and southwards. The intermittent thunder of their labours came to Peter, standing alone in the moonlight: and with it came the jingle and clank of ammunition waggons, the far crackle of an occasional machine-gun, the sound of Scotch singing from shuttered houses in the village on his left.

He turned; went into the house.

In the gloomy Mess-room, sat Stark—pile of typewritten sheets at his elbow,

marked map spread out on the table among the débris of dinner. Driver Nicholson crouched in the corner by the telephone.

“What’s it like outside?” asked the Weasel.

“Oh, pretty quiet, sir. The Boche don’t appear to be firing at all.”

“Any wind?”

“Not a breath. It’ll be bad for our gas.”

“Pity.” Stark bent to his map again. The telephone buzzed. “Mr. Purves, speaking from the dug-out, sir.” Peter stepped over, took up the instrument. “A battery report their No. 3 gun out of action.”

“What’s that?” asked Stark. “How did it happen?”

Peter got through to the battery, heard Lodden’s voice over the wire. “Yes. That infernal eighty-over-forty-four fuze with the new gaine. Blown about six inches off the muzzle. No. Nobody hurt. And my number two gun’s running-up very badly. Can you send Staff Sergeant Barrie down? . . . As soon as he comes in. Thanks.”

Peter gave the necessary orders to Purves; rejoined his Colonel over the attack-plans.

“Follow ’em?” asked Stark.

“Yes, sir. We’ve got five Divisions in the front line and supports. Forty-seventh; fifteenth; ninth; first and seventh. They’re to break the front; open out; and let the Cavalry through. *Our* batteries don’t take part in anything except preliminary bombardment. After that, we stop where we are. But what I can’t understand, sir, is about the Reserves. We don’t seem to have any.”

Driver Nicholson, listening open-eared, was sent out of the room by Stark.

“Look here, P.J.”—the soldier voice dropped a tone—“between you and me, this show’s going to be another wash-out. Our Division and the Northdown ought to have been up last night. That’s why we were hustled out of England. They’re *supposed* to be billeted on the line Beuvry-Noeux-les-Mines. As it is, our Infantry haven’t got as far as Béthune yet.”

“But, good God, sir—are these five Divisions going into action without any infantry Reserves at all?”

“They are, P.J. And you may well say ‘Good God.’ It isn’t our General’s fault either. I met his G.S.O.<sup>[9]</sup> One—your pal Starcross—in his car this afternoon.”

“And when *will* the rest of our Division get here, sir?”

“They’re coming up by forced marches. Starcross reckons they’ll reach Béthune at daybreak. . . .”

“Just when we push off.”

“Exactly. And it’s six miles as the crow flies from Béthune to our present front

line. . . .”

The two men stared first at each other; then at the map. Even to the amateur, the fault was obvious: “What will happen, sir?” he asked.

“Chaos,” said Stark succinctly. “And now you’d better be going to bed. You’ve got to be on that Fosse early tomorrow. Telephone down anything you see. I’ll be at the instrument myself. And mind you, P.J., what I’ve said tonight is between the two of us. . . .”

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[9] Senior Staff officer of a division.

### § 3

“Four o’clock, sir. Time to get up.” Peter awoke from undisturbed slumbers; saw Driver Garton standing, candle in one hand, steaming mug in the other, by his bedside. He pulled himself up from his valise; drank tea gratefully. In the opposite corner of the room, tossing uneasily in his sleep, lay Purves. Outside, all was still—not a gun firing. Peter dressed quickly, slipped sling of gas-helmet over his head; went downstairs.

The Mess-room, still shuttered, smelt dankly of stale smoke and human sleep. In one corner, telephone-receiver strapped round his ears, lay Driver Nicholson. “Don’t wake him,” whispered Peter, as his servant deposited breakfast on the table. “Go round to the dug-out, and tell them that Seabright’s to be ready in ten minutes. I shall want my field-glasses, my map-case, my compass, and a message-book.”

“And your cigar-case, sir?” smiled the young Yorkshireman. For answer, Peter tapped on his tunic-pocket; smiled back. Master and man knew each other fairly well.

The Adjutant disposed of two poached eggs, some greasy bacon, three slices of buttered toast and a large mug of black tea; lit a cigar; sauntered out of the house. A light appeared at one of the upper windows; some one called out: “That you, Jameson?”

“Yes, sir. I tried not to wake you.”

“You don’t catch weasels asleep. Mind you let me have plenty of information. And watch the signal station at G nine ack two seven—on the embankment.”

“I’ve got a note of that, sir.”

“Right. I’m going back to bed for an hour.”

Appeared from the shadows, Gunner Seabright (“Poluski number one”), a fat-

faced little man, clean-shaven, perpetually at grin. He carried a telephone case in his hand, another over his shoulder, a coil of wire.

“Got any earth-pins?” asked Peter.

“Aye, aye, sir.” Seabright had at one time in his chequered career been in the Navy. “Two of them.”

“Come on then.”

They climbed the fence at the back of the garden; stumbled across the colliery tram-lines; followed a red wire up the gritty front of the huge slag-cone. Light was just breaking, a glimmer of dawn over cloudy skies. Not a breath of wind stirred anywhere. “Hot work, sir,” commented the telephonist.

“Damned hot,” said Peter.

They made a flat platform of slag running round the peak of the cone; followed it half way round. “Going to observe from outside, sir?” “Yes. This’ll do. Connect up, will you?”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

Seabright opened his telephone case; drove the earth pin into the slag; connected it to his instrument; scraped the insulation from the red wire they had been following; screwed it home; began to buzz.

“...- -...- -... (F. X. D.)” buzzed Gunner Seabright “...- -...- -... (F. X. D.) Hallo there? Dugout? Is that you Pirbright? Then why the yell don’t you answer quicker?” As he had only called twice, the question was pure swank. Peter tested the line; wandered off round the Fosse.

Already it was alive. Officers everywhere, some ensconced at the end of deep burrows, peering out over the plain; some clambering up the pathways at the back; some standing about at the mouths of their caves; and at the very top, thirty feet above Peter’s head, among a perfect jumble of wires, two Frenchmen—operators for the heavy battery just visible on the plain below, gesticulating and shouting at their strange-looking telephone.

“*Mais non*,” Peter heard, “*mais non. On ne voit rien. Rien je vous dis. . . . Alors dans une demi-heure, mon Commandant.*”

“Their Major’s evidently not in a hurry,” thought Peter.

He was accosted by a serious-eyed Captain of Sappers. “Who are you observing for?”

“First Corps.”

“Well, you can’t get inside. It’s full.”

“I know. My telephonist is just round the corner.”

“Good. We shan’t see much from here.”

“No.” Peter went back to his telephonist.

Now, the glimmer of dawn turned to a faint dark blue radiance. Nothing stirred on the plain below. Light grew; revealing the silent village street, the churchyard, the ruined chapel of “Our Lady of Consolation” battered among her poplars, the long tree-girt stretch of the Hulluch Road. Beyond, like a dun still sea streaked with unmoving foam, lay the trenches. Beyond them, mist.

Peter drew out his map; unslung his glasses; threw away the stump of his cigar.

The mist cleared, revealing the dark pylons of Loos, twin spidery towers, black against the gray, a tiny blurr of high houses that was City Saint Élie, the great wheeled pit-head of Fosse Eight. It still lacked half-an-hour to “zero”; Peter wandered round to the back of the Fosse. Men were stirring round the gun-pits below. A motor skirled the dust on the road where Beuvry towers stood out from the plain. . . .

“Colonel to speak to you, sir,” announced Seabright, appearing suddenly at his elbow. Peter ran back to the telephone.

“How’s the light?”

“Middling, sir. And no wind yet.”

Peter lit another cigar; looked at his watch. A quarter of an hour yet. He was not in the least excited. It all seemed dull—dull beyond belief. . . . Ten minutes. . . . Still, it would be a show worth watching. . . . Seven. . . . What was the colour of Seventh’s Division’s flag—red and blue—diagonal. . . . Five minutes more. . . . His pulse quickened a beat. . . . Two minutes. . . . Decidedly, a show not to miss. . . . One minute. . . . He knelt down to be near the telephone. . . .

Cr-rack! Looking down, Peter saw a blue flash, a smoke puff among the trees round “Our Lady of Consolation.” Simultaneously the whole plain erupted. Here, there, everywhere, yellow and blue, the hidden pits flamed and screamed. Thin smoke rose from them; drifted *back* in a faint breeze. (“Hope to God, we’re not going to use our gas,” thought Peter.) Behind him, he heard the sharp clang of French heavies; the deep note of Granny, the huge howitzer in Saily La Bourse.

He looked towards the trenches; saw single shrapnel bursting orange to fleecy puffs. The puffs blended to a sea of white, flooding out the trenches. It was as though some invisible hand had poured an enormous wave of milk across the near horizon. And out of the wave spouted great heaving whorls of rusty smoke; staining it. And beyond, he could see huge shells striking at the foot of the spidery towers; at the reeling pit-head; at the high houses of City Saint Élie. Smoke pillars lifted to the sky, quartering the landscape. . . .

And always the voice of the guns grew hoarser in the plain below; always the

scream of their fighting shells wailed across the sky. . . .

“Colonel to speak to you, sir.”

Eyes on the plain, Peter took the receiver.

“Are the Boche replying?”

“No, sir. Unless they’re shelling our front line. I can’t see much except smoke.”

“Naturally. They lift in ten minutes.”

Still it went on below. Bark of eighteen pounder. Sharp double crack of four-point-seven. Screech and clang of French heavies. Deep boom of Granny far away in rear. Peter swept the sky with his glasses; saw the pit-head tottering above the smoke. Why didn’t they knock it out? Short! Short again! . . . He looked down towards the trenches. The white wave had turned gray. . . .

Sombrely the dawn increased. In another minute, the infantry would go over.

He fixed his glasses on the gray wave; saw it recede; saw line after line of tiny black figures, ant-like, swarm out of the ground; vanish into the grayness.

“Tell the Colonel. Infantry gone over.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

Below, noise lessened. He peered into the smoke-pall. Further it rolled; and further. In it, nothing moved. Out of it, emerged house-tops. And suddenly he saw the black specks again, little bunches of them. Peter studied his map; took out his protractor.

“Call up the Colonel. Is that you, sir? Infantry retiring from the direction of City Saint Élie.”

“Are you quite certain? We’ve had a rumour that City Saint Élie’s fallen.”

“Quite certain, sir. True bearing from here is 100 degrees.”

“Thanks. I’ll report to Division.”

And that was all our Mr. Jameson saw of the fifty thousand very gallant gentlemen who stormed forward *through our own gas*, dribbling foot-balls, tooting hunting-horns, skirling bag-pipes and blowing mouth-organs—on the morning of September the 25th, nineteen-hundred and fifteen!

Gradually, the gun-fire died away; smoke cleared from the plain. Bare and silent, the dun sea stretched to the sky-line. From very far away, came a faint chattering of machine guns. A German balloon rose up; peered at things; went down again. Down the Hulluch road, a toy battery trotted noiselessly. Only the French “heavies” behind the Fosse, still clanged unceasing.

But the great slag-cone itself seethed with excited men.

Out from their burrows they came; down from their eyries; maps in their hands, telescopes under arm, binoculars dangling from their shoulders. Rumour hundred-

wired, ran among them. Loos had fallen,—said rumour—Hulluch was ours, City Saint Élie, Haisnes, Douvrin!

“By God, we’ve broken them,” roared a fierce little Major of Garrison Artillery, “by God, we’ve broken them at last!” And he danced up there, on the gritty slag, none heeding.

“Look,” shouted the Captain of Sappers, “look! The Cavalry!” And moisture brimmed into his eyes, watching the squadrons wheeling into line on the grass-fields just below.

And always, high up, like monkeys among the telephone-posts, the three Frenchmen jabbered to their clanging guns—“*Bon. Bon. Bien tiré. Magnifique. On les a, je vous dis. Oui. Oui. Oui. On les a!*”

But Chips Bradley’s grandson, peering out over the empty plain, peering back towards Béthune—waiting, waiting, waiting, for the dust cloud on the road, the dust cloud that never came—thought of the words his Colonel had spoken the night before. And the heart in him was heavy, even in those early hours, with forebodings of disaster!

## § 4

Light grew and grew. Fitful gleams of sunshine danced across the plain. More cavalry came, squadron after squadron, wheeling into line on the fields just below. But they made no movement forward, those wheeling squadrons. Peter saw them through his glasses—dismounting, loosening girths, fume of their cigarettes blue in the air.

Came *one* English aeroplane, drifting aimlessly across the sky.

Walking wounded came, trudging painfully across the fields, singly and two by two, arms dangling, heads bandaged. (There were no steel helmets in those early days.)

Came a gray company of prisoners, capless, weaponless; fell out; squatted on their hunkers among the root-fields. Came a dozen peasant-children, sprung somehow to life; wrenched up roots from the field; pelted the captives as they squatted. The company fell in again; trudged off towards Béthune; followed by the spitting, cursing children. (And there were many “gentlemen” in England still abed that morning!)

Came, towards noon, down the road from Sailly, long brown columns of infantry, guns and horses; marching towards Noyelles. The Northdown Division! Gun-range away behind the grimy remnants who were even then bombing out the

cellars in Loos village beyond the skyline. . . . But from Beuvry to Annequin the roads were bare. And on the left of the attack, round the Hohenzollern Redoubt, in the Chalk Quarries, at the foot of Fosse Eight, men fought unsupported, died cursing the chance that was never taken, the help that never came.

“The situation with regard to the Southdown Division is still obscure at the time of drawing up my report,” reads official history of a fortnight later.

## § 5

Peter, relieved by Purves, stumbled down from his eyrie at about two o’clock; found Colonel Stark and Doctor Carson sitting over the débris of lunch.

“Very sad,” the Irishman was saying.

“What is?” asked Peter, slipping off his gas-satchel, sitting down to cold beef.

“Poor Halliday’s been killed,” answered the Weasel. “Doc’s just been up to Vermelles on a push-bike.”

“They nearly got me too. Bromley’s crowd have been having a pretty rotten time.”

The casualty, first among their officers, cast a gloom over the three men. Soon, the Doctor went back to his impromptu surgery—a tiny room off the hall where his batman had set out from their wicker cases, bandages, shining instruments, bottles of disinfectants, boxes of tabloids.

“Sportsman, the doctor,” commented Stark.

The telephone on the shelf began buzzing; Peter went to it; picked up the receiver. “Seventh Don Ack . . . Adjutant fourth Southdown Brigade . . . Brigade Major wishes to speak to you, sir . . . Right . . .” A pause . . . “That you, Jameson? Look here, we want your batteries to open fire again. . . .” Followed map-references which Peter repeated. . . . “Yes. The loophole plates. But go slow with your ammunition.”

Stark glanced at the big marked map on the wall; saw that the targets were the same as those for the previous day. “Infantry held up, I suppose,” he said. “What was that about ammunition? . . . Very well, tell the batteries to fire a round a minute. H.E.,<sup>[10]</sup> of course. You might go down and see how they’re getting on. Tell Mr. Black I want to see him; and send in a telephonist as you pass the dug-out.”

“Now I wonder,” thought the Weasel, as he sat alone over his map, “what is going to happen. Better be prepared for the worst, I suppose.”

The little Regimental Sergeant Major came bounding in; saluted; stood to attention.



“Got your note-book, Mr. Black?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then take this down please. ‘O.C. Waggon-lines, A and B batteries. On receipt of this, you will harness-up and be prepared to move forward at a minute’s notice. Acknowledge by bearer.’ Got that, Sergeant Major?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Repeat it to Mr. Murphy at the Ammunition Column.” Mr. Black stretched out the scribbled messages. Stark signed them. “Have them both sent by cyclist orderly, at once, please. Tell the orderlies they’ll be put under arrest if they’re not back in an hour and a half. Make them report to you personally, please.”

“And Headquarters, sir?”

“Same instructions, Mr. Black. The Adjutant’s horses and mine to be waiting saddled-up at the back of the Fosse; the rest, ready to move off with the batteries. Have the servants pack up everything except the Mess-box at once. Do you quite understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Rations all right?”

“Yes, sir. Two days’ supply.”

“Very good. Send Bombardier Michael to me, please. . . .”

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[\[10\]](#) High explosive.

## § 6

“Damn,” said Torrington, “I thought we were going to get a little rest. The men are pretty well all in. Straker’s up at the O. Pip,<sup>[11]</sup> but he won’t see much. One round a minute, you say.”

They were standing under the trees, just outside the command post—a vast hollow mound of chalk, shored with timber, top covered with new-cut branches.

“Come in, won’t you? We’re just going to have some tea.”

Peter crouched through the timbered doorway; sat down on a ration-box. “I’ll just get on to Straker.” Torrington buzzed on the ’phone above his untidy bunk. “Give me the O. Pip, please. What’s that? You wanted H.Q. Well, the Adjutant’s here.” He handed the receiver to Peter.

Straker’s voice came stuttering down the wire: “I thought you’d like to know

that one of our Infantry Brigades is coming up the road. The 2nd, I think. They're just marching round the Fosse now."

"Thanks," said Peter calmly. "Don't go away. Torrington wants to speak to you." . . . And to Torrington, "I don't think I'll stay for tea, thanks. You might pass the order on to Lodden. . . ."

Peter picked his way diagonally across the field towards the ruined house at the cross-roads. In it, a fire burned. His own men stood about, smoking, gossiping, drinking tea from enamelled mugs. A wounded man limped by, eyes on the ground.

And suddenly, riding round the battered wall at the foot of the Fosse, he saw Colonel Andrews. On either side of him rode Slattery and Simcox. Peter saluted; the Colonel acknowledged; said "Hallo, Jameson"; rode on. Behind him, came the Chalkshires!

"My God," thought Peter, "my God!"

Were these the lusty singing men he had known at Worthing, the cheery officers he had dined with at Shoreham—these dust-stained weary fellows, plodding two by two either side of the road? Hardly a sound came from their parched throats. Packs dragged at their shoulders; rifles dragged at their hands. Their faces were lined as the faces of old men. Sweat dripped from them. . . . A Company straggled by. Came his old company, Arkwright at their head.

"Hallo, Arkwright."

"Hallo, P.J."; and Arkwright rode on. Long Longstaffe and Private Haddock, trudging at his horse's tail, looked up at the known name.

"Gawd," said the little man, "if it ain't our old P.J. 'Aven't got anyfink to eat about yer, I suppose, sir?"

Others took up the cry: "P.J.! Gawblimey, it's our old P.J. Ask P.J. 'E'll give us somefink to eat. Somefink to eat, sir. For the love of Gawd. Somefink to eat. We can't fight with nuffink in our stomachs, sir. . . ."

Peter ran forward; clutched Arkwright's bridle. "What the Hell's happened, Arkwright?"

The schoolmaster looked down from his horse. "I don't know," he said wearily, "I don't know. We've been marching like this for three days. And the rations haven't come. That's all."

Behind them, rose the heart-breaking voices: "P.J.! Yes, P.J., I tell yer. 'E'll get us somefink to eat. Gawd! look at them ruddy gunners. They've got their rations, they have. 'Ere, mate, for the love of Gawd, just a bit of that bread."

Some of the gunners ran out of the ruined house; proffered a crust or two. The men snatched at them; tore them with their teeth as they marched.

“I can’t do anything for them,” whispered Peter. “When did they eat last?”

“Yesterday evening. We were hustled out of Béthune just as they were starting breakfast. . . . Where are we going? . . . God knows, I don’t. The maps haven’t been served out. You’d better get out of this, P.J. It’s only giving the boys false hopes.”

Peter stepped back; and the company plodded by. As they passed him, sweating heads turned, dusty lips murmured. “Can’t you do nuffink for us, sir? Just a bite, sir. Anyfink’ll do, sir.” They looked like faithful dogs whose masters had betrayed them.

“Cheer up, lads,” said Peter, “cheer up!”

“We’ll do our best, sir. Bit ’ard though, our first time in action, ain’t it, sir? . . .”

The files trudged past him in the dust. Behind them, came other files, thousands of them. All dust-stained. All sleepless. All hungry. “Food!” they cried as they marched. “Food!”

*But not a man of them fell out!*

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[\[11\]](#) Observation Post.

## § 7

They sat at tea in the bare Mess-room—the Colonel, Purves, Doctor Carson, Morency, Peter. Outside, it darkled. Rain had begun to fall.

“What’s happened to your appetite, P.J.?” chaffed the jovial Irishman.

“Somehow, I don’t feel hungry, Doc,” said our Mr. Jameson.

# *PART FIFTEEN*

## FORWARD

### § 1

Day waned; died. Bombardier Michael came in; cleared away the tea-mugs. The telephone on the shelf buzzed impatiently. Purves went to it.

"It's Torrington," he announced, "and he wants to know if they're to go on firing at the Pope's Nose."

"Tell him, yes," said Stark, "till further orders."

"Are we going to move out, sir?" asked Purves, coming back to the table. "My servant says he's had orders to pack up my kit."

"He has. My orders." The tone of the Weasel's voice stifled discussion. Again, the telephone buzzed.

"You answer it, Jameson."

Peter picked up the receiver; heard the usual: "Brigade Major Seventh Don Ack wishes to speak to the Adjutant." "You're through, sir." Then the usual quiet voice, "Oh, is that you, Jameson? About tonight, we want you to fire shrapnel on those cross-roads. Same as. . . . Here, half-a-minute. . . . Hang on, will you? . . ." A long pause. "Is your Colonel there? Do you mind asking him to speak?"

"They want you, sir," said Peter across the room.

"I guessed as much." Stark came over; took the instrument.

The four men heard him say: "It can't be done under four hours. . . ." Pause. "Yes, just like them, isn't it? . . . Le Rutoire Farm. . . . All right. . . . You might send those orders along, will you? . . . And I'm one gun short." Then he put the receiver back on the shelf; turned round; and remarked with a peculiar smile: "Well, gentlemen, we're for it this time!"

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### § 2

Peter Jameson was not a man who gave either friendship or admiration lightly. His feelings for Colonel Stark had hitherto been tolerant rather than friendly, critical rather than admiring. The little red man had stood to his Adjutant for a type: the "Regular soldier"—a person of limited outlook, good at his job (and why not, after twenty years of it?), irascible, rather inclined to bother himself over-much with detail,

taking the simple business of commanding an Artillery Brigade as seriously as if it had been the management of a complicated commercial concern. . . .

But on the night of September the 25th, even that stickler for organization and efficiency, P.J., had to acknowledge himself the Weasel's inferior.

The problem confronting the commander of the 4th Southdown Brigade comprised, briefly, the assembling of six hundred men, five hundred horses, and innumerable vehicles, scattered over at least seven miles of ground, the moving of them forward—provisioned, munitioned, and if possible without casualties—over unexplored country to the support of an infantry whose whereabouts had not been ascertained. And all this had to be accomplished through officers mostly ignorant of active service, by weary men, under incessant shell-fire and in pitch darkness. Moreover—as the only definite information consisted of “You will report yourself at once for orders to G.O.C. 2nd Southdown Infantry Brigade” at farm three miles away—arrangements to meet all contingencies had to be made instant.

But Weasel Stark forgot nothing, left nothing to chance. Within three minutes of receiving the first telephone-call, a cyclist was on his way back to the five-mile-distant waggon-lines, another to the Ammunition Column; Lodden and Torrington had left their Batteries for Headquarters, Purves was getting communication (through three different field-exchanges) with the forward batteries in Vermelles, the Doctor was packing up his instruments, Mr. Black serving out a second “tea” to H.Q. Staff, Gunner Horne preparing dinner for its officers. . . . Since tired men *may* fight, but hungry men, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, won't.

By the time D.R.L.S.<sup>[12]</sup> arrived with confirmation of the vague instructions, Bombardier Pitman and his typewriter were installed in the mess-room; and Peter, map in front of him, was dictating exact orders—“A and B would move by such and such a road, C and D would fall in in rear of them at such and such a point; Ammunition sections must keep touch by this means; Ration orderlies by that: the Brigade would halt here; a mounted officer from each battery await the Colonel there. . . .”

And all the time Stark was making certain, from Lodden, from Torrington, from Mr. Black, from Purves and the Doctor, by telephone messages and cyclists and mounted orderlies, about fodder and maps and a new gun for A Battery, and telephone-wire, and sand-bags and spare springs, and the million details which the Commander of a seasoned unit may leave to his subordinates but the Colonel of a new Brigade dare not abandon to chance.

Three quarters of a hour after the Weasel had said, “Gentlemen, we're for it this time,” he and Peter—warmed by a square meal and a glass of port, their preliminary

work accomplished, heavy belts bulging their aproned hunting-mackintoshes—climbed to horse in the rain, and set off, followed by their grooms, towards the shell-bursts over Vermelles.

Passing the gun-pits, Peter could see hurricane-lamps moving, figures unpling sand bags from the blocked entrances. . . .

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[12] Despatch Rider Letter Service.

### § 3

Single file through the streaming darkness, they jog-trotted the uneven road.

The rain beat in Peter's eyes; little Willie stumbled, pulling wet reins through wet gauntlets; recovered himself; jogged on. Peter leaned over; gentled the arched neck. Peering forward, he could just see the huge chestnut's lifting croup, the Weasel's bobbing torso. . . . Something came screaming out of the murk; flashed crimson; whistled; pattered to ground. Instinctively, Peter's knees tightened on the saddle-flaps. Little Willie hunched himself for a gallop; felt steady hand at his mouth; desisted. "Anybody hurt?" called the Colonel. Peter turned in his saddle; saw Jelks wrenching Queen Bess back to the road, a second figure coming up steadily behind. "No, sir. Ten yards to our left." . . . They rode on.

Now they were into Vermelles—a broad street of battered houses. The Colonel slowed to a walk. Came another whistle, followed by the smash of tiles, the clink of falling brick on cobble. "This is damned unpleasant," thought our Mr. Jameson. He saw Stark bend down, speak to a shadow on the road. They veered left; right again; over a railway-line into a soft road, trees on either side. The rain had almost stopped. Behind them, shells still whistled over the town. Immediately about them, all was quiet. Stark bent from his saddle; flashed a torch at the roadway; inclined right. They jogged on three hundred yards over turf, past a big hay-rick. Stark flashed his torch again; signalled "dismount."

"Sorry," he said when Peter came up. "Couldn't risk being blocked on the main-road. That's the farm. We'll have to walk the rest." He pointed to a yellow light; handed reins to his groom—an old man, clean-shaven and bow-legged.

"Doherty, you and Jelks will take the horses back to that hay-rick. Let 'em feed. Whatever happens, don't move from it. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ruddy muck-up all round," commented the Weasel to his Adjutant as they

stumbled down into a greasy trench; lost the light; hauled themselves out; found it again; picked their way through five yards of wire; felt mud and cobbles under their feet; saw the light close in front of them. . . .

Suddenly, Peter grew aware of noise. A noise inhuman. The whimper of damned souls. A wail as of wet fingers on an enormous glass: a wail that rose and fell, interminable, unbearable. Suddenly, he was aware whence that wail came.

All along the muddy roadway they lay: the wounded: hundreds of them: thousands: brown blanket shapes: some muttering: some moaning: some singing in delirium: some quite still. The agony of it gripped Peter in the stomach. Vomit rushed to his throat; was choked down again. . . .

The Colonel stepped over a moaning form; pulled back a sack curtain revealing bare walls, an oil-lamp, three gunner officers eating round a trestle table.

“Is this Le Rutoire?” rasped the Weasel.

The three officers rose to their feet: “Part of it, sir,” said one, “the rest’s about fifty yards down the road.”

“Is General Ballardyce here?”

“No, sir.”

“Who are you?”

“Siege,” said the officer, and gave his number. “We’ve got two six-inch Hows. in the farm.”

“Haven’t seen an Infantry General anywhere about?”

“No, sir.”

“All right. I’ll try down the road.”

“Have a drink before you go, sir?”

“No, thanks.”

They clambered back into the darkness; set off, between the moaning forms, down the road; found a great gloomy gateway. Here, the wounded lay in hundreds. Shapes stood over them; lifted them; loaded them into the shelves of hooded cars. The cars chugged away. Other cars chugged up. . . .

They passed through the gateway. “Do you know if General Ballardyce is here?” asked Stark of a big man, chaplain’s cross on his cap.

“No, I don’t,” answered the parson. “Who the hell is General Ballardyce?”

They searched the farm, gloomy outhouse after gloomy outhouse. Everywhere lay the wounded, brown shapes, moaning and wailing. Finally, they found steps; stumbled down them into an underground cellar. The place looked, smelt, was a charnel house. The reek of it struck Peter like a blow. Reek of blood! Blood everywhere. Bloody forms lying on bloody sacks. Bloody bandages in bloody

buckets. A man with bloody hands stooping over bloody flesh.

"Let's get out of this," rasped Stark. . . .

Once more they stood outside the farm, among the chugging cars, the moaning wounded. A form approached them. A voice asked "Are you General Ballardyce?"

"I am not," said Colonel Stark.

The form materialized into a pale-faced subaltern, whom Peter recognized.

"Aren't you Rutton of the Chalkshires?"

"Yes. Jameson, isn't it? I say, I wish you could help me. I've got all the travelling cookers of the 2nd Infantry Brigade just up the road. And I've been ordered to rendezvous with them at Haisnes Church at dawn. . . ."

"Haisnes is three miles away from here; and it's inside the Boche lines, young man," interrupted Stark.

"I know, sir. But I've got written orders." He fumbled inside his coat, produced a message-form. Stark flashed a torch on it. "You see, sir. It's quite clear. What *am* I to do, sir?"

"Use your common sense, young man. You can't charge the Boche with your sanguinary kitchens. . . ."

An orderly stumbled up; saluted Rutton; said, "The General's been gone three hours, sir. One of the doctors just remembered him riding up and riding off again."

"What *am* I to do, sir?" wailed Rutton.

But Stark was indulging himself in one real outburst: a frothing torrent of scarlet blasphemy that submerged every gilded head between Saint Omer and the Pylons of Loos. . . .

## § 4

Men under fire for the first time are not usually frightened.

Peter, re-walking the muddy road between those wailing wounded, was conscious of no fear. His orders—to find the horses, take them back through Vermelles and rejoin his Colonel at the cross-roads which the map called Corons de Rutoire—seemed simple enough. But he was in a black rage at the incompetence of those behind; and he cursed them as he pashed into the greasy trench, hauled himself out of it, tried to locate that hay-stack.

Damn that hay-stack! Where the devil could it have moved to? He saw the thing suddenly, outlined black against the saffron of a shell-burst; saw the silhouettes of horses rearing at their bridles; dashed forward. As he reached the two men, he heard the whistle of another shell; heard it stop, plop into the ground. No detonation



followed.

“By the Lord an’ I’m glad to see you, sir,” ejaculated the shadow of Driver Doherty, “I’ve been thinking we’d be killed every minute.”

“You will be if you don’t hurry up,” snapped Peter, swinging himself straight from the ground to his saddle. “Up you get, both of you.”

Unthinking, he put spurs to Little Willie; set off at a hand-canter; turned in his saddle; saw the Colonel’s groom struggling with the big chestnut. The old ostler had caught his right leg against the unaccustomed rifle-bucket; couldn’t get it across the saddle of his own horse. Jelks was in the act of mounting. Peter wrenched his horse’s head round; galloped back; threw the man somehow into his seat. Another shell whistled over, plopped harmless into the ground. The Colonel’s chestnut reared.

“For God’s sake get a move on,” roared P.J., and slashed the groom’s mount over the croup with his heavy riding-stick. The old man and his two horses shot forward down the track; Peter and Jelks followed at a gallop.

They came unscathed to the road; slowed to a trot, Peter taking the lead. No more shells followed: the road was deserted. They crossed the railway, swung left, arrived suddenly in an empty square. Above them rose the skeleton of a church tower. Peter pulled up; took out his map; flashed torch at it. The grooms joined him.

“You can’t stop here, sir.” A sentry popped up amazingly from nowhere.

“Why not?”

“Road’s being shelled every two minutes. One’s just about. . . .” The whizz-bang gave no warning. Even as Peter flung up his arm to cover his face, he saw it hit the ground ten yards in front, detonate blue in the dust. Little Willie reared straight up; Peter flung himself forward on the horse’s neck; gave him his head. He came down again; stood shivering.

“Anybody hurt?” asked P.J.

“No, sir.”

“Then come on.”

Behind them, they heard shells bursting; in front, the road lay deserted between shattered houses. They trotted past a level crossing; came on confusion beyond belief.

In the inky darkness, men, horses, guns, infantry cooks, cars, motor-cyclists, lorries were fighting their way forward. There was no traffic control, no attempt at order. On the road, at the side of the road, anywhere man or beast could find foothold, feet pashed, wheels rumbled. An enormous pontoon-boat on its low carriage had broken down. Round it, and about it, stood cursing men. There were

cries in the darkness: "Who the 'ell's that? Where are you, mate? Are you the Suffolks?"

Damning and blasting, Peter barged his way through; made the cross-roads. There, just lighting a cigarette, he found Stark.

"Didn't expect you quite so soon. Fine picnic, isn't it?" said the Weasel, as the three horsemen dismounted. "Didn't see anything of the Brigade, did you?"

"No, sir. They'll have a job getting through."

"They're not due yet."

Peter drew off his gauntlet; looked at his watch; saw the hands pointed to ten o'clock; groped instinctively for his cigar-case; pulled out a weed; bit off the end of it; found his matches; lit up.

"What about General Ballardyce, sir?"

"God knows where he's got to. You might ask some of these infants. The whole place is swarming with them. Don't be away long."

Peter plodded off haphazard into the murk; barked his shin against a vehicle. "Who's that?"

"Cookers. Second Southdown Infantry Brigade," answered Rutton's voice. "I say that Colonel of yours is a brick."

"Oh, to hell with you and your cooks," said Peter, and plodded on again. He had been sweating: now the perspiration began to dry. Also the black rage was on him again. He heard the jingle of bits in the darkness; somebody shouted "Halt!" A shell, out of sight, crashed to ground. Then somebody called out from his horse, "I say, you with the cigar?"

"Yes," answered Peter.

"Can you tell me where I am?"

"Who are you?"

"Southdown Yeomanry."

Peter gave the information; and added, "I should get out of this if I were you. It's no place for Cavalry."

Asked the somebody, "Have I your permission to retire, sir?"

And Peter Jameson, Adjutant of the 4th Southdown Brigade, who had as much right to order Yeomanry out of action as Driver Jelks, said—without a quiver in his voice—"You have"; listened, cigar in mouth, to the somebody's "Walk—March," to the jingle of bits and the creak of accoutrements; saw the last file of that squadron disappear into the darkness.

"Discipline be sugared," thought P.J. "A child could see that this isn't the place for Divisional Cavalry."

He plodded on, enquiring of all he met: "Have you seen General Ballardyce?" But nobody he met had either seen, heard of, smelt or felt the missing General of the 2nd Southdown Infantry Brigade.

## § 5

Meanwhile, Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas Stark, D.S.O. R.A., ruminated at the roadside. In front of him, the amazing traffic disentangled itself somehow; moved forward, a grotesque shadow-show, through the darkness. Behind him, he heard the jingle of harness, a battery moving forward over turf. He called out, "Who are you?" "B Battery 3rd Southdown Brigade," came the answer. The battery disappeared.

...

Stark began to reason out his position. He knew Ballardyce of old: a sound fellow, the last person to disregard detail. Therefore, Ballardyce had not been told to keep touch with his guns at Le Rutoire. Point one settled. Point two—Murchison's cryptic orders about the forward move. Murchison was over-conscientious in the transmission of orders. Followed that Murchison had practically no information. Point two settled. And with that—added to his own private telephone-talk to the Brigade Major of Seventh Artillery—Stark arrived at a definite conclusion: The blunder lay further back than either Southdown or Seventh Division Headquarters.

Obviously. Because Rutton's order to rendezvous with firstline transport at a village still in possession of the enemy, proved an entire misconception of the battle-front. . . .

The Weasel had not wasted the hour it had taken his Adjutant to find the horses and return with them to the cross-roads. He had spent it in reconnoitring, as far as possible, the immediate ground; in acquiring miscellaneous scraps of information.

Remained three problems—the exact position of our own front line, which section of it he would be asked to protect, and where to plant his batteries.

And the Weasel thought: "This road runs straight into Loos village. There are no shells coming from that direction. We are supposed to have taken Loos. I think we have. Beyond Loos"—he consulted his map—"is this Hill 70. The chances are we have not taken Hill 70. There is a lot of hostile artillery fire coming from my left front. . . ."

He timed with his watch the period between the discharges of the guns and the shell bursts over Vermelles. . . . "Those guns are not much over two thousand yards from me. I know for certain, because of the targets we were firing at this evening, that the centre of our original attack was held up: and if P.J.'s information about City

Saint Élie was correct. . . .”

“And by Jove it *was* correct.” The Weasel suddenly broke into speech. “That gun-fire proves it. As sure as God made little apples I’m sitting on the base-line of a semi-circle, plum in the middle of a five-mile salient.”

Then he took out his compass; laid it on the ground till the needle steadied; and turned due west. “Damn it,” said the Weasel, “what’s happened to the Véry Lights? . . .” And even as he spoke, directly to the south of him, he caught a faint white shimmer in the sky; and even as that faded, due north of him, he caught the barest glimpse of another.

“Oh, hell!” thought the Weasel. “Oh, ruddy hell!”

Down the road behind him, headlamp flaring recklessly, dodging in and out among the traffic, a motor-cycle phutted its jolting way. The Weasel jumped into the middle of the road; stood there, coat open, arms outstretched. The cyclist halted, dropping one leg to the ground.

“D.R.L.S.?” asked the Weasel.

“Yes, sir. I’m in a hurry.”

“To hell with your hurry. Put that blasted lamp out. Now wait.” The Weasel shaded the Orilux torch at his belt; drew a message-pad from his pocket; inserted the carbon; began to write. And while he wrote, very meticulously, he thought of the Brigade he had trained so carefully, of his wife and the life she carried, and of a certain individual at St. Omer who would not be displeased if Weasel Stark happened to make a mistake. . . . For in the bigger affairs of earth, as in the smaller, it is easier to break a subordinate than admit one’s own failure. . . .

“Sign on the message-form, please,” rasped the Weasel, holding his hand over the meticulous words. Then he tore off the top copy, and stuffed it into an envelope which he addressed, marking the time of dispatch on the space provided, to: “B.M. Southdown Div. Arty.”

“And now,” rasped the Weasel, “why the devil didn’t you shout out who your message was for? Don’t you know your job?”

“O.C. 4th Southdown Brigade R.F.A., sir,” said the cyclist. “He’s at Le Rutoire farm, sir. . . .”

“Is he?” said the Weasel; and opening the envelope, began to read: “Further to my B.M. 764, through 7 D.A., please report by bearer map-references of your batteries and what time G.O.C. 2nd I.B. proposes to attack. . . .”

“Why didn’t Davson or Hathway bring this?” asked the Colonel.

“I don’t know, sir. I only joined Divisional H.Q. this morning.”

The Weasel turned the torch on his own face: “You’ll know me next time, young

man. Now buzz off.”

“I was told to wait for an answer, sir,” said the cyclist, slipping the empty envelope, signed for evidence of receipt, into the case slung at his side.

“You’ve got your answer,” rasped the Weasel. “Buzz off, and be quick about it.”

“Don’t switch on that headlamp till you reach Vermelles,” the great voice boomed like a megaphone through the phutting darkness.

## § 6

One o’clock A. M. on the morning of the 26th. A drizzle of rain. Stretching a mile down the road from Corons de Rutoire, its last water-cart just clear of the shell-fire on the Vermelles railway-crossing, waits a long column of dripping horses, loaded vehicles and weary men. The men are dismounted. They stand, gunners by gun-wheels, drivers at horses’ heads. “What’s happening, Joe? I dunno. Wish we could smoke. Where’s the old man? Up in front! Anyone hit in your lot? Only our Number one’s horse. Just a splinter. . . .” Laughter. . . . “Bet he danced a bit. Who bound it up? The Doc. Good for the Doc. He ought to be at Number Nine Hospital. What-ho!”

At the head of the column stands a little red-headed man; Adjutant by his side; round him, his four battery commanders: Torrington, dropping with fatigue; Lodden, very calm, all his irascibility vanished in the presence of crisis; Bromley, twirling brown moustaches; Major Lethbridge, the newcomer, a tiny fat man with a weak mouth and unsteady eyes, fidgeting his riding-switch.

“Well, that’s the position,” says the Weasel. “We can’t move forward because we haven’t got guides and God knows where the trench-bridges are. We can’t go back, because Ballardyce has obviously been ordered to attack. Therefore, though we may get it pretty hot if the Boche is still in Fosse Eight tomorrow morning, I intend to stop where I am. There’s an old trench just in front of us; the parados will give us a bit of cover.”

“But what about the horses, Colonel?” from Torrington.

“They’ll have to stop with the guns till dawn anyway. If the front line gives, we shall be liable to want our teams in a hurry. Well, gentlemen, if nobody has anything better to suggest. . . .” A silence. . . . “All right. Jameson, you’d better go with Bromley and mark for the right of the Brigade. Batteries to come up one at a time in column of route. Action left. Get your guns as close to the trench as you can. Usual intervals if possible. Teams to remain with the guns till dawn. Purves. . . .”

“Yes, sir.” The Balliol man appears out of the darkness.

“Tell H.Q. to walk their horses forward to that hay-stack. See it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Unhook the telephone-wagon and the M. O.’s<sup>[13]</sup> cart. Send your horses a hundred yards to the rear, and report to me when its done. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

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[\[13\]](#) Medical Officer.

## § 7

If ever man in a tight corner drew comfort from good work done in the past, it was Weasel Stark as he stood alone that night, and watched this entity of his creating file past him in the darkness.

Very quietly they came, team after toiling team, gun after creaking gun, subaltern after subaltern leading his section to their marked position—O’Grady, Archdale, Pettigrew, Straker, Conway, Merrilees, Hall and Hutchinson. One by one the teams were unhooked, led away; one by one the guns swung round, muzzles across the gaping trench. And about each gun, as it dropped into position, men laboured, men very weary of labour, with pick and shovel and sand-bag, making what cover they might against the dawn.

And till dawn began, up and down among the labouring men,—the orders he had *anticipated* received at last—strode the Weasel, rasping across the darkness: “Dig! you blight-hawks. For the Lord’s sake, dig!”

# *PART SIXTEEN*

## ACTION LEFT!

### § 1

Daylight revealed an irregular line of fifteen field-guns and limbers, weary men piling sandbags round their wheels. Already the sandbags had risen to the gun-axes.

The line of guns lay in the centre of a great shallow saucer of ground, scarred with zig-zag trenches; and as the first blue of dawn cleared to white, the men who laboured could see, straight to their front and on the lip of the saucer, the shattered top of a solitary tree. And looking to the left of the tree, they saw,—first of all—a road, and then a big battered farm-house, beyond which—miles away as it seemed to the weary men—rose over the ultimate edge of the huge saucer a something which Gunner Mucksweat, miner by trade, pronounced to be the wheel of a pithead. Had Gunner Mucksweat been able to read a map, he would have known the pithead wheel for the top of Fosse Eight.

Prolonging the line of guns on the left ran the road they had traversed during the night—at its end, the torn roofs of Vermelles; and behind the guns, bunched together over a square mile of ground, stood horses—hundreds and hundreds of horses. For the fourth Southdown Brigade was not alone in that huge saucer of chalk! And behind the horses, parallel to the guns, lay another road, lined with red brick houses, above which towered the huge slag-cone of Fosse Seven.

### § 2

The toe of a boot woke 2nd Lieutenant Stanley Purves to consciousness of the fact that he was sleeping in the lee of a particularly noisome hay-stack.

“Get up,” said P.J. “The Colonel wants you.”

“What’s the time?” asked the thing under the hay.

“Half-past four.”

“My grief, what a time to get up!”

He struggled to his feet, pulling wet wisps from his hair; realized that he could hardly walk for cramp; limped forward; stumbled over a low stretcher on two-cycle wheels, into the shafts of a hooded cart painted with a large Red Cross.

“Anybody want me?” Doctor Carson, a light sleeper, pushed his white head out

from the tilt; saw Purves making for the guns. "Suppose I'd better get up," said the Doctor; and in doing so, woke Horrocks the Vet. They cursed each other, and stepped out onto the wet ground.

Said Purves, returning: "The Weasel wants his breakfast, and he wants it damn quick." He limped off to find Gunner Horne, found him asleep under the spidery telephone-waggon. Him, by right of seniority, Purves kicked also. Moreover, after a careful reconnaissance, the Balliol man discovered two foreign-looking boots projecting from the afore-said hay-stack, which—being sternly pulled—produced Morency.

Meanwhile the four battery commanders—Torrington, hobbling along somehow in the rear—followed by two men carrying a red drum of wire, were toiling up the slope towards "Lone Tree."

### § 3

"Have you been smoking those cab-rankers of yours *all* night, P.J.?" asked the Weasel.

They were standing in the middle of the gun-line, watching Charlie Straker as he bent over the pointer of his No. 1 director.

"I should lay on that tree till you hear from Torrington," said Stark; and repeated his question to Peter.

"Pretty well, sir."

"I wonder they don't make you sick. Had any sleep?"

"No, sir."

They looked at each other, the two unshaven men; and both laughed for the first time in twenty-four hours. Whatever else happened, the fourth Brigade was at least in position. Merrilees, solemn as an owl, came up with "Mr. Conway's compliments" and "should he lay his guns on that tree"; departed with his instructions.

By now, sticks were crackling in the deserted trench, tea boiling and bacon sizzling. Weary men struggled into their tunics; ate and drank gratefully. "Keep 'em at it," said the Weasel, as they passed the last gun on their way to breakfast. "Very good, sir," answered horsy Hutchinson; and added *sotto voce*, "what the devil does the old man think we're all made of—pigskin!" . . .

"Rotten job, driving tired men, isn't it, P.J.?" said the Weasel, balancing himself—mug in hand—on the shafts of the doctor's cart. "But I don't like the look of that," he pointed to the far pit-wheel, "and I don't like the look of this," he indicated the cross-roads, "in fact, *entre nous*, the more I see of things all round, the less I like



any of 'em."

Half way through breakfast, Peter—called to the telephone—heard Lodden's voice. They had made out, roughly, the infantry's position; were coming back. Would Peter send up O'Grady and one other subaltern to observe? At half-past six, the four battery commanders returned. It was still too misty for shooting.

Appeared, on a frisky charger, red hat glowing, eagerness personified, Murchison the Brigade Major. He waved a large white map at the Weasel; pointed with his finger to a wriggly red line on it. "We want you to open fire on that trench, Colonel. Fire as much as you like: but don't fire a round after 10:30; because the Infantry are going to charge then."

"Who's going to cut the enemy wire?" To Peter, overhearing, the tired voice sounded very serious.

"Oh, that'll be all right." Murchison galloped off.

The right-hand gun of the Brigade shot out a tongue of flame; a sandbag dropped from its parapet. O'Grady, beyond the crest, had begun his ranging.

Appeared, on a quiet brown mare, Coolsdon, the Staff Captain. He, too, had a white map in his hand; indicated a target.

"Oh, if Murchison's been here," said Coolsdon; and galloped off. . . .

Now, all round the great saucer of chalk, men bent to telephone receivers. "Add 100. Five minutes more right," shouted the men, and voices down the gun-line repeated, "Add 100. Five minutes more right." The thing that ballooned slowly into the air behind Fosse Eight, could not hear the shouting men; but it could see, vaguely through the low mist, tiny sparks of fire in the great saucer!

## § 4

*"Three rounds Battery-fire. One-O seconds." "Stop." "Add twenty-five." "Two rounds Battery fire, One-O seconds." "Go on." "At Battery fire, sweep one five minutes."*

Up and down the long line, men stood shouting, men jerked triggers, muzzles roared and recoiled, shells leapt to open breech, breech-blocks twirled home, gunners—knees astride—clung to rocking seats. And round the rocking, roaring guns, deafened men still toiled with pick and shovel at the sandbag epaulments.

Batteries were firing independently: and Stark, mackintosh spread on the parados of a crumbling trench, watched them without a word. He felt a hand on his arm; saw two fingers and a cigar pointing over his shoulder, forward and upward through the gun-flashes. "See that sausage, sir," shouted P.J. in his ear.

The Weasel looked round at his Adjutant: the Adjutant flickered an eye towards the crowded horse-lines.

"Behind those houses," rasped the Weasel. "Get 'em away quietly, or they'll panic. And tell 'em to post a look-out man to watch for signals."

"Not bad for a civilian," thought the Weasel as he watched Peter stroll calmly to the haystack, tap Horrocks on the shoulder.

The balloon had gone down again; guns were still firing; and across the fields—veterinary officer's white breeches at their head—filed at a walk the horses of the Headquarters Staff. Now, in and out among the tethered teams at the battery horse-lines, cigar in mouth, strode a stocky figure, whispering, "Hook in and get away quietly. Behind those houses. At a walk, please, Quartermaster Sergeant." Like figures in a quadrille, the bays and browns and blacks of the teams, the dark green of the ammunition wagons, curved to slow life; emerged into four long lines that unrolled steadily across the dun fields to safety. But as the lines drew clear, they revealed behind them, low dark bunches in the middle distance; other horses—hundreds and hundreds of horses. . . .

*"Ich kann nicht genau sehen,"* mumbled a guttural voice three and a half miles away, *"aber am Dreiweg finden wir sicher etwas. Also, los damit, lieber Oberleutnant."* . . .

Peter heard, above the roar of his own guns, a high shrill scream; saw a black fountain spurt from the ground three hundred yards in front. The Weasel was on his feet, hands to mouth, "Take cover," roared the Weasel. "Take cover. All except gun-numbers into the trench." For the diggers had stopped work, stood staring at the dropping fountain.

Rose another scream up the sky. . . . "Get down, you fools, get down." Now the Weasel was half way along the flashing line. . . . The scream came shrieking to earth, stopped. A hundred yards in front, a few clods leapt from the ground. "Under cover. . . . Under cover." . . . Like rabbits to burrow men popped to earth. . . . But still the guns went on.

Peter, kneeling behind quivering sandbags, was conscious of a mule braying high in air, of a second's deadly silence, of a thudding crash; felt a rush of air at his ears; saw something slice the sandbag at his side as a knife slices cheese, plunge into the turf. . . . Then he heard fragments pattering on the hard earth behind him; looked up; and saw, a hundred yards away, standing upright, hands in his pockets, the Weasel; and the Weasel was still shouting "Under cover, you fools, get under cover." The gun behind which Peter had knelt, went off with a crash. . . .

"My aunt," he thought.

Except for the Colonel's figure, nothing moved behind the guns. Purves and the Doctor, noses to ground, were lying flat against the haystack. Very high in air, another shell went howling on its way. Peter, following the noise with his eyes, found dark clumps of horses; was conscious noise ceased; saw a great black earth-spout shoot up among the horses; heard the double crash of shell's alighting; saw terrified teams rear and plunge; saw little figures hurling themselves at bridles. . . .

Another shell swished over; and another; plunged to ground in rear of him. The whole middle distance seemed a mass of stampeding beasts that hurled themselves through black fountains across the plains.

"Didn't you hear me say get under cover, you sanguinary cigar-merchant?" rasped a voice at his ear. . . .

## § 5

"Another five minutes," ordered the Weasel. "Tell 'em they can go to gun-fire if they like."

Hostile shelling had ceased. Only, far away over the roofs of Vermelles, an occasional gray puff-ball betokened shrapnel. Sun shone on bare plain behind, on bare crest in front. Round the farm, little figures moved.

Torrington, V.C., pale and shaky, lay in the bottom of the recess between his sections: "What's that, Sergeant Major?" he asked the man standing behind him. "Colonel says we can go to gun-fire, sir." "All right. Tell 'em five rounds." "Five rounds gun-fire," megaphoned the Sergeant Major. Straker and Pettigrew, kneeling between their pieces, flung out hands in acknowledgment; repeated the order. Flames roared above Torrington's head; chalk pattered down on him from the trench-walls. "How much longer, Sergeant Major?" "Four minutes yet, sir." "Battery fire, till the last minute." "Right sir. . . . At Battery fire, go on."

"God's teeth," muttered Torrington, V.C. "I can't stand this racket much longer."  
...

*"Stop!"*

All round the hollow saucer of ground, noise ceased miraculously. Only, every now and then, the howitzers roared separately at their far targets. And from beyond the lip of the saucer came a distant stutter, as of men swinging gigantic rattles—the chattering of machine-guns.

Behind the tattered hay-stack, stood a signaller, flags outstretched. "W N," wagged the signaller. "W N," replied far flags at the corner of the houses under the Fosse Seven. Ammunition wagons came trotting across the field. . . . Down in the

trench, black instrument in front of him, another signaller buzzed frantically. "F.O.O." buzzed the signaller, "F.O.O." But no answering buzz sounded in his ears. For the red wire lay frayed beyond the crest-line—and the guns were blind!

"This is nice muck-up," said the Weasel to Lethbridge. "Strict orders not to fire after ten-thirty. The line dished and the Lord knows what may be happening."

A man, telephone-case on his arms, climbed out of the trench; began making his way up the wire.

At the end of the gun-line, by an emptying ammunition-wagon, Peter stood talking to Bromley. They looked towards Vermelles. Suddenly, under a gray smoke-puff they saw a horseman at full gallop; behind him—drivers bending low in their saddles, whips plying,—a six-horse team came hell for leather, and behind the team, a leaping bumping thing on wheels. "Charge of the horse-artillery?" laughed Bromley. "No," said Peter, "Lodden's missing gun." The team arrived with a clatter and jingle at the cross-roads. Lodden leapt by. They heard his furious voice. "Who told you to gallop, Bombardier? Who the hell told you to gallop?" Drivers grinning from their sweating mounts, the gun creaked past.

"Hurry up with those shells, you chaps," said Bromley to his gunners. . . .

There jog-trotted slowly to the cross-roads a young Staff officer. He put hand to eyes, shading them from the sun; said, "Good Lord, it's Peter"; trotted over to the guns. The horseman in the creaseless tunic looked very out of place, as he leaned from his saddle talking to the unshaven tired-eyed Gunners.

"What are you doing up here, Francis?" asked Peter.

"Trying to find Le Rutoire, and a prisoner or two. That's it, I suppose." He switched riding-stick towards the red buildings in front. "What's supposed to be happening here—a battle?"

The three stood gossiping. The ammunition wagon, empty of its contents, wheeled past them; trotted across the field. "Well, so long," said Francis, "I must be off." He puts his horse to a trot. . . .

Peter heard the shell scream; flung himself on his face; heard the burst of it, the clods falling about him. "Christ!" he thought, "Francis. . . ."

Bromley, unhurt, was first to reach the bloody kicking heap at the roadside. Even as he came to it, the kicking legs jerked convulsively—the beast rolled over—lay still. Peter, rushing up, saw a gaping, steaming belly, a scarlet boot protruding from it. . . . Together, they dragged out the tortured thing that had been Francis Gordon. He lay there, face dead white, just muttering. Only the upper part of his body seemed human—the rest was blood, blood and dirt.

Across the turf towards him, white hair ruffling in the breeze, darted the doctor,

looked for a second at the thing on the ground.

“Shell-dressings! In my cart. Quick as you can. Case of instruments. My orderly!” Peter rushed off. . . . He came back carrying a great armful of lint, to find the doctor and Bromley on their knees. A boot, bloodsoaked, was lying on the ground. “Cut the seam,” he heard; and “all right, Doc,” from Bromley. Something ripped: they were turning over the thing which had been his cousin.

“Dressings,” said the doctor, “thanks.” He took them, began bandaging the ripped flesh.

Francis opened his eyes; saw Peter standing over him. “Make—him—give—me—morphia,” gasped Francis. Then pain stunned him; he lay there, as a shot rabbit lies, eyes still open. . . .

The doctor’s orderly came running, case under his arm. “Morphia,” said the doctor calmly, not looking up from his work. “Rip that sleeve, please.” . . .

Blessed needle slid under white flesh: eyes closed. “More dressings, please,” said Doctor Carson, “and you can be getting up that wheeled stretcher, Masterson.”

## § 6

“Will he live, Doc?” Peter, rather white about the gills, watched the stretcher down the road, out of sight.

“I’m afraid not. Though mind you, there’s a chance. The left femur’s broken; that right foot. . . . But there, you saw for yourself.”

“You’d better look after these, P.J.” Bromley handed over a bundle of papers, a wrist-watch, a morocco leather photograph-case. Peter stuffed them into his pocket; walked back to the Colonel. He had been awake so long, the thing had happened so suddenly, that the fact of the casualty being his cousin hardly touched him. He felt the horror—but horror numbed, impersonal. . . .

At the Colonel’s side, leaning over from his horse, Peter found Murchison.

“Any news from your F.O.O.?” asked the Brigade Major.

“No. Wire’s broken. I’m having it repaired. Hallo, what the devil’s that?”

He pointed to the crest on their right. Little figures, figures of men running, rose over the skyline; bunched together as they streaked down the hill. A shell burst black among the figures—a second shell. And up the slopes towards the figures, galloped miniature horses with tiny jockeys; and as they reached the crest, horses silhouetted black against the sky-rim, the jockeys flung themselves from their saddles; dashed forward out of sight. And still little men poured back over the hill, past the waiting horses. . . .

“My God,” said Murchison, “I thought at first they must be Boches.” (For there were two hundred British guns in that great saucer of ground.) . . .

“My God,” rasped the Weasel, “I wish they had been.” (For it is not good to watch the unofficial side of history in the making.) . . .

Suddenly, they heard a voice, roaring, “Action”; an orderly dashed up; “Through to F.O.O. sir.”

“Shrapnel. . . . Four six hundred. . . .” roared the voice. . . . “At gun-fire sweep five minutes from your zero lines. . . .”

The rest of the orders were howled down by a hurricane of gun crashes. . . .

## § 7

Beyond the farthest lip of the chalk-saucer; beyond the zig-zag communication trench; beyond the old front-line, cut deep into the chalk, studded with empty gas-cylinders, littered with rifles and the uncleanly débris of war; beyond the lonely tree; beyond the burrow where O’Grady’s telephonist crouched at his instrument; beyond sight and touch and hearing, and every human emotion save that last instinct which is the naked life—lay Second Lieutenant Peabody of the Chalkshires.

His brown face was gray in the dust. He had no cap. His outstretched hands were ripped and torn from clutching at rusty wire. His left puttee had fallen in coils over his boot. And where he lay, he panted: as a hound pants after the kill.

But Peabody had not been killed. . . .

He became aware of bees, swarms and swarms of bees that zipped and buzzed about him. Then he felt a terrific tug at his ankles; felt his face scraping against the ground. Something grabbed him round the neck; pulled him over backwards.

He wiped the dust out of his eyes and began to curse. The curses were utterly inhuman. The kind of curses doctors hear at times from perfectly respectable young mothers in milk-fever—foul blasphemies that have their roots in the subconscious dark of sex.

The soul of Second Lieutenant Peabody returned to his body. . . .

His soul remembered peculiarly little. They had arrived—in Artillery formation—somewhere or other—on a pitch-dark night—occupied some trenches. He had posted sentries—and the sentries had gone to sleep. Everybody *had* gone to sleep—except himself and Arkwright. Arkwright, by the way, must be dead. Otherwise, why should he think of Arkwright as doubled-up over something or other, with a pair of wire-cutters clutched in his hand. . . . Oh, yes—now he came to think of it, most people were dead—because Slattery had come along and said something about

“half-past ten.” Then, they had all got up—with their packs on—they ought to have been told to take their packs off. . . .

“Ave a drop of this, sir?” said a well-known voice at his elbow.

“Thanks, Haddock. I think I will,” answered the soul of Second Lieutenant Peabody.

The mind came back to the soul. “What the hell happened?” asked the boy.

“Whizz-bang. Thought you were gone that time, sir,” answered the dirty little man with the dirty rifle. “Tain’t no use going hover again, sir. We’ve been hover three times.”

“Get me another rifle, you son of a bitch,” said Peabody curtly. Something cracked like a whiplash in the air: he felt a terrible kick on his left ear-drum; collapsed to ground.

For a second, the boy lay perfectly still; then, to his utter amazement, he realized that he hadn’t been killed. On the contrary, the shock of that second whizz-bang seemed to have cleared his brain.

He hauled himself up very cautiously; peered over the edge of the shallow trench.

Just above him, the ground rose—two hundred yards of ground—littered with brown heaps—some of them moving—at the top of the slope, more bodies—hundreds of them—hanging grotesquely in the air. He dropped down again. . . .

“How many of us got back, Haddock?”

“Dunno, sir. Old Long. ’E’s just round the corner, sir.”

“Well, you stop here. If you see anything coming, shoot at it!”

The boy bent down; crawled along the trench; ran his head into a man’s knees. “Heasy on there,” growled Long Longstaffe. “Heasy on.” Then looking down, “Sorry, sir. Didn’t know it was you.” The boy gave his instructions; crawled on. Private Longstaffe arranged his elbows in the dirt; kicked his long legs behind him; cuddled the rifle-stock to his cheek. “Carn’t miss the sods from ’ere,” he said to himself. . . . And then, suddenly, he saw a cautious dot bob up on the near skyline. . . .

## § 8

“Blast it, oh, blast it. Get me a line, damn you.”

O’Grady, binoculars to eyes, could see the gray figures crawling through the wire; could hear rifles crackling just below him.

The man on his knees tapped key frantically. “F.X. Don,” tapped the man, “F.X.

Don.”

More gray figures came through the wire. On the left of the wire, up a little white road with trees on each side, came another line of gray figures; flung themselves down. O’Grady could see flame from their rifles, toy smoke puffs.

“F.X. Don,” tapped the man, “F.X. Don.” The gray figures by the road were on their feet, running.

“F.O.O.” throbbed the plate at the man’s eardrum, “F.O.O.”

“Got ’em sir,” said the man to O’Grady, “will you speak?”

O’Grady grabbed the receiver, and said, speaking very slowly and distinctly: “Esses—O—Esses. Do you understand?”

“Esses—O—Esses” throbbed the plate at his ear.

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Private Longstaffe, wrenching frantically at jammed breechbolt, heard a whirr as of homing pigeons over his head; was aware of white smoke puffs bursting among the gray figures all along the slope in front of him. . . . The breechbolt shot home at last, but when he lifted the rifle to his shoulder, peered through the V of the backsight, the gray figures had disappeared.



# PART SEVENTEEN

## THE SUICIDE CLUB

### § 1

At midnight between the 26th and 27th of September, 1915, two men faced each other across a chequered French table-cloth in the bare *salle à manger* of an *estaminet* at Beuvry.

An orderly stood outside the door, an orderly with tiny highly-polished grenades on his shoulder-straps, and below the grenades two winking brass letters—the second of the letters being “G.” Outside the *estaminet*, a car waited; and past the car filed steady columns of tall men. These men, too, bore a winking “G” on each shoulder-strap of their excessively clean tunics.

Said the first of the two at the table, a broad-shouldered quiet man, rather full in the face, steady of eye, big of brown moustache—a man who wore the crossed swords and star of a Major General: “And so we have the job of cleansing their Augean stable for them. As far as I can make out, the position is this.” He spread a big white map on the table; indicated with one finger a semi-circle drawn in thick blue chalk. “Whether the 9th can hang on to Fosse Eight or not, is pretty doubtful. You already know the *political situation*”—he emphasized the words a trifle scornfully—“with regard to Hill 70. . . . The rest of the line, as far as the Hulluch Road, P. must look after. Now, what about those guns? . . .”

His companion, a saturnine aquiline Brigadier General of Artillery, well over six-foot, glass in his eye, drew a creased plan from his pocket; spread it over the table-cloth. As he did so, his long hands betrayed intense concentration; a concentration not belied by the clipped phrases in which he spoke.

“I’ve seen both the Brigades, sir,” he began, “and as they apparently know very little of the ground, I’ve arranged to take over both Artilleries myself. Our own can’t be up for three days. The Southdown batteries”—he pointed to the map—“are marked in red; the Northdown in blue.”

“Too far back,” commented the other, scrutinizing the coloured dots, the shaded arcs which showed their approximate ranges.

“They seem to have done the best they could under the circumstances.”

“The circumstances,” known to both the speakers, did not bear overmuch thinking of—being on a par with the “political situation” which, by a premature

announcement in the English Parliament of the capture of Hill 70, was forcing them to attempt an attack both knew to be in the nature of a very forlorn hope.

The Gunner General went on detailing his plans: "I shall put Stark in command of the Left Group. He's the only regular Colonel they've got."

"Good man?" asked the other.

"Yes, sir. Very sound. I've known him for years: stuck pig with him in India. . . . We're very short of ammunition for the Hows."

"That's nothing unusual. Allenby's had to chuck it altogether in the Salient. What about eighteen-pounders?"

"We can just manage a two-hours' bombardment. When do you propose attacking, sir?"

"Day after tomorrow." The senior General glanced at his watch, saw it was past midnight. "As you were, tomorrow. Sometime in the afternoon."

## § 2

At last, Peter Jameson slept.

All through that long afternoon of sunshine, the eighteen-pounders of the Fourth Brigade had been silent. Round the outside lip of the chalk-saucer, attack and counter attack had died in exhaustion. Only, at its extreme left edge, under the shadow of Fosse Eight, in the Hohenzollern Redoubt, kilted men fought out the light, hand to hand, with bomb and bayonet and grenade. In front of Loos, the saviour Cavalry watched the silent woods and the hill whereon death waited.

O'Grady had come back at dusk to report the situation. At nine o'clock, the men sleeping round the guns had been awakened by a vast crackle of rifle-fire far away on the left, by a torrent of white lights spurting up inky skies. This they had watched, as a dog, too tired to bay, watches the moon; watched and slept again—all save the weary sentries peering towards the lonely tree, and the weary signallers in the trench by the telephone.

But Doctor Carson might not sleep. All that afternoon, his red-crossed tilt had lured piteous bandaged men. All that night they came; staggering down the slopes; waiting a while; staggering on with a "Thank yer, doctor" towards Vermelles. The doctor was fifty-five and a specialist; but bending over those piteous men, he did not regret his quiet consulting-room in Harley Street—even though that which he accomplished for them scarcely required as much skill as he had possessed in his medical student days.

He felt a little lonely, there in the shadowed darkness, watching the lights leaping

all about him; and when, from the Vermelles road, there came other men, tramping steadily together, he enjoyed the modulated voices which asked him: "I say, this is right for Loos, isn't it? Thanks so much."

These voices, when he inquired who they might be, all replied with one word: "Guards"; and tramped on through the night. . . .

Later, there arrived a car, with a Staff officer who inquired for Colonel Stark. Him, the doctor directed to a trench covered with a water-proof sheet: under which, after a moment, showed the light of a candle. The Staff officer with a "Thanks. Feels like rain," departed: but the candle still shone. And after about an hour, another car arrived, with another Staff officer.

Doctor Carson, seeing blue cigar-smoke curling up against the candle-glow, thought to himself: "Hello. They've woken P.J."

They had; and Peter, note-book in hand, squatted on his chalk-covered valise, peering at two maps; copying little red dots from one to the other. The original map from which Peter copied had been sent from Beuvry; and the last note in his book read "Report to G.O.C. Guards D.A. at Le Rutoire farm eleven A. M."

### § 3

Weasel Stark's preliminary instructions, given in the candle-lit gloom of a dirty trench at 3 o'clock in the morning, confined themselves to few words. The problem consisted firstly, secondly and lastly in efficient communication: Peter, awake at dawn, got busy on it. As primary difficulty, he encountered Purves.

Said Purves yawning: "As I understand things, you and the Colonel are going off to Le Rutoire. I remain here as Adjutant to Major Lethbridge, who will command the Brigade. Communication will of course be arranged by Divisional Signals."

Growled Peter, shivering in the misty dawn: "For God's sake forget 'Training Manual Signallers.' How much wire have we got on the telephone cart?"

Purves sent for Corporal Waller. Corporal Waller said he thought they had four and a half miles of "D 3." Peter pulled out his map: showed the Corporal what he wanted done. Purves sulked in the background.

At five-fifteen, Seabright and Pirbright, carrying a red drum between them, set out to find the Third Brigade. At ten minutes to six, a very sleepy battery commander of that unit protested down the new wire that he had no instructions as to taking orders from the Adjutant of another Brigade. At five minutes to six Weasel Stark—overhearing the long range wrangle—came to the phone and explained the situation at some length of blasphemy. Throughout breakfast, eaten squatting on damp clay,

similar conversations took place.

At ten-thirty, Corporal Waller again telephoned. He had found the Second and First Brigades; was tapping into their wire. Also, he had nearly run out of wire. . . .

"See that he gets some more," rasped the Weasel to Purves. "You and I must be off, P.J."

They made their way on foot, through sparse traffic, down a sodden road, towards the huge gutted farm. As they passed under the great gateway into the crowded courtyard, something exploded with an earth-shaking concussion.

"Six-inch How," said the Weasel.

A very tall young subaltern, with carefully up-curved moustache and tiny bronze buttons on his loose tunic, came up; saluted the Colonel; and said, "Are you Colonel Stark, sir? . . . The Artillery General won't be here till two o'clock." Then, to Peter, "Hallo, Jameson, haven't seen you since you left. . . . Come and have a drink before lunch, won't you, sir?"

Peter introduced "Sandiland of Impey's" to his Colonel; and the young Guardee led downstairs to the foul cellar they had visited on the night of the twenty-fifth. It was no longer a charnel-house. Down the middle of it, a long table, spread with a white cloth, testified the imminence of lunch. About the table, talking quietly, stood other tall men, all in identical tunics, all with the same carefully up-curved moustaches, the same modulated voices.

They called each other by nicknames: "I say, Bunny, what about those smoke-bombs?" "My dear Trousers, don't panic." "Where's the General?" "Is Muggins about?"

Sandiland produced gin and vermouth. Talk grew general.

Peter did not take long to recognize the peculiar social atmosphere. It was merely glorified Eton. Everybody trying their best to assume that facts didn't exist; that emotions didn't exist; that they knew little and cared less about the job they had at heart. It was over twelve years since Peter had lived in that particular atmosphere: but he sniffed it gratefully. His voice changed to it. He said, "Oh, really. Well, of course, *I* don't know much about Gunnery," knowing perfectly well that he knew considerably more about it than Sandiland—and, "It's been very quiet round the batteries"—feeling that nobody had ever been quite so heavily shelled as the Fourth Southdown Brigade.

The Weasel, who happened to have been at Winchester before going on to Woolwich, felt suddenly and immensely superior to everybody on earth. For, on that point, all old English "public-school" men feel alike: which is what makes them at times so insufferable to outsiders. If a foreigner had asked any of the men in that

cellar *why* he was fighting, the foreigner would have met with an incredulous lift of the eyebrow: that particular lift of the eyebrow which no foreigner understands; but which conveys—to one who can interpret—“My dear fellow, I was at Eton” (or Winchester, or Haileybury, or Harrow, or Radley or a hundred other foundations of that classical tradition which literary pacifists despise) “and *one does, don’t you know, one just does.*”

Luckily, there is no “education” at English “public-schools.” They merely train boys to be *men*.

## § 4

The Infantry Brigadier, arriving about mid-day, declared to his Brigade-Major:

“My dear fellow, the whole countryside looks like Hampstead Heath. Have some one go out and clean it up, please. I really can’t have men wandering about *all* over the skyline.”

The Brigade Major, strolling across the room, said: “I say, Bunny, I wish you’d take a peep round and see what we’re to do about these fellows wandering about on the skyline.”

Bunny disappeared and did not return till after lunch.

Nobody in all that farm seemed in the least degree excited about anything. Work was not *done—it proceeded*. Stark and Peter, returning to the outer air, watched the procedure. By now, their own communication orderlies, servants and telephonists had arrived. It began to rain, vaguely, unpleasantly. . . .

At one minute to two, a limousine, mud-spattered from roof to axle, tore down the road; pulled up slithering before the gateway. From the car, sprang a tall aquiline eye-glassed man; who said, “Hello, Stark. Sorry to be late. Look here”; drew a very dirty map from his pocket; and swept one finger over a blue semi-circle of it. Stark, drawing an identical map from his pocket, copied the semi-circle; asked: “Any particular instructions?”

“No.” The aquiline one was obviously working under extreme pressure. “You’ll get those from Trench later. This isn’t as much fun as pig-sticking, is it?” He leapt back into his car; whirled off down the road.

Two minutes afterwards Peter—note-book on knee—was writing from orders Stark’s dictation. . . .

## § 5

The remainder of the afternoon resolved itself into a constant dispatching of orderlies, a constant running in and out to the jingling clicking telephone station.

At half-past four, the aquiline one returned. Peter, instructed to report communication completed, found him closeted with a big vaguely seen man in the semi-dusk of yet another dug-out. At five o'clock, these two removed themselves.

Said the Weasel: "What sort of a dug-out was the one in which you found him?"

Said Peter: "Pretty good, sir."

Ordered the Weasel: "Then we'd better occupy it."

## § 6

In that flimsy tin-roofed tunnel, hidden away in mud between brick walls, glass-doored at each end, perpetually illumined with guttering candles, Peter spent three days and three nights. Incredible things happened in that tunnel: equally incredible things in the farm above. Our own howitzers shook it till the glass-doors rattled to splinters: shells, screaming down out of nowhere, missed it by inches, plunging visibly through the shattered roof of the farm, extinguishing candles, shattering telephone wires. Men came to it—all sorts and conditions of men: orderlies and Generals, Colonels and battery commanders. Guardsmen, dizzy with shell-fumes, staggered down its steps, were given gas-capsules, departed. Murchison the Brigade Major came to it, sojourned with them two days. A weary officer of the Third Southdown Brigade, who had been shelled out of his position with the loss of two guns and twenty men, dropped down on its muddy floor and slept like a dog, cap under head, in his spurred field-boots.

And always, Peter—in the dark forward compartment—sat by the telephone operator. Men were blown to bits above—(there were one hundred and twenty casualties in Le Rutoire during those three days): orderlies, sent out on cycles, failed to report, were never again heard of: men died at the batteries even as he spoke to the batteries: the farm rocked: lights went out: shelling stopped: shelling began again. But always, Peter Jameson was trying to explain over a wire which either carried four different voices or went absolutely dead, that Colonel Stark wanted fire directed here, that the Coldstreams reported two field-guns 200 yards South West of Metallurgique tower firing on G 24, that the Bois Hugo was full of M.G's, that if Major Lethbridge couldn't fire with A Battery, because A battery had three guns out of action, he must fire with B. . . .

The world-famous attack on Hill 70, when the Guards went over the top, ("By the right," as the unemotional Pettigrew reported afterwards, "just as if there hadn't

been a Boche within miles of them”) resolved itself for P.J. into a jumble of buzzes, translated to scribbled message-forms, a pile of scribbled message-forms, translated to buzzes. (For by that time, speech on the majority of the sodden lines had become impossible.). . .

By late afternoon of the twenty-ninth, when the most incredible occurrence of all took place, Peter—still sitting at the telephone,—was too weary to appreciate it.

It had been a baddish day. Fosse Eight seemed by the accuracy of the hostile shell-fire, to have fallen at last. Major Lethbridge reported twelve guns of his sixteen now out of action, the remaining four being pushed up by hand owing to buffer troubles. Third Brigade wires refused to act. They had run out of whisky. A five-nine shell had missed the bomb-store wherein the servants and the orderlies slept by two feet; killing a horse and wounding three men. Murchison slept. The Colonel, just returned from visiting the Infantry Brigadier in his dug-out across the road, had found the Brigadier absent; tripped in a sodden trench; looked like a scare-crow; was swearing like a fish-fag. . . . At which precise moment, “Royalty” appeared in the tunnel!

“Royalty,” represented by a jolly fair-haired youngster in a darkish rain-coat, followed the missing Infantry Brigadier past the telephone shelf where Peter sat, into the rear part of the tunnel. Murchison, miraculously awaking, and the Weasel, with his tunic off, stood up and said “Sir.”

Peter, who imagined them to be greeting the Brigadier, found a dark-moustached young man beside him.

Whispered the dark-moustached young man, taking Peter’s knowledge for granted: “I’d rather be a Tommy in the front line than have to look after *him*. Once the Guards are in the trenches, we can’t keep *him* away from them. *He* ran away from G.H.Q. this morning, and *he’s* insisted on tramping all round the front line. *He* enjoys it. I don’t! It isn’t right, you know. It really isn’t. *He* might remember that *he’s* the heir to the throne. Don’t you think so?”

Peter, realizing the jolly fair-haired youngster to be the Prince of Wales, whispered agreement. The conference in rear of the tunnel broke up.

“Thank goodness *he’s* going,” whispered Peter’s companion. “This job will turn my hair gray.”

The three passed out through the shattered glass-door; up mud-steps into the farm. . . . Very far away, Peter heard a low whistle, a whistle that rose to a high-pitched scream, seemed to surge up the skies. Interminably they waited; penned in the dusk. Impotent! Down upon them, faster and faster, shrieking and howling, rushed noise. . . . They were deaf. . . . The tunnel staggered. . . . Light disappeared.

. . . Glass tinkled about them. . . . Things thudded from walls to floor. . . . Noise stopped. . . . Peter heard the Weasel's voice: "Good God, I hope that didn't get him": saw a shadow stumble up the steps. They waited—interminably. Murchison's voice called: "It's all right, Colonel." . . .

"Will you please speak to Mr. Purves, sir?" asked the unconcerned operator at the telephone.

## § 7

And the next night, first of October, they were relieved. The thing seemed impossible. They had always lived in the tunnel; would continue to live there till the end of time. The big man in khaki who sat talking to them had no corporeal existence. He was a joke—an elaborate joke. "Of course, Stark, I shan't occupy *these* headquarters." Of course he wouldn't. Why should he? Nobody except themselves. . . .

"Hallo," laughed a voice, "your Adjutant's gone to sleep."

"I'm not asleep, sir." Peter, very indignant, started up from the Weasel's berth on which he had been sitting; dived back to his own part of the tunnel. The two Colonels heard his voice down the telephone: "Very well Corporal. If the Brigade's gone, you can disconnect. Are the horses ready? Just coming up the road. Thanks. . . ."

And then, for the first time in his life, Peter knew fear. Real crazy fear. It was midnight. Pitch-dark. Not a shell falling. But a shell might fall. If it did, what would happen to Little Willie? Little Willie was trotting up that damned road. If anything happened to Little Willie. If Jelks hadn't fed Little Willie properly. Little Willie was the finest horse. . . .

"Your coat, sir, and your spurs. I've packed your belt in the valise. And there's only two cigars left, sir?"

Driver Garton, smiling, proffered one of them.

"Got a match?" asked Peter.

## § 8

The batteries of the 4th Brigade had been amazingly fortunate; got away almost without a casualty.

Laughed the Colonel, as he and Peter trotted side by side through cool rain: "Well, P.J., you won't forget Le Rutoire in a hurry."



Peter turned in his saddle, looked back towards the farm: "I should think not," he said, and added, "Though I suppose that dug-out must have been pretty safe."

"Safe?" Stark laughed again. "Why, man, it wouldn't have stopped a direct hit from a pip-squeak." . . .

They passed the cross-roads of Corons de Rutoire. "Francis!" thought Peter suddenly. Through the blurr of sleep, memory came back, clear-cut, horribly personal. He must find out what had happened to Francis. Then he fell fast asleep in his saddle; woke with a start to find Little Willie at walk through shadowy traffic.

"It's a pity that attack didn't succeed," the Colonel was saying. "If it had, we might have got a brace of medals between us. As it is, if you live to be as old as Methuselah you'll never see a worse show than the first two days of the battle of Loos."

## § 9

Next morning, as they rode, Brigade behind them, through the streets of Béthune, Peter fumbled in his breeches pocket; found a coin; stretched it down to the boy trotting at Little Willie's head; took the proffered paper; spread it on his saddle-peak.

"Any news?" asked the Weasel.

For answer, Peter held up the staring headlines.

"Great British Victory," they read. "Triumph of Staff Work. Hill 70 Ours. Official."

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Peter ripped the paper to shreds; flung it in the gutter.

# *PART EIGHTEEN*

## RESPIRE

### § 1

Francis Gordon was not killed at the disaster of Loos. A stretcher-bearer wheeled him, unconscious of whistling shrapnel, to the casualty-clearing station at Vermelles; and thence, still unconscious, he came by Ford ambulance and Red Cross train and yet another ambulance to a great bare hospital at Rouen.

For three days he knew nothing. Life ebbed and flowed back again in waves as of morphia: pain throbbed and receded through the torn body it could not awaken. On the fourth day, very dimly, he grew conscious of his suffering self. It seemed to him that he lay in a four-poster bed, round which figures moved vaguely. He heard one of the figures speaking: "It's time for his injection"; felt something prick his forearm; drowsed off again into unconsciousness.

Next morning he awoke to pain. Some one was questioning him. The some one had a board in her hand; wanted to know who he was. (For secret service men wear no "identity discs"; and Nurse Prothero had been ordered to find out the name of the patient). He told her: "Gordon, Francis, Captain, Intelligence Corps." "Religion?" she asked. "Church of England, sister."

The nurse, a comely middle-aged creature, smiled down at him; and he slept. But gradually, the morphia ebbed away from him. Pain called to consciousness. . . .

It took his drugged mind three whole days to grasp its new realities. He had been wounded, badly wounded. (How, he could not yet remember.) His left thigh-bone was shattered; his right foot badly smashed. The thing above him—which made the bed seem like a four-poster—was a "super-structure": a frame-work with a pulley arrangement whereby his left leg, a mass of bandages, could be hauled up and down for dressing. Both left leg and right foot were "septic": in the wounds, had been inserted indiarubber-tubing—Carrel-Dakin tubes—to drain them. The changing of these tubes caused him constant pain.

The screens round his bed prevented him from seeing the other patients in the ward. But he knew them to be many; and, lying awake at night, he could hear the orderlies shuffling round in their list slippers: their "Are you awake, sir?" sounded an unceasing chorus to his dreams.

For the alert clean-shaven doctor had only reduced, not stopped, the morphia:

and Francis had many dreams. They came as the morphia-wave surged over him in comfortable pain-killing warmth; receded as the wave ebbed, leaving him prey to suffering. And always, in his dreams, he saw Beatrice, a gracious figure vignetted in silver radiance against the background of his thought. It seemed as though her spirit watched over him, tender, infinitely solicitous. . . .

He had been in hospital eight days before it was borne in on his dazed intellect that he must write to her. They fought him, sisters and doctor, for three weary hours. "He was too ill to write letters," said the doctor. "Let me write for you," begged Sister Prothero. But Francis insisted. They could neither persuade nor coerce him. He would write a letter; write it with his own hand. Lying there, feverish, broken, not even certain of the exact words his lips uttered, he forced them to his will. At last, they yielded—for they knew his chance of life still hung by a hair: and an orderly brought him paper, an envelope, an indelible pencil.

The sister propped him with pillows. As she lifted him, he felt his head turning, spinning. . . . Yet he wrote, tracing each word with pain. A letter of lies, of glorious lies. He was in hospital, wounded—only slightly wounded, she must understand—in a few days, he would be about again—would write her a long letter—meanwhile, he sent his "very kind regards." He folded the sheet himself; put it in the envelope; wrote the address; signed in the left-hand bottom corner. . . . Then he fainted; and, for a week, doctor and sisters blamed themselves for their yielding, fearful lest the man should die.

As a "case," he puzzled them. The wounds were healing, slowly, very slowly. Thinking to cheer him, they told him of his progress. It appeared to have no interest for him. He was content to drowse away the hours: watching his leg move up and down for its dressing; listening to the murmur of the ward. For he had lived in a year, this broken man who lay there so quietly, a thousand aeons of terror. He had walked, unarmed and alone, through countless caverns of fear. Now, fear had departed; and the mind took its revenge for long coercion, refused to function. The mind knew that its body would not die; and with that knowledge, was content. . . .

They pronounced him "out of danger." Nurse Prothero brought him many letters. He read them languidly. It appeared that Peter had been moving heaven and earth to find out if he lived: Patricia wrote asking him if he wanted books, cigarettes: Prout wrote and sent on a package of press-cuttings: his name had been in the "Roll of Honour": the literary press of England noticed him, praised him, printed his photograph in their columns. But Francis Gordon cared for none of these old things. He wanted Beatrice!

He used to lie there, hour after hour, screened from the world, thinking of her.

His mind went back to days before the War, and he saw himself as he had been: the tango-dancing champagne-bibbing egotist, very proud of his little literary achievements, neither good nor bad, merely a drifter. He saw himself, ruined financially, miserable. And he met her again, in his dreams; sailed with her, once again, the tropic seas of their delight.

Beatrice, the Woman Denied! Surely that God who had once denied her to him, calling him unworthy, would not refuse her to him now. Surely, now, he might say to himself, in clean pride: "I have done my Work; paid full price for any happiness this world can offer me?" . . .

And then, five weeks after he had written, came her cable: "Am anxious," she wired, "have you told me the truth about your wounds." He spread the cablegram on his bed; read it again and again. Intuition, sounder than judgment, told him the truth. To this girl, five thousand miles removed from the cataclysm of Europe, he stood for "heroism"—a vague figure dowered with all the virtues of war. It needed only a word, a *weak* word, to make her love him.

The mere thought was a flaring temptation. Why not? If ever man had earned woman. . . .

When the doctor made his midday visit, Francis—looking down at his swathed legs—asked one straight question.

"You mean," said the doctor, "is there any reason, any physical reason, why you should not marry?"

"Exactly, doctor."

"None whatever."

"But I shall always be more or less a cripple?"

"You will walk with a limp—a slight limp. That isn't being a cripple."

Alone, he fought the problem out again: and decision came to him, clear-cut, obvious. She was twenty, rich, beautiful: he, a cripple—and a pauper cripple into the bargain. Leaving God out of the question, to take her in marriage would not be the act of a gentleman. . . . Chivalrous, stubborn, a fool if you will but no weakling, he traced the answer to her cablegram: "Much better thanks writing."

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In the middle of December, 1915, they shipped him—still a "stretcher-case"—to England.

## § 2

In those early days, the Endsleigh Gardens Hospital for officers was a place of

easy discipline, comely V.A.D. nurses and frolicsome patients. Francis, still unable to walk, could not be frolicsome: but they gave him a room to himself, a tiny room, linoleum-carpeted, high up on the sixth floor; and in a funny introspective way, he was happy.

The "faithful Prout," overjoyed at his master's return, insinuated himself somehow or other into the Hospital; brought meals; ran errands as of yore. A new doctor substituted "B.I.P."—a saffron ointment of bismuth, iodoform and petroleum—for the Carrel-Dakin treatment; and pain departed. His kit arrived from France. He began to read, omnivorously, old books and new: dreamed even of working. But no poem came, only vague inspirations which refused to materialize. Beatrice wrote—a chatty letter; was answered in the same strain. And, of course, there were visitors, flowers, cigarettes, well-wishes from admirers. For, among a limited circle, Francis enjoyed "celebrity." . . .

It was early afternoon of Christmas Eve. He lay in bed, wicker cage over his legs, propped on multitudinous pillows. Through the open window by the glowing fire-place, he could see the high hills of outer London, tree-fringed, blue against gray skies. He had been alone all day, visioning once again that great poem of Anglo-Saxondom which always eluded him. For now that he had—as he thought—definitely put aside all hope of Beatrice, this belief in a Federation of the English-speaking races, with which she had inspired him, seemed somehow a consolation.

"Mrs. Jameson to see you, sir," announced Prout. Patricia followed the little man into the room. She had been driving the car: and the dark motoring-furs accentuated the blond tallness of her. He had thought, once or twice, that the strain of Peter's absence was telling on his cousin's wife, graving little lines round eyes and chin. But today she looked young, radiant.

"Peter's coming home," she said. "On leave."

"When?"

"Tonight. Isn't it splendid?"

They talked Peter for a while. Prout brought them tea on a little wicker-table.

"I heard all about his Brigade the other day," said Patricia, bringing a second cup to the bedside. "Captain Torrington—you met him I think, he's a V.C.—told me. They must have had a dreadful time at Loos."

"Torrington?" Francis thought the name over. "Yes. I remember him. He was there the night I dined with them. Where did you meet him? Is he on leave too?"

"No. He's home for good. He never ought to have gone out, you know. But he insisted—and broke down. You men are so stupid about that sort of thing. I suppose *you'll* want to do something again as soon as your leg's right. . . ."

"I wonder," said Francis. "You see, I'll never be any good at my own job again. A man with a limp is too easily spotted. And as for office jobs, there seem to be enough stay-at-home heroes without me. . . ."

"I wonder why it is"—Patricia lit herself a cigarette—"that you are all so bitter against the people who stay at home. Everybody can't go to the front."

"It isn't *everybody* who wants to," commented Francis acridly.

She changed the topic; produced the Christmas present she had brought—a Whytwarth fountain-pen, gold-mounted and of enormous ink-capacity. He eyed it doubtfully at first; till she shewed him the simplicity of its action. Then he began to take professional interest; screwed it up and down again; tested the nib on the fly-leaf of one of the many books at his bed-side.

"By Jove, Pat," he said at last, "I believe you've discovered the only fountain-pen. . . . And I never thought you a clever woman!"

Remembering old animosities, she blushed at that, and they laughed together like two children.

"And when does Peter arrive?" he asked.

"Late, I'm afraid. Not before midnight anyway."

"Are you going to meet him?"

"Of course."

He began to tease her aimlessly; called her the "expectant bride." "Do you know, Pat, that I believe you're madly in love with that cousin of mine. After nine years of matrimony, too. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Said Patricia, arranging her veil for the street: "I shouldn't chaff people *too much* about being in love, if I were you, Francis": and with a meaning glance at Beatrice's photograph on the mantelpiece, departed.

### § 3

As Patricia paced up and down the cold, scarce-lit platform, the great vault of Victoria Station seemed like a tomb. Already the leave-train from France had been announced. But it was half-past two on Christmas morning; and, except for herself and two ordered taxis, none waited. England had not yet troubled to organize any reception for her weary fighting-men. They would arrive, as Patricia and a few voluntary motor-drivers had so often seen them arrive, cheerlessly, unfed, unwelcomed, to sleep the night as best they might in fireless waiting-rooms, or tramp the streets till dawn.

"Didn't expect to see you here tonight, mum," said a porter who knew her of

old, touching his cap.

She told him she was waiting for her husband; and he bustled off in search of information.

"Another five minutes, mum. They must have had a bad crossing. She didn't get to Folkestone till nearly one o'clock."

A bell clanged; she saw the glow of smoke and sparks; the train slid alongside the platform, stopped, began to disgorge its khaki. She had met that train so often; knew so exactly what to expect; but always before, she had watched the third-class carriages. Now, she had eyes only for the Pullman. Excitedly, she scrutinized the descending officers. . . . Last of them all, very calm, cigar-butt between his lips, coat-collar pulled up to the eyes, cane under his arm, came Peter.

Obviously, he did not expect her. She let him saunter a yard or two along the platform; noticed the cleanliness of his boots, the sheen of his spurs. Then she touched him on the arm, said: "Taxi, sir?"

He turned round; began to say something; recognized her; burst out, "Good God, Pat, what on earth are you doing here?"

"Meeting lonely soldiers," she laughed: and put up her lips to be kissed. He took her in his arms. . . .

"But you ought to be in bed," he protested, as they made way arm-in-arm along the crowded platform.

"My dear, if I can drive Tommies home four nights a week, surely I can devote one to meeting my own husband. Have you had anything to eat?"

"Rather. And a bath at Boulogne. And a cabin to myself on the boat. It's quite a comfortable journey if only one knows the ropes. I say, what are these poor devils going to do?" He looked at the crowd of men, mud-stained, kit-loaded.

"Sleep in the waiting-rooms till the trains start running."

He let go her arm; stood still. "Supposing I weren't here," he said, "what would you do?"

"Oh, we usually try and find two or three who live fairly close, not more than five miles out. Then we drive them home."

Husband and wife looked at each other; then Peter said: "Damn it all, Pat. . . ."

"As you like, dear," she answered: but the heart grew heavy within her. She wanted him to herself, to herself: and he was away from her already, striding here and there among the men.

"Any of you men live in London?" asked P.J.

"Yes, sir. I do, sir. So do I, sir," a dozen voices answered the question.

"West London? Marylebone? Regent's Park?"

“Albany Street, sir.” A heavy-laden infantryman detached himself from the crowd; looked up expectantly.

“Right. I’ll drive you home. Any one else live that way?”

“My mate was coming ’ome with me. Could you take ’im too, sir?” asked the infantryman.

“Very well. Hurry up, though.” Peter turned to the crowd; said: “Sorry you chaps. I can’t manage more than two. Merry Christmas to you all.”

“Merry Christmas, sir,” answered a dozen voices. . . .

“I’ve got a brace,” he told her, “and they both want to go to Albany Street. It’s hardly out of our way at all.”

The two men followed them under the gloomy archway into the blue-lit gloom without; climbed stolidly to the rear seat of the open cabriolet. Pat took the wheel; Peter cranked up; and the Crossley crawled out into the dark canyon of Grosvenor Gardens. She was a very different car now from the royal-blue garnished plaything which Peter had hurled along the Bath Road in August 1914: countless muddy boots had left their mark on her varnish; countless accoutrements had torn her gray cord lining; but the engine still purred sweetly as of old, bore them smoothly past the dark bulk of Hyde Park Corner, up Park Lane, homewards.

As she drove, Patricia’s momentary spasm of discontent vanished. They were so pathetically grateful, the comments she caught from the passengers behind; and when she stopped the car at a shuttered house in Albany Street; when there came—from the mysterious lower regions—a woman who said, “Why, Alf, is it really you? I’ve been waiting up just on the off chance you might get home tonight”; when—with a grateful “Merry Christmas to you, sir”—the two weary men stumbled down the steps out of sight; it seemed to her as though, by parting with those few moments of her own selfish happiness, she had somehow earned the right to enjoy every moment of the seven days during which Peter would be hers.

Peter’s comment, as they sat over the little supper prepared for them in her father’s library, is characteristic. “I hated doing it,” he said, “but somehow one feels one ought to do all one can for them. Compared with us, the men have a pretty thin time.” . . .

## § 4

In the ordinary workaday life of the peacetime individual, a week seems a distinct interval of time: but to the men and women of the recent War, who snatched their respite from long months of anxiety in a few brief hours of happiness, the



allotted seven days used to pass like a quickly-flashing dream.

Still, for her one week, Patricia was happy; and much of that happiness came from the knowledge that this man whom War had sent back to her, was no longer the same creature whom she had given to War. He had left her a civilian in khaki; he came back a member of the British Expeditionary Force.

She found the change in him difficult of analysis. The old absorbed Peter still lived—a reticent animal; unwilling to tell her of his life “out there”; though eager enough to explain the changes in his Brigade: how Major Lethbridge had been promoted Lieutenant Colonel, and Conway given “C” Battery in his stead: how Torrington’s successor, Captain Sandiland, was inclined to take unto himself too much credit for the work done by his subalterns: how Little Willie still flourished. But of Loos, of trench-warfare, of Reninghelst and Dickebusch, and the three weeks’ rest at Acquin which the Fourth Southdown Brigade had been enjoying when he left—he told her little or nothing. “It was really not so bad,” seemed the limit of his descriptive powers.

But, grafted onto the old Peter, there existed a new Peter, irresistibly young, who amazed his wife. He seemed to have acquired a capacity for enjoyment, a carelessness about money-matters, a delight in petty personal comforts, utterly out of keeping with his civilian self.

Formerly, the theatre had not appealed to him; now, he wanted to go every night. He disliked eating at home; seemed happiest in some gaudy restaurant, some rag-time night-club. He took taxis everywhere; bought expensive presents for her, for the children, for himself. When she attempted to expostulate, he laughed at her—and taxi’d to Cox’s Bank to draw another cheque.

Then too, he had become quaintly tolerant. On Boxing-Day Heron Baynet gave a family dinner-party. Rawlings and Violet came in their new car: Violet overdressed and overbearing; her husband, who had been promised a knighthood in the New Year’s Honours list, full of it and of himself. Peter, in evening-dress, new enamel buttons in his white waistcoat, welcomed the pair like long lost friends; congratulated Hubert; flattered Violet. “Hubert,” said Peter to his face, “was a devilish clever fellow. Perhaps when Hubert got his Knighthood, he could find him, Peter, some soft job at home. . . .”

“But I thought you didn’t like Hubert,” Pat said to him when they were alone in their bed-room.

“Oh, he’s not a bad chap,” laughed Peter, “not our *class* of course—I mean, one can’t have any respect for him—still, I daresay he’s all right.”

When she pressed him further on the subject, he said—after a little hesitation:

"It's a question of caste, I think, Pat. One looks upon those sort of people—you know, politicians and the Whitehall gang—as one used to look on the lower orders. One doesn't dislike them: one's just sorry for them."

Arthur Jameson, a taller blonder edition of his brother, came to town on two days' leave; and she let them make one night of it together. From their boyhood, Arthur and Peter had quarrelled; but now they seemed to see eye to eye on a hundred subjects. As the flying-man—he had passed for his "wings" and was next on the roster for active service—confided to Patricia: "That husband of yours always wanted a good shaking up; and this War seems to have done it for him."

The swift days fled. They visited Francis; took the delighted children to the Pantomime. She drove him to the City; sat in the office while he talked away half-an-hour with Simpson; whirled him westwards again. . . . "And will you ever go back to Lime Street?" she asked as they sat down to lunch. "I suppose so," he answered, "if this War ever gets itself over. What shall we do this afternoon, old thing?" . . .

"Was he in love with her?" Patricia asked herself that question more than once during those breathless days: but found no answer to it. Obviously, her companionship, the physical joy of her, moved him as never before. They were pals again, better pals than ever. She told herself to be content with that.

And yet, reason was not content. Reason said: "This is excitement, pleasure at being back with the accustomed luxuries. After what he has gone through—almost any woman of his own class could give him what you are giving him."

She hated that thought. Moreover something sounder than reason, the instinct of matehood, told her that she misjudged him. In so far as the average man can love the woman he has been married to for nine years, Peter did love her. There had been no other woman in his life. Only, only, she wanted more from him than the average husband gave to the average wife!

And so once again, they came to the last twenty-four hours.

## § 5

It was raining when they woke; very good to potter about in dressing-gowns and slippers, to dawdle through their baths, and take late breakfast leisurely in the roomy library. (For Heron Baynet's patients already waited round the book-strewn table in the long dining-room facing Harley Street.) Among her letters, Patricia found one from Alice Stark—the first since her confinement. She wrote from Devonshire: the boy flourished, had red hair like his father; Douglas had enjoyed his leave; she had heard from him that day; the Brigade had been ordered into action again; he hoped

Peter was enjoying himself.

Said Peter: "You would have laughed to see the old man when the wire arrived. He sent out for three bottles of champagne. Morency rode ten miles for them; and we had to drink the youngster's health. I wish *we* had a boy, Pat."

She knew the chance remark almost meaningless—long ago, they had abandoned the hope of a son: nevertheless, it depressed her. All that day—when the children came in to be played with, at lunch with her father, through the *matinée* which followed—she thought of it. For now, he seemed almost gone again. And it had been so good to have him home. If only she could feel that he would come back safe. If only she had given him a son.

"*The Optimist! And the Pessimist!*" sang the two comedians on the stage in front of her. Patricia looked round the auditorium. Everywhere, she saw excited men, smiling women. Once she had envied such joyous couples. Now she only wondered, if, like herself, all the women were hiding, stifling, drugging-away somewhere, the sorrows at their heart. "But we must laugh," she said to herself. "*They* mustn't think of us as unhappy."

And again, as on that last day at Deepcut, Patricia played out her comedy to the end. But for the first time in her life—she admitted as much to her father after Peter had gone—she let alcohol share her troubles.

Cowardly? Perhaps it was cowardly: but she couldn't face the prospect of spoiling his last night by tears. And the alcohol helped her to put a brave face on things. The cocktails which he offered after tea, she took; and the whisky-and-soda when they got home; and the champagne for dinner, the night-cap of *crème-de-menthe*.

Poor Pat! She was only a very human, very loving woman, sending her man back to the lands of no-tomorrow. And the warmth of those harmless drinks helped her through, helped her to hide the misery behind her eyes. . . . Let the self-righteous, the uncompromising ones who have never known unhappiness, cast the first stone!

## § 6

He would not let her see him off from the station; and she lay in bed, watching him as he laced his high-boots, straightened his spur-chains, pinned khaki collar.

"Anyway, old thing," he said, "we've had a great time together. And in four or five months, well make another week of it. . . ."

He went down to his early breakfast; came back again; kissed her good-bye.

“Take care of yourself, Peter,” she smiled at him. And again he answered “Trust me, old thing. . . .”

But as she listened to the taxi purring down Harley Street, to the slam of the closing front-door, it seemed to Patricia as though there were no Power, either heavenly or earthly, in whom a woman of those days might put her trust.

# *PART NINETEEN*

## THE CITY OF FEAR

### § 1

Had Peter Jameson been an Irishman, a Gaul, or an Italian, his mind—as he taxied to Victoria Station—would have pictured to himself the physical charms of the wife he was leaving: her dark eyes framed in the golden aureole of hair, her smooth loving hands, the tones of her low voice. . . . But Peter, in his attitude towards women, was very much the Anglo-Saxon; and his thoughts of Pat, if he could have voiced them, would not have exceeded: “Dear old Pat, she’s a jolly good sort.”

Still, it needed effort not to think of her overmuch during the long journey back to his Brigade!

Three mornings after they had said good-bye, he lit a cigar; pulled tight the belt of his mackintosh; drew on his gauntlets; and set out on his first journey from Poperinghe to “Wipers.”

Little Willie, skittish after long inactivity, lashed out as his master mounted; danced erratically over the cobbles: Queen Bess and Jelks joggled soberly in rear.

It had been snowing. Under-foot the streets were still starred and sodden; and when they came to the great Square, they found men at work, shovelling dirty brown heaps to the side of the road. Gloomy, the place looked: gray-housed under its gray skies, inhospitable, a vision of discomfort. . . .

Peter rode on.

Scant houses gave way to flat open country—white on either side between the shell-pocked trees. It was very silent. An occasional car, a returning G.S. waggon, the clop of their own horses’ hoofs, alone broke the silence. They came to the red ruin of Vlamertinghe; passed the Church, halved by a 17-inch shell as a man halves cheese with a knife, and the four roads and the railway. Now, the road mounted, glistening bluely, veneered with mud. Peter heard, in front of him, the whistle and burst of a heavy shell; slowed to a walk.

At the top of the incline, between the trees, stood a little white toll-house. From it, emerged a man in khaki, holding up his hand.

“What’s the matter?” asked Peter.

“They’re shelling the road, sir. I should wait a little, if I were you. It’s big stuff.”

Peter dismounted; surveyed the country. In front of him the road dipped to a

level-crossing; rose again. In the hollow, stood a red-and-yellow château, forlorn among dank gardens. Along the railway, to the left of the road, showed a line of dug-outs—gigantic molehills, brown and shapeless.

“Seems safe enough,” he said to his groom: but even as he spoke, there came the ominous whistle, the double crash of a five-nine shell, the black spattered fountain of it among the trees on the crest in front. Hell for leather through the spattered fountain, galloped a heavy two-horse waggon, driver lashing frantically from his seat. The waggon bounded across the railway, up the slope into safety. . . .

By now, a little crowd had congested round the toll-house. Peter heard the men talking. Said one:—

“Funny? I don’t call it funny. How long have you been out? Two months. I thought so. I’ve had over a year of it. You wait till you’ve seen a bit more. Funny indeed.”

They waited half-an-hour, as civilians wait for it to stop raining; trotted on up the slope. Now they could see the shattered roofs of Ypres. At that distance, it still looked like a city. Only as they came to it, was its nakedness, the ruin and desolation of the place, apparent.

The huge red bulk of the Asylum turned, as they approached, to a gutted skeleton of a building; and beyond, the houses which they passed leered at them in drunken burlesque, shameless. Here, a made bed lurched half out of a shattered window; there, shells had ripped away the whole front of a dwelling, exposing—as a lewd woman exposes herself—all the petty secrets of what had once been a home.

Left they swung, past the chipped and bulging Water Tower, past more ruins of villadom, into a bare tree-lined road; right again.

“Colonel doesn’t like the horses to come further than this by daylight, sir” warned Jelks.

“Very well.” Peter dismounted. “Which way do I go?”

“Just up to that bridge, sir. Then, left along the canal bank. You’ll see the Lock-House just in front of you.” . . .

Peter found the Weasel, reading his *Times* by the light of their one oil lamp (it was just lunch-time) in a low, timber-shored dug-out which one approached down greasy steps, along duck-boards laid just above the water-level of a muddy creek.

“Hallo,” said the Weasel. “So you’ve turned up at last, have you? Jolly place this. What?”

“A trifle cramped, sir,” laughed Peter; and began to explain his overdueness.

“Oh, that’s all right,” chaffed Stark; “we’ll take the three days off your next leave. I’m glad you’re back though. Purves, as acting Adjutant, does not shine.

Morency's at the waggon-lines. I've had to do most of the office-work myself. He's out on the wires now. We're commanding a 'Group.' If you get that map down, I'll show you the battery-positions."

He indicated them.

Doctor Carson came in, bumping his head on the lintel as usual; said "Hallo, P.J. Jolly spot, isn't it? Time for lunch, I think."

Bombardier Michael appeared, carrying plates; followed by Peter's batman Garton, with food from the tiny cook-house which Gunner Horne had found on a tottery foot-bridge over the creek.

Somehow, in spite of discomforts, Peter was glad to be back. Lunch over, he explored along the creek; was shown the doctor's dug-out (shared willy-nilly with Purves); clambered a little mud-slope; found the "office," a steel tunnel let into the foundations of what must once have been a house, and the "telephone-room"—a sunk cellar.

"I've put your bed in the office, sir," announced Garton. "The room next to the Colonel's leaks."

"Good lad," said Peter, looking down, from the little mound, onto the desolation of "Wipers." . . .

In the months which followed, he grew to know that view as a bank-clerk knows Lombard Street. Below him, on his left, stretched the muddy waters of the Yser Canal, men living like water-rats all along its banks. On his right, stood the shattered lock-house beneath which slept Sergeant (once Corporal) Waller and the staff. In front of him, water lapped the stone quay of "Tattenham Corner," with its tipsy blind lamp-posts, its twisted railings. For the rest, the panorama was just ruined houses, skeletons of houses, mockeries of homes: above them, jagged spires—broken dogs-teeth against winter skies. Sometimes at night, a blue, almost Whistlerian radiance brooded over this ghost of a city: but mostly blackness hid it—a blackness broken only by the silver of Véry lights, the orange of candle-flames in dug-outs, the crimson flash from a gun-muzzle. . . .

## § 2

It is owing to a higher capacity for adaptability that the human animal has defeated all the other animals on this planet; made himself in fact the "lord of creation." For example, one need but take the Southdown Division during its winter in the "City of Fear."

Their life—from the front-line infantry, frozen blue or blown to bits between

rotting sandbags, to the drivers in the swamped horse-lines where the dumb beasts stood all day, tail to storm, fetlock-deep in mud, and whence men and beasts sallied forth every night up that road of death between the scarred poplars—was indescribably foul, a reversion to conditions at which an aristocratic caveman might well have jibbed.

In the fighting-zone itself, boredom followed fear, fear boredom, with monotonous and unending regularity. There were some days when never a rifle cracked, never a gun barked: others—as that Sunday which saw Stark’s headquarters moved to the Ramparts—when unanswered salvos rained on ruined streets, on gun-positions, and cross-roads, on stumbling fatigue-parties and sentries acrouch behind sandbags; when the very breastworks heaved and blew skyward, crashing down in mud and mine-débris on the corpses of the men who had inhabited them.

Still, the human animal endured. More, he learned to adapt himself to this condition and that; avoiding danger by instinct; finding his needed relaxation in petty amusements; making to himself, even, some social order out of the chaos wherein he dwelt. And since none, sallying forth, might know if he would come back alive, a certain careless spirit,—more hysteria than the “war humour” stay-at-homes christened it,—stiffened endurance, irradiated relaxation.

In the Ramparts, vast catacombe of old brickwork impervious to any artillery, were pianos, gramophones, picture-galleries selected from coloured supplements of the *Sketch* or *La Vie Parisienne*; cheery Messes whereto came mud-soaked men out of the noisy night, eager for whisky, always ready to break into song. Some of those men died; some were wounded; some sickness took: but always other men replaced them—and life went on. Moreover, since the human animal cannot now exist without the written word, he even discovered, buried away among the ruins of the City, a printing-press, and type, and paper, from which evolved itself the semblance of a news-sheet—which he called *The Wipers Times*.

In this atmosphere, whatever glamour “active service” once possessed for P.J. soon disappeared. He did his work now, office and telephone duties varied by trips to front-line or batteries, with the meticulous accuracy of an automaton; wrote much to Patricia; and read the daily, weekly and monthly newspapers from cover to cover.

Towards the end of February, however, chance provided him with a new interest. Monsieur Van Woumen, the Belgian who had taken furnished his house in Lowndes Square, was anxious to renew the agreement. Peter, purely from habit, wrote back to the agent who made the offer, that he thought there should be an increase in the rent. The agent replied that his client would not increase the furnished



rent; but might be prepared, on certain conditions, to take the remainder of the Crown lease off Peter's hands. "Would you," wrote the agent, "consider an offer for the furniture?"

The little deal kept Peter amused for a whole two months. He had no particular sentiment about either house or chattels. Patricia, consulted in a long business-like letter, approved of the scheme: making only certain reservations—some of her own bedroom furniture, the desk and sideboard in the dining-room, a blue carpet, and various other pieces she thought it inadvisable to dispose of. Monsieur Van Woumen paid his deposit; signed the agreement and completed the purchase-money by the time that—after three months and twenty-seven days which are best left to the imagination—the Southdown Artillery was ordered a week's rest at Eecke.

### § 3

In and around Eecke, the Southdown Division Artillery abode ten good days. It was earliest April. Sun shone on clean farms, on green fields and white pavé roads. Men, cleaning harness and equipment or leading teams to water, whistled at their work: the lines which the City had graven on their faces, disappeared. They chaffered merrily with the peasants for eggs or milk; sang songs in the *estaminets*; strolled, cigarettes in mouth, to Steenvoorde or Caestre, to Godewaersvelde or Sylvestre Cappel.

General Blacklock gave a dinner to his Colonels; the Colonels dined and wined their Battery Commanders. They held a "race-meeting" at which Peter and Little Willie—to the intense joy of all spectators—took a scunner at the post-and-rails, rolling headlong and unharmed in the mud. But, principally, the Fourth Brigade played poker.

Night after night, Headquarter Mess resounded to, "Raise you fifty, sir," "All right, P.J., I'll see you." Even Lodden caught the infection.

They played high; and they played fast: but they played neither high enough nor fast enough to catch the Weasel. Always, he defeated them; his hard blue eyes, his firm lips, gave never a hint of the cards in his hand. Even Conway, who had learned his poker wisdom in Iquique (where there is no rain but much whisky) and completed his education at the "Spotted Dog" in Kuala Lumpur (where there is much rain and still more whisky) acknowledged himself overmastered. Sandiland, the newcomer,—a blond clean-shaven Regular who looked more like an actor than a soldier—stone-walled in vain; was lured from his caution; heavily mulcted: Lodden, the richest member of the party, found bluff met with counter-bluff. Only Peter held

his own. For Peter, in addition to knowing the game, knew his Colonel.

"Very wrong for me to play so high with my juniors," Stark used to say—crushing notes into his pocket-book after the defeated ones had gone; "but they'll only rob each other if I don't rob them. Where did you learn the game, P.J.?"

"I, sir." Peter would smile. "Oh, I've sat in some rather hot games in my time. In Havana, with the Tobacco Trust crowd; and when I was in New York."

Then they would sit up over a last whisky-and-soda, discussing the play of this hand or that; till Stark produced his pet theory: "Say what you like, P.J., no man ever knows another till he's drunk port and played poker with him."

## § 4

Good days! but they came to an end: and once again the Brigade marched out, polished to the last bandolier-buckle, for Neuve Eglise.

"A mighty good place," assured the Canadians—serious-minded men—from whom they "took over." And so indeed, with one or two exceptions, they found it.

Batteries barked from a pleasant valley, under real trees: a valley down which a man might ride in safety. Peasants still lived, close to the firing line, in unshelled farms; crops were reaped within two miles of the trenches. Headquarters, instead of rat-infested cellars, found an unholed house—fields in rear, farm in front, Belgian landlady in the kitchen—at the foot of the village, below the skeleton of the Church.

But here, as everywhere along the front, danger lurked. Men, grown careless by long immunity, had neglected to fortify their habitations. During their first week, the Southdown Infantry paid—for this neglect—the price of one hundred men, killed in their rest-billets behind the firing line.

Still, compared with Ypres only a few miles away to northward, the place was—for gunners at any rate—paradise. . . .

They had been at Neuve Eglise a week, were just getting comfortable, when Miss Macpherson's telegram arrived. The dispatch rider brought it, shortly before tea; and Peter, busy signing the correspondence for Artillery Headquarters in the bare back-room where Corporal Pitman and Driver Norris had established themselves, let the thing lie for a good five minutes before he opened it. Then he tore the envelope; read: "Simpson died yesterday can you get leave macpherson."

He stood there, flimsy paper in his hands: no longer Lieutenant and Adjutant P. Jameson R.F.A., but Peter Jameson cigar merchant, of P. Jameson & Co., Lime Street, London. For a moment, he felt sorrow, the words "poor old Tom" framed themselves at his lips; till the brain, putting sorrow aside, insisted on business.

“Tom Simpson being dead”—reasoned the brain—“meant that Tom Simpson’s widow would have to be paid out in cash.” “In cash!” the brain repeated. What a fool he had been to renew that partnership agreement. But then, who would have imagined that of two partners, one on active service, the other at home, the civilian should die first. A fantastic trick—fantastic. . . .

Peter stalked out of the office, through the backyard, into the fields beyond.

“Wonder what’s upset ’im,” commented Driver Norris, looking up from his typewriter.

“He’s certainly worried,” admitted Corporal Pitman; and bent once more over his interminable “Army Forms.”

Alone in the big hedged grass field Peter Jameson, business man, wrestled with his problem. He must get leave of course. . . . But after that. It was no use going home without a plan. . . . He remembered suddenly that all leave had been cancelled the day before; strode back to the house.

The Colonel sat in the Mess—a comfortable room looking onto the road, light papered, tile-floored, furnished with some spindly chairs and a good dining-table.

“Leave!” said the Weasel, looking up from the vari-coloured map he had been studying. “You’ll be damn lucky if you get it. Hang it. I haven’t had *my* second leave yet.”

Peter explained rather curtly, ending up: “If you’ll sign the application, sir, I’ll take it in to Bailleul tonight. . . .”

“Do you know, P.J.,” chaffed the Weasel as he wrote “Recommended. D. Stark Lt. Col.” on the carefully-typed foolscap, “that you’re a damned undisciplined fellow? God knows what’d happen if you were Adjutant to any one except myself.”

But Peter was in far too serious a mood for back-chat. Outside, Jelks waited with the horses. He took the paper; buttoned it carefully into his tunic-pocket; mounted; rode off across the fields to the main road. All the way to Bailleul—they made the eight miles of pavé within the hour—he conned over his arguments. “Urgent Private Affairs!” Well, this was urgent enough. . . .

Coolsdon the Staff Captain, busy with papers in a handsomely furnished room, seemed doubtful. “Let me talk to him,” said Peter; and was ushered into a plush-sofaed parlour where General Blacklock sat smoking a cigar.

“Leave!” sputtered Blacklock. “What for?”

“Urgent private affairs, sir. My partner died the day before yesterday.”

“Hm,” said the General. “Lot of money at stake?”

“About thirty thousand, sir.”

The Brigadier signed the application.

“Stay to dinner, won’t you?” he invited.

“No, thanks, sir. I want to take this to Division myself.”

At Divisional Headquarters, a vast house on the Rue d’Armentières, Peter, running up an imposing stair-case, met the very man he sought—a tall, fiery-eyed General with upturned moustaches and an eye-glass.

Peter saluted; and the “Whirligig”—who prided himself on never forgetting a face—growled out, “You’re Jameson of the 4th Brigade, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir. Can I speak to you for a minute?”

“Go ahead.”

For answer Peter, knowing his man, drew the application from his pocket. The General glanced at; noted the signatures at foot; said “Got a pencil?” . . .

“Hope you settle things all right,” he growled out as he handed back the document. “Q’s at the end of the passage. Tell ’em, with my compliments, to send this on to Corps at once, and mark it Urgent.”

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Twenty-four hours later Peter, opening the big envelope from Artillery Headquarters, found his Leave Warrant. This time, the yellow ticket seemed to hold no promise of enjoyment!

# *PART TWENTY*

## THE HOME FRONT

### § 1

All through the thirty-six hours of his journey back to England, business nagged at the mind of Peter Jameson. He made the first twenty miles, Neuve Eglise—Strazelee—Borre—Hazebrouck, on horse-back; caught an afternoon train which crawled through Amiens and Abbeville, making Boulogne too late for dinner; slept at the Officers' Club; and crossed the Channel in smooth sunshine on a boat which carried only the mails and a few fortunates to whom leave restrictions did not apply.

But neither Little Willie trotting happily along uncrowded roads, nor the stammered friendliness of blue-clad gaudy-capped French Officers in the antimacassared first-class compartment, nor a night in a civilized bedroom, nor any of the petty pleasures of home-going, penetrated to a conscience obsessed with uncomfortable thought, a brain occupied with financial riddles.

Moreover—though this Peter failed to realize—that brain was not quite the sure-functioning machine of old days. No man comes quite unscathed through eight months of fighting: even if the body be unwounded, the mind—which must force the body through its physical revulsion—pays toll in restlessness, in loss of concentration.

And so Peter's problem, instead of coming to him clear-cut and impersonal, took at first the shape of a grievance, of a self-reproach. Fate had not treated him quite fairly. No reasonable being could have imagined that the renewal of the partnership deed with Simpson would land him in such a coil. It was just rotten bad luck.

Arrived at which point, the wind began to reproach itself. Bad luck! Not a bit of it. If he, Peter Jameson, had possessed any common-sense, he might have foreseen this happening. He, Peter Jameson, thought himself a damn clever fellow; whereas, actually, he was a fool. Otherwise, he would have stayed at home, like Sir Hubert Rawlings and a thousand others. . . .

But at that, the soul revolted; the dumb patriotism of the man re-asserted itself. For, deep down in Peter's consciousness, lay the firm conviction that in volunteering for service he had done the one possible thing. . . . Only, it did seem as though Fate were exacting a highish price for his self-respect—first the loss of Nirvana, and now

this new complication.

He pulled himself together; set his brains to grapple the problem resolutely. It was,—regarded as he now managed to regard it, impersonally—a simple riddle. Jamesons' capital consisted of twenty-eight thousand pounds; half of this roughly belonged to him, half to Simpson's estate. Under the deed, he would have to pay out Simpson's executors within twelve months.

Had he been free, had there been no War, he could have borrowed the money on the security of the business, taken in another partner, amalgamated with a competitor. But he was not free, would not be free till the War ended. And he had seen enough at first hand to know that the War—unless America came in—could easily go on another five years.

He might, of course, compromise with Simpson's executors, spread the payment over a longer period. But, in that case, who would carry on the concern? Miss Macpherson? He could hardly imagine a woman running Jamesons'. Mallabone, their sole remaining traveller? Mallabone had no brains. Besides—and here the effect of war on Peter's temperament clearly revealed itself—any such solution contained the element of *risk*. He had lost more than half his capital: and he funk'd any diminution of the rest.

Funk'd it! He, Peter Jameson, who had never funk'd a business gamble in his life. . . .

"The only alternative," said reason, "is to sell out. You'll get hardly anything for goodwill: outside the stock and book-debts, your only asset was the Beckmann contract. That's not worth twopence today. Still, if you could sell the business as a going concern, your capital would, at any rate, be *safe*. . . ."

So thinking, Peter stepped out of the Pullman on to the platform of Victoria Station.

## § 2

This time, no Patricia met him. Apparently his wire to her had not arrived. He looked at the clock above the archway; saw it was half-past two; and decided to go straight to the City.

In the Underground, an elderly civilian insisted on talking to him; asked—looking at his high-laced boots, his soft cap, his bulging haversack—if he had been to the Front.

"Just come from it," answered Peter, lighting a fresh cigar.

"You're in the R.F.A., aren't you? I wonder if you've ever met my nephew. No,

he's not got a commission. A sergeant, I believe he is. His name's Tomkins, same as mine: but I've forgotten the number of his battery. . . ."

The conversation lasted till the train pulled up in the cavernous gloom of Monument Station.

"Silly old ass," thought Peter as he clinked along Gracechurch Street. "These people at home seem to think the R.F.A. is about as big as a platoon."

Pushing his way through the glass doors of the office, he bumped his haversack; vented an Expeditionary Force oath.

No office-girl sat at the reception window. The racks in the duty-paid stock-rooms were quite empty; he passed between them into the back office; found Miss Macpherson, busy with ledgers and foolscap, sitting at Simpson's old desk.

"I didn't expect you so soon, Mr. Jameson," she said, rising. The war had altered the Scotswoman: higher pay had clad her in a well-cut skirt, a silk blouse, good boots and stockings; she looked almost comely with her dark hair, just graying, her firm well-moulded features, her keen brown eyes.

"I've just been taking the bonded stock," she went on. "There isn't much of it, I'm glad to say. Almost everything is sold before arrival now. And the book-debts are low."

They discussed details; and Peter found himself amazed at her knowledge, her capability.

"Mr. Simpson left a good deal to me at the end," she explained. "He was ill for nearly three months before he died. But he wouldn't have you written to about it. Poor Mrs. Simpson! I went to see her yesterday. She was so sorry you couldn't be home to the funeral. You ought to go and see her if you can."

A girl brought tea. Over it, Miss Macpherson put her question:

"What are you going to do about the business? Will it have to be sold? You don't mind my asking, I hope. But it's rather important *to me*."

"I'm afraid it *will* have to be sold, Miss Macpherson. You know about the partnership deed, I suppose?"

"Yes. Mr. Simpson told me." She finished her cup. "I could run it, you know—easily—till you came back."

"Could you?" Her earnestness appealed to Peter. This type of managing woman, bred by the war, was new and very refreshing.

"Of course I could. It's not a very difficult business."

The telephone bell rang. Miss Macpherson picked up the receiver; pushed the instrument across the desk. "It's your wife, I think."

"Peter"—the voice came faintly over the wire—"I just missed you at Victoria.

Shall I bring the car down to the office?"

"Yes, do," he answered.

The little scene was—could Peter but have realized it—very typical of war: women working with and for men, driving cars, running businesses, doing a thousand jobs which would have seemed impossible two years since. But Peter Jameson had no sense of drama; he accepted new conditions, as most Englishmen, with nothing more than a mild surprise.

"I wish you'd get me the private ledger, Miss Macpherson," he said: and immersed in the "private ledger," Patricia found him.

As she entered, tall, gauntleted, small toque low on her blond head, he looked up from his work; rose to greet her. They did not kiss: they were not of the breed that kisses before employés. But there was no condescension in Patricia's, "How do you do, Miss Macpherson?"

"I shan't be more than ten minutes, Pat," Peter said. "You don't mind waiting, do you?"

She sat there, looking at the two of them, the man in soldier's uniform, bending over the account book, the middle-aged woman with the fountain-pen—holding her love for Peter in abeyance, recognizing that this was "business," a mystery beyond her scope. And with that realization came a little flash of jealousy against the other woman who could help where the wife must sit useless.

Peter snapped-to the catch of the private-ledger; pulled the telephone across the desk; asked for a number.

"Mr. Reid in?"—Patricia heard—"No. Mr. George Reid. Gone for the day. Confound it. Is he free at ten o'clock tomorrow? Right. Yes, Mr. Jameson, Mr. Peter Jameson."

He turned to Miss Macpherson, said "Do you think you can have those figures ready by lunch-time tomorrow?" received her affirmative; asked if she knew the names and addresses of Simpson's executors; wrote them down in his note-book.

"Ready now," he told Patricia: and, as an afterthought, "How much petrol have you got?"

"I filled up just before coming out."

"Good." He looked at his wrist-watch. "Then I think, if you don't mind, we'll run down to Harrow to see Mrs. Simpson."

### § 3

The drive to Harrow, through traffic and tramlines for the most part, gave little



opportunity for conversation.

"Are you very worried?" she managed to ask.

"Yes," he confessed, "I am."

They drew up, at about six in the afternoon, before an unpretentious, comfortable villa in an unpretentious, comfortable side-street. It was the usual English suburban home, a doll's house of red-brick and stucco: two lime trees sheltered the little iron gate; on either side of the gravelled path which led to the front door, tiny well-clipt lawns gave on to laurel-bushes. As they came up the path, a half-seen figure moved behind the muslin curtains of the dining-room window.

Ringling the ivory knob of a well-polished brass bell-push, they were welcomed by a maid in cap-and-apron; ushered, through a marble-papered hall with a mahogany hat-stand, into an over-furnished room (piano and sofa prominent) whose long French windows looked out on "the garden"—a narrow strip of lawn ending in a fence crowned with trellis-work and scant ivy.

"Mrs. Simpson will be down in a moment," announced the maid.

She came in, a little faded woman, light-haired—the pallor of her accentuated by the obviously new black dress. An open-faced gold locket with the miniature of her dead husband hung from a gold chain at her breast.

"This is very good of you," began Mrs. Simpson.

Condoling with her, Peter felt—for the first time—a real sorrow at loss of his partner. He remembered "Tom" bringing his wife to dinner at Lowndes Square, remembered how Pat had laughed at his calling her "mother."

"Won't you sit down?" said Mrs. Simpson; and began to talk about the illness, the funeral. "Poor man, he was worried you know. Worried! The work got too much for him. I used to say to him, 'Tom, don't go to the office today.' But he would go. And the trains are so crowded now—these soldiers. Often, he'd have to stand up the whole way home. Then the raids used to keep him awake."

To Patricia, she seemed a pathetic figure; to Peter, she grew rapidly irritating. Sorrow disappeared. He had come there to talk money-matters, not to hear about the "dear departed." The front had hardened him to death: death was just an incident, a daily incident: one did not mention the dead.

"Tell me, Mrs. Simpson," he interrupted, not unsympathetically. "About money? Are you all right? You know it will take some little time to get the estate settled up. I thought of going to see the executors tomorrow."

"It's very good of you to take so much trouble, Mr. Jameson. Very good of you indeed. But I've got enough to go on with. And my brother-in-law tells me. . . ."

In her narrow way she was shrewd—with the shrewdness of the English middle-

class. Business, taboo in Lowndes Square, had always been the staple topic of conversation at "The Limes." Mrs. Simpson knew all about Nirvana, about Hagenburg, about the partnership deed; knew too, exactly what she wanted.

And she wanted her money out of Jamesons; wanted it in War Loan. This, without any definite statement beyond, "She hoped he wouldn't have to sell the business," and "It seemed very difficult, his being at the front," she made very clear to the astute mind of Peter Jameson.

Yet she pressed them to have some tea, which they refused; pressed them to come again. The visit, the car at the gate, flattered her vanity. "Tom," she said to herself, "had always thought very highly of young Peter. Tom would be glad that young Peter and his wife had been to see her. But Tom would not like her to leave his money in the business."

She walked to the gate with them; said what a beautiful evening it was; watched the car glide off round the corner of St. John's road. Then she turned back to her lonely house, her lonely life. For Tom Simpson's "mother" had only been a joke between them; and now, he would never joke with her again. . . .

## § 4

Instead of swinging the car left for London, Patricia drove straight past the Harrow foot-ball fields, up the Hill towards the School. Holidays had emptied the Georgian street, the red-brick buildings; the little low cake-shop at which they halted was quite empty.

"I haven't had any tea," she explained, as they sat down at a clean table.

"Sorry, old thing,"—Peter's voice sounded gentler than usual—"I'm afraid I'm a selfish beast."

"Sometimes," she laughed, "but I'm glad to have you back all the same."

A waitress appeared from the back of the shop. Patricia ordered tea for two. They wandered up to the counter; chose cakes, sat down again.

"Now tell me about business," she said. And Peter told her, a little bitterly, the whole tale.

"I can't see any hope of saving the show," he ended. "Miss Macpherson thinks she can run it. Perhaps she could, if one had enough capital. But one hasn't. So that's the end of that. First Nirvana, then Jamesons—they all go the same way home. Serves me right for gambling, I suppose. But I wish I hadn't let *you* down, Pat."

"You haven't let me down," she flashed at him: and the sudden anger surprised them both. "Do you think I married you just for money? Do you think I want you to

be like Rawlings? . . .”

“No”—somehow her anger soothed him—“of course I don’t.”

“Well then, why do you talk about letting *me* down?”

“Because, Pat”—he spoke slowly, fumbling for words—“a man’s got no right to marry a woman and have children if he can’t look after them. Two years ago, we had three thousand a year; today, we’ll be lucky if we’ve got six hundred. That’s failure, Pat. And you know what I think of failure.”

She remembered a similar conversation, long ago, at the Carlton.

“It isn’t your fault,” she said stubbornly. “And besides”—her voice grew very gentle—“lots of people are very happy on six hundred a year.”

“In books,” he sneered.

“Peter”—she looked at him and he saw her eyes suffuse—“that *hurts*.”

The sudden change in her dumbfounded him. Always, they had talked openly, as man to man. Now, he knew instinctively that he must finesse. And he hated finesse—even in commerce. Yet he was sorry to have hurt her; told her so; tried to explain.

“It’s all right for some people, Pat. But it wouldn’t suit us. Imagine us living in a place like ‘The Limes.’ . . .”

Thought Patricia, “He’s been home half a day and he hasn’t even kissed me yet!”

Nevertheless, she pulled herself together. He had come home “on business”; and he must be allowed to settle his business in his own way. He looked thinner, she thought: and it seemed to her a shame that he should be worried with money-matters when his real work lay elsewhere, at the front.

She let him talk himself into optimism; admired the ultimate philosophy with which he said: “Anyway, it’s only temporary. One doesn’t alter a deal by talking round it. Jamesons will have to go. Let it! Once this war’s over, I’ll get into business again. And then, then, my dear, you’ll see me make things hum.”

He paid for tea; insisted on driving home himself. They spun out of twilight country into the blueing gloom of war-time London; made Harley Street in time for dinner.

The children, who had waited up for his return, greeted their father uproariously; could hardly be induced to bed. Later Heron Baynet produced Clicquot, a decanter of special brandy. The three of them made semblance of enjoyment. Peter told them how he had wangled his leave; Patricia broached a plan long contemplated—the taking of a little place in the country; her father spoke, as always, of his work.

The little consultant with the lined face and the kind eyes was one of the only three men in England who had made any study of war’s effect on the fighting man’s nerves. Already, in the card-index on the table in his consulting-room, he had

tabulated five hundred cases; and from those five hundred cases, a theory had begun to evolve itself—a theory of eminent simplicity. Heron Baynet called it, “The Curve of the Limit of Human Endurance.”

The curve and the limit of each individual varied, were affected by conditions—physical, mental, and sexual, conditions of heredity and conditions of pre-war environment. But of one thing, Heron Baynet already held the absolute certainty:—The superman, as preached by German philosophers, did not exist. Every human individuality possessed its breaking-strain, the point beyond which will-power could not force either the body or the brain. Any attempt to pass that “limit of human endurance” must be foredoomed to failure.

And it seemed to Heron Baynet, sitting alone after the two had gone to bed, that he could already detect from certain tones in his son-in-law’s voice, from the way his conversation ran from one topic to another, from the whole atmosphere his personality exuded, that Peter Jameson had already abandoned the flat level of the normal, begun the slow climb up that curve of endurance which must lead eventually to breaking point. . . .

# PART TWENTY-ONE

## THE DROSS AND THE GOLD

### § 1

Despite his father-in-law's diagnosis, there was no sign of overstrain about the quiet young fellow in mufti who sat talking figures in George Reid's stuffy private office, the morning after his arrival in England. One by one, Peter marshalled his facts; laid them before the middle-aged clean-shaven man at the paper-littered desk.

"But are you sure you can find a buyer?" said Reid at last. "It all seems to hang on that."

"You can always sell things—at a price," answered Peter. "The only trouble is *time*. One can't conclude a deal like this in under a week. That's where I want *your* help. If I start the negotiations, will you carry them through? Of course, you must name your own fee."

"I don't take fees for helping people in the Army," said Reid.

"But that's ridiculous. You're not here for your health."

"Ridiculous or not, I won't take any fee." There was something very near emotion in the accountant's voice. "You can pay for having the accounts audited if you like. But beyond that, not a farthing. Hang it all, when you fellows are risking your lives, the least we old 'uns can do is to see after affairs at home for you."

"It's damn decent of you," said Peter, "but all the same, I don't like accepting favours."

"Favours be blowed." Reid lit himself a cigarette. "Let's get down to facts. First point: Are you quite sure it's necessary to sell?"

"Quite."

"Why? The business is perfectly solvent."

"Because I happen to be in the Army."

"Some one could run it while you're away."

"It isn't that"—Peter spoke coldly, impersonally—"but if anything happened to me there'd be the whole tangle over again. Whereas, if I can get my fourteen thousand out, that *and* the insurance money, at five per cent. . . ."

"Very well," interrupted Reid. "I follow you. Point two: Who's your buyer?"

"A firm called Beresford and Beresford. You'll find them pretty tough nuts to negotiate with."

“Jews?” asked Reid, who had a slight acquaintance with the cigar-trade.

“Yes.”

“Well that’s one comfort. They won’t mess about. If they want the thing, and the price suits them, they’ll have it. . . .”

## § 2

Peter had spoken with great certainty about Beresfords; but as he climbed down the prison-like stone staircase of Great Winchester House he began to wonder whether he might not have misjudged the situation. Two and a half years ago, Maurice would have jumped at the opportunity of acquiring Jamesons on the terms Peter now proposed to accept. But things had altered in the cigar-trade; perhaps the arguments he intended using would not be effective.

The whole proposition was very distasteful. He found himself hating the City, almost wishing he were back in the firing-line. And when, through various passages, he made his own offices, distaste deepened. Sitting there, talking generalities to Miss Macpherson (it would be time enough to tell her the business must be sold, after he had seen Maurice), memories thronged over him. He saw his father again, uncording a parcel of dock-samples, old George with his duster, Tom Simpson, himself as a raw youth.

Recollection conjured up many such pictures that morning: comedies, farces, tragedies, all enacted among the cedar-boxes and the mahogany furniture of 28 b. Lime Street.

After Miss Macpherson had given him the promised figures and gone off to her lunch, he prowled about the place. It seemed like a tomb now; all the life gone out of it. The faces of the two girls in the clerks’ room were as strange as the emptiness of the dusty racks.

Yet, for all its apparent deadness, Jameson & Company still made profits. For a moment, studying the rough balance-sheet Miss Macpherson had prepared, Peter doubted his wisdom in selling out. Why shouldn’t he make a fight for it, let her carry-on? There was enough money on deposit in the Bank to stall off Simpson’s executors for at least six months. The selling of goods, under war-conditions, presented no difficulty. What one could import, one could dispose of.

Still doubtful, he went out to lunch, avoiding the Lombard lest he should meet Beresford, going instead to a noisy old-fashioned chop-house where the food was as good as the service execrable. Over his chop, wisdom prevailed. For Patricia’s sake and the sake of his children, he dare not risk any more financial complications.

With which resolution firmly in his mind, Peter walked down St. Mary Axe, entered the elaborate warehouses of Beresford and Beresford.

Maurice, dapper as ever, eye-glassed, patent-booted, but short-jacketed and bowler-hatted in deference to war-conditions, happened to be in the outer-office; welcomed Peter as a long lost brother.

“But what are you doing in mufti?” he asked, leading way through the glass-partitioned sales-rooms (which, Peter noticed, were as bare of stock as his own) into a green-carpeted sanctum of saddle-bag chairs and roll-top desks.

“Usually get out of uniform when I’m on leave,” explained Peter.

The little dude unlocked one of the desks; sat down at it; produced a box of fat oily Cabanas; pushed them across.

“Trust goods. But not at all bad,” he said.

Peter lit up; took the chair at the side of the desk; asked:

“Is your brother Charlie in town?”

“Yes. He’ll be back from lunch in about ten minutes.”

“Good,” said Peter. “I’ve come round to talk business. It’ll save time if you’re both here.”

“Business?” queried the other, letting the monocle drop from his eye-socket. “What sort of business?”

“Tell you when Charlie comes in. How are things in general?” They settled down, Maurice on tenterhooks to find out what Peter could be driving at, to desultory trade-gossip.

“Too much Government control for my liking,” said Maurice. “Still, except for the freights, I’m not grumbling.”

His brother came in: a fat little man with goggly eyes and red hands, one of which he extended cordially to Peter.

“Very glad to see you back, Peter. Very glad indeed. When’s the war going to be over?”

“Peter’s come round to talk business,” interrupted Maurice.

“Business!”—Charlie hung up his soft hat—“what sort of business? I didn’t know there was any business left to talk about.”

He also unlocked his desk; sat down at it; took out a cigar-box; selected a weed. Looking at the two of them, Peter could not help a totally unreasonable feeling of contempt—contempt not only for them, but for himself for wanting money from them. There was a little of the Weasel’s rasp in his voice as he began:

“The business is this. As you know, Simpson is dead. There’s no one left to carry on Jamesons. And so, I’ve got to sell it. I’ve come to you first. You know

almost as much about the show as I do. If you want it, you must make up your minds within twenty-four hours. . . .”

“Rather rushing things, aren’t you, Peter?” interrupted Maurice.

“Possibly,”—it must be remembered that Peter knew his men pretty well—“but what am I to do? Leave doesn’t last for ever; and I’ve got to have the whole thing settled before I go away.”

“But what’s the price?” Charlie’s mind moved more directly if less rapidly than his brother’s.

“Well”—Peter spoke slowly—“of course you’ll take stock and book-debts at a valuation. We shan’t quarrel about that. The only question is how much the goodwill’s worth.”

“Goodwill!” Maurice screwed his monocle back into his eye. “My dear Peter, you must be joking. I shouldn’t dream of paying for goodwill.” (“Then he’s a buyer!” commented Peter’s mind.) “A cigar importing business has no goodwill. You and I decided that years ago. It’s a personal business.”

“Not under present conditions. The import-licence represents a share in an absolute monopoly.”

“Only while the war lasts.”

They wrangled about goodwill for ten minutes. Then Maurice said casually:

“I suppose you’ve got to pay out a good deal of money to Simpson’s estate.”

“A certain amount,” admitted Peter, “and frankly that’s one of the reasons why I’m anxious to dispose of the business. You see, it’s a bad time to get rid of outside investments”—he spoke as if he had millions of them—“and although Simpson’s capital was not enormous, I don’t feel inclined to realize a lot of shares so as to replace it.”

“So you want us to do it for you,” said Maurice.

“Your position’s different to mine. You’re both here to look after things: I’m not.”

“That’s quite true,” interrupted Charlie.

Maurice, who wanted the business badly but did not wish to appear over-keen, looked angrily across at his brother; took up the running himself.

“You’d want to be paid in cash, I suppose?” he said.

“Take your own time about that,” answered Peter largely. “If it suits you better to pay me out as you realize the stock and book-debts, I don’t mind. There’ll be interest, of course.”

Maurice came back to the question of goodwill; was sheered off by Peter; began to fish for figures. But these, his antagonist refused to give.

“My accountant’s working on them,” he prevaricated, “they’ll be ready



tomorrow. But it's no good showing them to you unless you're prepared to deal."

"Can't you give me some idea? I'm only trying to find out if we can afford it."

It was time to fire the last shot. "Maurice," said Peter, "you know as well as I do that there's no question of affording. All you're asked to do—barring the payment for goodwill—is to take over sound stock and good book-debts; realize on 'em; and pay the money over to me. If you don't want to do it, say so; and I'll either sell the show to Elkins or tell my accountants to liquidate."

"You're in such a hurry," began Maurice. "Can't you leave us till tomorrow?"

"No, I can't."

"But about this goodwill. How much do you want for it?"

"A year's profits."

The two brothers looked at each other; and Peter, watching, saw that he had the fish hooked. They didn't want Elkins to have the business. They didn't want it liquidated. They wanted it for themselves.

"Look here, Peter," began Maurice ingratiatingly, "you and I are old pals. Of course, I quite see you must have this thing settled quickly. But I'm sure you wouldn't want us to pay more than it's worth for the business: any more than *we* should like to pay you less."

"Of course not," smiled Peter. He knew Maurice Beresford in his "between-you-and-me-and-the-gate-post-and-as-old-friends" mood.

"Well, why not leave the details to our accountants? You want to sell. We're quite prepared to buy. A few hundreds one way or another can't make any difference to either of us. Don't you think that's best, Charlie?"

Charlie looked up from his desk; began, "Well, I think we ought to know how much money is involved"; caught his brother's eye; ended up, "Yes. I think that would be the best way."

"There's only one thing," said Peter at parting, "I think you ought to keep on our old Staff, at any rate until they can find other jobs."

"My dear Peter," purred Maurice, "we're so short-handed that they'll be a god-send."

But when Peter broke the news to Miss Macpherson, she said, very firmly: "Oh, I don't think I'd like to work for Beresford & Beresford, Mr. Jameson. I'd rather go into one of the Government Offices. You see, to have carried on while you were away would have been a kind of war-work, wouldn't it? Whereas if I went to them. . . ."

She left the sentence unfinished, and its hearer a little amazed. For Government Offices did not pay the same wages as private employers; and patriotism in money-

matters—except his own, about which he always felt a trifle foolish—was a little beyond the scope of P.J.'s imagination. . . .

### § 3

The Beresfords lost no time in getting to grips, no opportunity of pointing out the worthlessness of the concern they proposed acquiring.

At his very first interview with George Reid, their intermediary—the dignified portly principal of Messrs. Guthrie, Guthrie, Jellybrand, Sons and Guthrie—made their attitude very clear. He was given to understand, he said, that Jameson & Co. had been for many years prominently associated with a German firm, domiciled in Cuba, who had recently been black-listed by the British Government for serious misdemeanours. Under the circumstances, and as patriotic merchants, his clients felt some diffidence in negotiating.

When Reid (primed by Peter who had anticipated the argument) pointed out that Beresfords had also, prior to the war, traded with Beckmanns, and that they had only abandoned trading with them because *his* clients, Messrs. Jameson & Co., refused to supply further shipments, Mr. Guthrie professed bland ignorance.

The matter—went on Mr. Guthrie—was not of vast importance: still, it undoubtedly affected the question of goodwill. And, while on the subject, he felt it only fair to say that—had Messrs. Beresford taken *his* advice—they would have thought twice before entering into negotiations at all; as, in his opinion, the excess profits tax would swallow up any increased earnings that could be made. However, his clients had pledged their word, and he would be glad to have the balance-sheet—which, with Mr. Reid's permission, he would take away and study at leisure.

Followed a long letter, querying the item of "furniture and fixtures," alluding once again to the debated question of goodwill, suggesting that the book-debts should be guaranteed by the sellers, the stock valued by some independent expert. Followed another interview, a demand to examine the lease of the premises, and—"I told you so, Reid," said Peter when he heard of it)—a very tactful request for a copy of the contract with Beckmanns!

Meanwhile Maurice insisted on entertaining Peter and Patricia to dinner at Claridges': a dinner during which he assumed the deal already completed, and after which, over enormous cigars and exiguous liqueurs, he did his best to settle all disputed points in his own favour.

"Horrid cynical little man," commented Patricia after he had dropped them at Harley Street.

"Oh, we're all thieves together in the cigar-trade," answered Peter. "If I were in Maurice's position and he in mine, I should do just the same. He knows that if he can only play out time till my leave's up, he'll get the business at his own price."

"Well, I think it's very mean of him."

"Don't be so foolish, Pat"—Peter laughed the new bitter laugh she was growing to hate. "There's no sentiment in commerce."

She thought of their mad happy Christmas together; and sighed. He had reverted to his old absorbed self, the Peter of Nirvana days: grim, concentrated, efficient. She was his chattel again, no longer his pal.

That sentiment swayed him, that he hated parting with the "old business," that his weakened resolution needed constant screwing-up to bluffing-point—Patricia did not realize. She knew that he was fighting a losing battle against time, felt dimly that his financial anxieties were more on her behalf and the children's than his own. And for these things her heart sympathized with him: but her neglected love suffered, suffered impotently.

Reason asked: "Why *do* you love this man?"—and found no sure answer. Reason told her that he was hard, incapable of any but the most casual affection; that his fidelity indicated nothing but lack of temperament, that he would have been happier unmarried. But Instinct, ousting reason, replied: "And in spite of it all, you *do* love him."

It took many years before Patricia, looking back on that dark week, realized herself one of those women whose love can only walk hand-in-hand with their *respect*; that whatever this man of hers might do or say, instinct, stronger than any reasoning power, gave her the key to his motive: and always, that motive was the same—a desire, voiceless but founded on sure conviction, to do the right thing. . . .

Still, it was a beast of a week! Try as she might, Patricia could not wrest his mind from his business problems to herself. Even during their visits to Francis, he seemed incapable of putting the thing aside. She grew to resent the constant messengers bringing bulky envelopes from Reid, the servants, "Your office wants you on the telephone, sir," the afternoons he must spend in the City.

For Peter had no intention of allowing Maurice to play out time. He hustled Reid till Reid hustled Guthrie; met this point; refused that; threatened here; was purposely dilatory there; used every artifice to bring matters to a climax before the Thursday morning when he must return to France.

In the end, by luck rather than judgment, he succeeded. Maurice Beresford (afraid lest Peter should carry out his latest threat—to liquidate Jameson & Co. altogether) suggested a conference. They met, the two accountants and the three

principals, at Guthrie's offices; sat down in his mahogany board-room to a long session. Talk, as usual at such meetings, coiled away from essentials; wound itself into interminable knots over unimportant minutiae . . . till Peter's temper, long held in leash, got the better of him.

"And don't you think, Mr. Jameson," began Guthrie blandly, "that the transfer should be made as from the date of the balance-sheet?"

"If you want to know what *I* think," Peter flashed back at him, "I think we're all sitting round this table like a lot of blithering idiots, talking sanguinary rubbish. Anyway, I'm fed up with it. Look here, Maurice"—he turned on the little man furiously—"you've been mucking about for six days. I've met you over the guaranteeing of the book-debts, the price of the fixtures, and the indemnity for repairs under the lease. What the hell more do you want?"

Guthrie, ruffled out of his portly dignity, sat silent and disgruntled; Reid's eyes twinkled; Charlie Beresford fidgeted uncomfortably; but his brother, screwing monocle into eye-socket, retorted calmly:

"I don't want to pay anything for goodwill."

"Then the deal's off." Peter began to gather up the papers in front of him. "If you won't pay more than the actual value of the assets, I'll wind up the show myself . . ."

"But . . ." began Maurice.

"Though why the devil you've wasted all this time, God alone knows," finished Peter. He completed the collection of papers, rose to go.

For once in the history of Beresford & Beresford, the junior partner saved the situation. Maurice, not realizing Peter's temper unassumed, thinking it a bluff, sat silent; leaving Charlie's frightened acquisitiveness to exclaim:

"I don't see why we shouldn't pay *something* for goodwill. Only, it's a question of how much. Couldn't we compromise, Peter?"

Our Mr. Jameson sat down again. The outburst had steadied his nerves; his commercial judgment revived. Inwardly, he laughed a little: it seemed quaint that his loss of temper should have brought the Beresfords to heel so quickly. But what he actually said was:

"Compromise? Why the whole amount's only chicken food."

"Damn dear chicken-food," commented Maurice. "You're asking a year's profits. That's about two thousand five hundred pounds." He changed his tone. "Look here, Peter, your time's valuable, so's mine. I'll tell you what I'll do. The indemnity under that lease of yours might run into a lot of money. Supposing we waive it, and give you a thousand in cash for the goodwill."

Pouted Guthrie, recovering his dignity: "That seems to me a very liberal offer."

...

And at twelve hundred, Peter compromised. It was a weak thing to do, and he knew it weak as he did it; but time pressed, and somehow he felt sick of haggling. The old Peter, the Peter who would have fought up to the last ten-pound note, had left his patience at Ypres!

But it was the old Peter who insisted on the immediate exchange of letters; who dictated the rough agreement to Guthrie's pert blond typist; appended steady signature at foot.

"And about the contract itself?" asked Maurice Beresford as the party, all smiles and handshakes, broke up. "You'll have that sent out to you, I suppose?"

"It won't be necessary, Maurice. Reid has my power of attorney. You see"—our Mr. Jameson couldn't resist a last crow over old opponents—"I never expected to bring you up to the scratch before I went away!"

But Maurice only chuckled, "Well, there's *one* thief less in the cigar-trade anyway, Peter"; and insisted on accompanying him to the corner of Lombard Street. . . .

## § 4

A man's money-standard is of necessity comparative. Five pounds is a fortune to the beggar; ten thousand a charity-subscription for a millionaire. But in Peter's case money had hitherto represented more than mere coin to spend or save as the mood happened: it had stood for the measure of success in his career. So that, as he walked home through Lombard Street that fine April evening, he bore, in addition to the weight of his loss (and no man, pauper or millionaire, *likes* losing money), another heavier burden—the burden of failure.

The whole street, the gold-devised signs that had hung three hundred years and more outside stolid buildings, buttressed on millions, the marble-pillared windows, the iron-shuttered entrances, mocked at such failures as his own; seemed glutted with money, money to be picked up by anybody with brains and nerve. He hurried through it; left the low black bulk of the Bank of England behind him; struck westwards through Cheapside.

It was late, and most of the shops had closed. He slackened his pace to the slow dawdle of the man who thinks.

"Failure!" thought Peter. "Argue round it as you like—the result's the same." And so thinking, there came over him another wave of that bitterness which, under

the Voluntary System, is reserved for those who fight for their country while others, equally fit, stay safe at home. Tolerance for those others, clean pride in himself were submerged in that bitter wave; the scum of thought floated upwards.

"A fine fool I made of myself," he argued, "rushing into the army. Why didn't I wait? All these people at home are making more money than ever. Marcus must be coining it out of Nirvana. Beresfords' will get back the purchase-price of Jamesons in six months. If I'd only stayed at home!"

He began to rail, as so many railed in that black time, against the very thing to which he had dedicated himself. "What are we all fighting for! The country? Oh, hell! A lot 'the country' cares. Look at it. Every one having the time of their lives—more money being made and spent than ever—politicians at £5,000 a year yapping of patriotism, munition-workers getting ten pounds a week—while poor bloody Tommy is blown to bits for seven bob."

"Poor bloody Tommy!" The thought acted as a life-buoy in the storm of anger. What right had he, Peter Jameson, Lieutenant and Adjutant of Gunners, he Peter with his cushy job at the front, his security from want at home, to grouse at hard luck, while men—(thought pictured them clearly)—trudged the shelled duck-boards to Railway Wood through endless nights, clung to its whizz-banged breastworks through endless days? And among those men—a dozen confided stories leaped to mind—were plenty who had sacrificed not half an inherited fortune, but everything: men with assured positions, skilled mechanics, dock-foremen, master-printers, who had thrown up fine jobs, whose wives struggled along on ludicrous separation allowances, because. . . . "Because of what?" asked thought. And reason answered thought in one clear sentence: "Because they were *men*!"

Evening had come as he dawdled. Twilight brooded over London. But now no twilight brooded over the soul of Peter Jameson. The burden of the past week dropped from him as a heavy pack drops from weary shoulders. He stood upright in a sudden blaze of clarity. Let the old, the emasculate, the pimps and the panderers haggle in their market-places, babble at their talking-shops: his path led clean away from their market-places and their talking-places, clean across the seas into that other country where neither his money nor his talk but only a man's manhood availed him: a loathsome and a desolate country, a country of fear and mud and boredom intolerable, of maiming and of death: yet a country above whose desolation shone always the one clear light—the Light of Duty!

A little of that new vision which had been vouchsafed to him, Peter confided to Patricia, haltingly and half ashamed of it, during their last night together; and after he had fallen asleep she lay for a long time, listening to his easy breathing, hoping and fearing for him, wondering about him.

Her own patriotism was a simple star-clear faith in birth and flag; his, she had never yet entirely understood. It seemed to her a voiceless sullen creed—superstition rather than belief. Striving to analyse it, a fantasy came to her. It was as though she stood among the ruins of a huge temple in the midst of a desolate city. Outside, guns flashed and boomed: their flashes illumined the black sky above the roofless temple. Round her, on the brick-strewn floor, among the fragments of granite pillars and stained-glass windows, knelt men—thousands upon thousands of armed and helmeted men. Their helmets were dented, their arms foul and bloody, their drab uniforms wet and clotted with yellow slime. And from a ruined altar, One spoke to the men on their knees, saying:

“Know ye the Whys and the Wherefores of this thing ye do?”

Then the kneeling men answered as with one voice:

“Neither the Whys nor the Wherefores of this Thing are known to us; nor do we care to know them. Only we know that this Thing we do is the Fine Thing: and with that knowledge we are content.”

Then said the One at the altar: “This is My Work which ye accomplish.”

But the men on their knees answered him: “What is that to us? We have set our hands to this Work and, Thine or another’s, we will accomplish it. For this Work is the Fine Thing.”

And so saying they rose from their knees, man after helmetèd man; rose and passed out into the desolation of the city. . . .

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But fantasy proved no consolation to Patricia when, once again, she bade *her* man good-bye!

# *PART TWENTY-TWO*

## “SUNFLOWERS”

### § 1

Peter Jameson returned to his unit in a very peculiar frame of mind: a mixture of gladness at having left his business annoyances behind him, regret for missed enjoyments, and determination not to allow anything that might happen at home to interfere with his work as a soldier—a determination slightly tinged with fanaticism, which did not improve his temper.

He detrained at Steenwerck, in pitch darkness, after a nine-hour train-journey; was accosted by his groom at the exit from the station.

“Hope you had a good leaf, sir.” The squat little man saluted awkwardly.

“Thanks, Jelks. Quite good. Where are the horses?”

“Just over there, sir. I tied them up to the fence.”

“Both of them all right?”

“Queen Bess had a bit of a cold, sir. Captain Horrocks made me keep her in for two days. She’s all right now.”

They made their way across shadows; untethered the horses. Peter mounted.

“Colonel told me to bring your gas-helmet, sir.” Jelks divested himself of the extra satchel he wore slung from his shoulder; handed it up to his master. “He told me to tell you, sir, with his compliments”—Jelks grinned as the Weasel had grinned when he gave the message—“orders is that both officers and men should take their gas-helmets when they go on leaf.”

Peter, rather annoyed at being called over the coals for infraction of an order nobody ever obeyed in those early days, put Little Willie to a trot. They rode, under vague starlight, through La Creche into the main Bailleul-Armentières Road; were challenged at the barrier. As they turned leftwards up the pavé for Neuve Eglise, a mild wind blew across their faces. Passing the low huts of Divisional Baths, a sentry saluted them. “Gas Alert, sir,” he called out.

Peter called back, “Thanks.”

At the canvas house which hid the naval gun from hostile airmen, another sentry gave the same warning. Peter slackened to a walk; summoned his groom.

“We’ll go round by Kortepyp,” he said. “It’s quicker.”

“Very good, sir. Turning’s about a hundred yards on.”



They found it; veered away from the trees into flat country. Now the wind blew direct in their faces. In front of them, Véry lights glowed skyward, hung and disappeared silently behind the trees. “Devilish quiet,” thought Peter. Not a gun boomed, not a rifle cracked. . . . He seemed to catch the faint sound of a gong; halted hand-to-ear.

Again, the gas-gong belled faintly down wind; a distant gunflash winked across the darkness ahead. Then, maniacally, the countryside awoke. Sound swept back, as a wave sweeps, leaping down the valley towards them—horns shrieked, gongs dinned, whistles blew: rifle-fire crackled, burst to a roar: guns boomed dully from beyond the horizon; they caught the far crash of shell-fire. The sky blazed with electric flashes, with whitely-soaring lights, with orange hints of machine-gun flame. Hedges, trees, crest-line, sprang from shadow into silhouette. And suddenly, near and high above the silhouetted valley, soared the crimson rockets of the S.O.S. station on Hill 63; hung a moment; waking pandemonium as they drooped to ground.

A mile away among the trees, our own guns awoke, red and roaring; the flames of them cut great gashes against the sky, the voice of them drowned the far crash of shells, the crackle and sputter of rifle-fire. But shrill above the voice of the guns, Peter and Jelks heard the howling shrieking Klaxons. “Gas,” they shrieked, “Gas! Gas! Gas!”

“Better dismount, I think,” said Peter calmly. “It’s hardly likely to come as far back as this; but there’s no sense in taking risks.”

They stood, bridles over arms, watching and listening. Every now and then, Peter sniffed at the breeze. “Gas-training”—beyond the putting-on of the helmet—had not yet been invented. He felt irritatingly ignorant. How long would the stuff take to reach them? Would he be able to see it? What did it look like? Smell like? Could it kill horses?

Driver Jelks began fiddling at his satchel; extracted the clammy “P. H.” mask; shook it out; pulled it half-on, tucking up the glass eye-pieces and the rubber mouth-valve over his head. Peter saw that the man’s hands were shaking.

“Not frightened, are you?” he asked.

“I don’t mind shells, sir,”—stammered Jelks—“but this gas, it fairly puts the wind up me, sir.”

“Don’t be a damn fool, man,” said Peter gruffly. “You’re all right as long as you’ve got your helmet on.”

And then, suddenly, he saw the poison—a low gray wraith, rushing down the darkness; heard himself say, “Pull that helmet down *quick*”; caught a whiff as of rotten pears; closed mouth and nostrils; felt Little Willie wrench at bridle over his

right arm; whipped gas-helmet out and on, stuffing the flaps of it under his collar. He found the rubber tubing with his lips; sucked on it; realized instantaneously that the valve leaked!

Now fear had its way with him. The eye-pieces blurred. To breathe meant death. . . . He must breathe. . . . His lungs would burst. . . . Blood drummed in his ears. . . .

Came another wrench at bridle-rein; with it the madness of inspiration. His right hand found the peak of the saddle, his left the cantle, swung him from ground to horse. . . . Teeth unclenched from rubber, breath surged through mouth and nostrils. . . . Now death was certain. Be damned, though, if he'd die in that acrid clammy darkness. . . .

Peter jerked up the stifling cloth; felt cool air on his eyes, sweet air in his nostrils; failed for a second to realize the miracle. Then, instinctively, he knew that his leap to horse had poised him above the heavy gas-cloud, that he was looking down on it, as a man riding the fields at dusk looks down on the ground mist. . . . But even as Peter looked, the tail of the poison-belt blew clear!

For a full minute, he sat his horse—motionless, amazed, still afraid to breathe. The horror had come and gone like some bestial dream. Guns were still flashing and roaring; the sky still blazed; Klaxons howled all round him. Jelks' squat figure, cowed in its goggling mask, Queen Bess's bridle over its arm, stood within three yards of his stirrup.

Little Willie began coughing; fidgeted for a second; stood still again.

"You can take that thing off," said Peter.

"Beg pardon, sir," answered a muffled voice.

"You can take that damn thing off," roared Peter.

Fumblingly, the man removed his helmet. "Was it gas, sir?" he asked.

"Very much so," began Peter; "and the next time you bring me a gas-helmet, I wish to Christ. . . ." He bit off the end of the sentence. After all, the fault lay with himself, not with his man.

They waited half-an-hour; heard the shriek of the Klaxons die away to silence, the roar of the guns to an intermittent crackling.

"I think we might go on now," said Peter. "It doesn't seem to have hurt the horses, thank goodness."

Nevertheless, since the wind still blew fairly from the north-east, he kept ears and nostrils a-cock as they made gingerly for Headquarters.

"That you, Jameson?" called Stark's voice from the lighted doorway of the villa.

"Yes, sir."—Peter dismounted—"Is Captain Horrocks up, sir?"

“Up? Everybody’s up, except our ruddy Belgian landlord. He and his wife have got their respirators on, their heads under the bed clothes, and the fear of God in ’em. Why do you want Horrocks?”

The Weasel looked a quaint figure. His red hair was still towzled with sleep. He wore a “British Warm” coat over silk pyjamas, striped white and crimson, rather short in the leg, and heelless slippers of red morocco-leather. From his bare neck depended a vast respirator (one of the earliest experiments in that direction), whose square box—thick tube hanging down like a diminutive elephant-trunk—bobbed at his chest whenever he spoke.

“I’m afraid the horses got a whiff or two of that damn stuff, sir,” explained Peter. “Oh, and thank you very much for sending me my helmet.”

“Some sense in Corps Orders occasionally,” said the Weasel grimly. “I told Mr. Black to pick you out a new one. Hope it was all right.”

Peter, not wishing to make trouble, kept silence. Horrocks, also in pyjamas, appeared clutching a whisky-and-soda; fingered his moustaches professionally; gave it as his opinion that gas, except in very large quantities, had no effect on horses. Peter dismissed Jelks; and the three passed into the Mess-Room.

Dr. Carson, in mauve and yellow pyjamas, gas-helmet perched drunkenly on his white hair, was just opening a potted tongue. Purves, fully dressed except for his tie, and very *affairé*, stood tracing imaginary lines on the large-scale map above the mantelpiece. Morency, barefoot in unlaced breeches and striped vest, held a huge bottle of Perrier in one hand, a tin of sardines in the other.

Came a rap at the panelled door, a breathless signaller: “Ack Battery report infantry asking for retaliation, sorr. They have begun firing, sorr. And they want to know if Gas Alert has been cancelled, sorr. I told them it had not been cancelled, sorr. . . .”

“Better go and see what they want, P.J.,” Stark nodded to his Adjutant. “Doesn’t look as though we shall get much sleep tonight.”

And as a matter of cold fact, it was 5:0 A. M. on the morning of his return from leave to that “cushy” spot Neuve Eglise, before Peter at last crawled between his Jaeger blankets.

“Wonder if Pat’s awake,” he thought. . . .

## § 2

“Can’t we come too, Mummy?” asked Evelyn.

“You might take us?” pleaded Primula.

The children came running into Heron Baynet's garage where Patricia—in smock and wash-leather gloves—stood tinkering under the open bonnet of her car.

"No, you can't. And you're both very wicked children. How on earth did you manage to get here? Without your hats, too!"

She stood there, the faulty sparking-plug in her hand, half-smiling, half-frowning at the two pinafored figures.

"Well," said Evelyn proudly. "It was my idea. Miss Merridew left us alone. So I said to Primula, 'Let's just *rush* downstairs, open the front-door, and go to Mummy. It's only at the end of the road.' . . ."

"We did keep on the pavements," remarked Primula airily; and added: "Even if you don't take us with you, you'll *have* to drive us as far as the front-door."

"I shall do nothing of the sort"—Patricia knew how easily children grow to dominate their parents—"I shall telephone Miss Merridew to fetch you, and you'll both do half-an-hour's extra lessons."

"Oh, Mummy," began Evelyn: but her mother had already stepped to the house-telephone; was ringing up for their governess,—who appeared, flustered and hatless, a few minutes afterwards; dragged the culprits back to their multiplication table.

"That woman," thought Patricia as she returned the cleaned plug to its socket, "is a fool, an untrained fool and an expensive fool. I shall have to take on the kids' education myself."

She peeled off smock and wash-leather gloves; arranged toque and furs at the cracked mirror over the shelf whereon Heron Baynet's chauffeur (long since enlisted) had kept his "spares"; cranked up; and backed the car steadily out through the folding doors. . . .

Peter had been gone nearly a fortnight. He had written her—his usual scribbles. Reading between the lines of them, her heart forgave him its wounds. But now, she too had her work to do, little time for musing.

She thought of that work as her firm hands steered the Crossley towards Endsleigh Gardens. She had been her father's unpaying guest long enough. The sale of the Lowndes Square house made her homeless; and she was not the type of woman who could be without a home. She needed her own things about her; needed the bother and the fret and the pleasure of housekeeping. And London, with its darkness and its air-raids, was no place for children.

So Patricia's imagination had taken unto itself a "little place in the country"; a place to which Peter could come back—on leave if his luck held, to recover if he were wounded. For that other contingency, his death and her own widowhood, even Patricia's stout heart refused to face. . . .

She pulled up at the entrance to the hospital; jumped down from the driving-seat; slammed door behind her; ran lightly up the steps.

“Captain Gordon?” she inquired at the porter’s office.

“He’s in the drawing-room, Miss,” the orderly smiled back at her. (She had been there nearly every day for five months; and the orderly knew her name perfectly. But she looked young, and she looked attractive, and she always came to see the same officer. So he called her “Miss” instead of “Madam.” In days gone by, when he had been a skate-fitter at Olympia, the little trick had earned Private Johnson, R.A.M.C.,<sup>[14]</sup> many tips!)

Patricia walked swiftly through the hall—the Endsleigh Gardens Hospital had been a hotel before the war—into the ornate and over-furnished drawing room; found Francis alone.

He had been “up” only three weeks; rose to greet her with difficulty, supporting himself first on the arms of his chair, then on two rubber-shod sticks.

“Morning, Pat,” he said. “I’m all ready, you see.”

The months of illness had told on him, graven lines of pain on his temples, at the corners of his mouth. His hair, too, had grayed a little above close-set ears. His eyes seemed to have grown darker. But his clothes—he wore mufti in sublime defiance of Regulations—were immaculate as ever.

“They’ll never let you out of the door in that get-up,” pronounced Patricia—eyeing the “Barnard” motoring-cap, the blue-and-black old Etonian tie, the loose fitting brown over-coat.

“Wonderful what one can do in this place if one only smiles at the sisters, bullies one’s doctor, and gives half-crowns to the orderlies,” laughed Francis.

He shuffled awkwardly across the impeding carpet, through the swing-doors Patricia opened for him. Prout emerged from the basement by the elevator-shaft; and together the two helped the invalid down the steps into the car.

Patricia swung the crank-shaft; climbed to her seat; switched gear-lever into “first”; let in the clutch.

Watching them as they glided out of sight, round the corner of the square, Prout’s thoughts turned to bygone and merrier days. “Poor Mister Francis,” muttered the old man. “And him that was always so fond of dancing. . . .”

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<sup>[14]</sup> Royal Army Medical Corps.

“ . . . And what perfectly-appointed country residences do we inspect today, Pat?” asked “poor Master Francis” as they threaded the traffic of Tottenham Court Road.

“Look at them if you like. They’re in that pocket.”

Francis lifted the leather flap in the door, which she indicated; pulled out and opened a long envelope; began to study the house-agent’s slips.

“Berkshire,” he read out. “Berkshire again. Oxfordshire, border of Berkshire. Berkshire, border of Oxfordshire. . . . None of them sound very promising, Pat.”

“No,” she admitted, “but I like the idea of living in that part of the world. My mother was Oxfordshire, you know. Besides, we might *find* something.”

“I don’t know why you’re so keen about the country all of a sudden, Pat,” went on Francis. “What about your lonely leave-men. Who’ll motor them home to their wives?”

Patricia drove on in silence for a few minutes; then she said: “A woman with six hundred a year and two children to educate, can’t indulge in the luxury of unpaid war-work, Francis. And besides there are heaps of people meeting the leave-trains now: it’s become quite fashionable.”

“Then why not take a paid job?” he suggested.

“Because other women”—she thought of Miss Macpherson—“not only need the money more than I, but can do the work a great deal better.”

By now they had cleared the heat-haze which brooded over inner London. Up and out from his cloud-veils, clambered the sun. The laburnum trees in the little suburban gardens were all a-bloom with yellow. It promised a glorious day.

And promise fulfilled itself. They left the last tram-lines of Brentford astern; emerged mile by mile into the full splendour of England’s Maying. The home-counties unrolled beneath their questing wheels in vista upon vista of young green fields, of pink and white hedgerows, of orchards all alight with blossoms, of silver river-reaches, of pleasant homes where pigeons fluttered dazingly to age-reddened roofs and the lilac bloomed palest amethyst over the glowing emerald of close-clipped lawns.

But there was never a pleasant home among those which Patricia’s house-agents had persuaded her to visit!

"Never mind, Pat. It's been a topping drive," said Francis consolingly.

It was nearly four o'clock; and his cousin's wife had just emerged from her last disappointment—a drainless waterless abomination of mouldy stone-work, with acres of unkempt gardens, ten miles from anywhere among the bleak hills beyond Ipsden.

"Where now?" he went on.

"Home, I suppose," said Patricia, drawing her map out of its case. "We'd better make for Henley, I think."

She felt tired, out of patience. The house-agents were idiots: three of the places they recommended turned out to be glaring brick villas on the outskirts of Reading; at the fourth—a converted farmhouse near Bix—a long-haired foreigner had informed her, after gibbering for three quarters of an hour, that "vot he wanted was to sell de place, not to let it"; the fifth, as far as they could ascertain from the inn at Nettlebed which gave them lunch, did not exist at all: to crown disaster she had wasted time, temper and petrol on this mid-Victorian mare's-nest.

"It's done me all the good in the world," went on Francis. "For two pins I'd let my flat—the Lord knows if I'll ever be able to manage those stairs again—and come to live in the country myself."

"Apparently, you'd have to camp out in it," said Patricia. . . .

They climbed, sputtering, up a rough road; dropped to an uninhabited valley; climbed again; left the bare lands behind. Now, their way led through burgeoning woods of beech and larch-trees past a quiet village-green, into woods again.

Patricia drove slowly. The scent and the silence of the woods summoned her, bidding her stay. She wanted to stop the car, to wander away all alone over that flower-strewn moss, down those long brown avenues, under that pale-green canopy of spring-time.

All day long "country" before her eyes had been calling to "country" in her veins. A long clear call, dominant, heart-compelling. The country! She knew so little of it; the simplest names of its trees and its flowers were mysteries to her. Yet the trees and the flowers spoke to Patricia that afternoon; spoke to her of happiness. "Here, here, here and here only," they seemed to say, "will you find that for which you are seeking. . . ."

And then, sudden as a dream, she saw the house of her dreaming. They were still among the woods; and the house—she knew—stood beyond the woods, at the brow of the hill. Yet Patricia saw it, clear and perfect in the eye of her mind—a long low red-roofed home, with square windows opening out from walls of mellow brick-work, criss-crossed with weather-beaten oak, onto terraced garden. Below the

garden pastures sloped to dark-green tree-clumps; and beyond the tree-clumps, shining silver in the gaps between, wound the river. . . .

The road forked. Instinctively Patricia swung the car left-handed. Trees closed in above them; macadam under their wheels narrowed to a turf-edged track.

"Are you sure this is the right way?" asked Francis.

"Certain," she answered; and drove on, between the serried tree-trunks,—beech and larch and alder, slim pillars of brown, gray-green and silver about their path.

"Look," said Patricia, "the woods end."

She spoke very quietly, pointing to the door of blue which widened as they climbed to it, letting them out from the trees. The car dropped a hundred yards between the warm coral-and-ivory of hawthorn hedgerows; seemed to stop of its own accord at a quaint red-walled brown-gabled house whose lower windows were almost level with the Crossley's wheels.

"This isn't the place," thought Patricia. Yet somehow the peaked and ivied gable with its one leaded window looked familiar—familiar as the road they had climbed through the woods. Just under the window, half-hidden by the ivy, was an old sign-board: "T. Tebbits. Builder & Contractor," read Patricia. But Francis, sharper-eyed, had seen the other sign which peered over the garden-hedge—a plain square of oak, newly painted with the words:—

#### "TWO GOOD HOUSES TO LET."

"I say, Pat," he said, pointing to it, "why not try here? . . ."

There came out of the house a hatless man with weather-beaten face, clean-shaven except for the fringe of hair under his chin, bushy of eyebrows, dressed collarless in a rusty black cardigan jacket and corduroy-trousers. He had hard blue eyes, hairy ears, thin lips; might have been any age from fifty-five to eighty.

"Might you be wanting anything?" he asked.

"Are you Mr. Tebbits?" Patricia smiled down at him.

"That's my name, missis."

"We came about the houses," went on Patricia, indicating the notice-board.

"Be you from the agents?" asked Mr. Tebbits suspiciously.

"No. We were just passing, and we thought. . . ."

"Well, that's a good thing." The old man smiled grimly. "Because I won't have no more agents. They be all robbers, it seems to me. Now what sort of a house was you looking for, missis? I asks because it's no good a wasting your time if you wants the sort of house I hasn't got. There be two of 'em, one's a bit cottage-like and



t'other's bigger. But they bain't neither of 'em what you'd call big."

"Are they a long way away?" interrupted Patricia.

"Well, missis, one is middling far and t'other's quite close. Sunflowers—that's the name of the bigger one and a silly name it be, to my way of thinking, because there bain't never a sunflower near it—her's just up the road. T'other. . . ."

"Could we go and see it, do you think?" Patricia interrupted again.

"Aye. If you'll bide a minute, I'll just go and get my cap." He disappeared into the house; re-appeared.

"Now if you'll drive on slowly, missis, I'll follow you. 'Tis the first house you comes to on the left hand side of the road. 'Bout a hundred and fifty yards down, two hundred mebbe."

Mr. Tebbits declined a lift, and they motored on without him; rounded a bend in the hedge-rows; and saw in front of them, half hidden by greenery, low red roofs that curled up to high red chimney-stacks and down to square windows, set in walls of mellow brick-work criss-crossed with the gray of weather-beaten oak.

Patricia's heart gave a great leap: for this was the very home she had imagined as they came through the woods!

They drew up at a wooden gate, painted dull green, supported by low pillars of old brick-work between the hawthorn hedges; saw, peering through it, a small gravel-drive, a huge walnut tree just in leaf, and a long low house, door in centre, double-floored under projecting eaves.

"Francis," cried Patricia, "this is *it*."

He looked at her; saw a woman transformed. Her cheeks glowed; her lips were half-parted; her slumbrous eyes danced and kindled.

"My dear Pat . . ." he began.

"Don't tell me I haven't seen it yet, Francis. Don't tell me it won't do; that the drains will be all wrong; that it's a hundred miles from anywhere. Because I don't care. This is going to be my home—mine and Peter's. . . ."

Mr. Tebbits found them by the gate.

"You been wounded, mister?" he asked, looking at the sticks Francis carried.

"Yes," admitted Francis.

"Ah. At the war, I expect. This be a mighty bad war. I've got five sons there myself. All in the Ox and Bucks they be. Two's Corporals. Charlie, he couldn't go; nor Harry neither." He turned to Patricia. "This be Sunflowers, missis. Likely you'd care to go in."

He swung open the gate; held it while Francis hobbled through. "The paddick goes with the house," explained Tebbits, "but if you wasn't thinking 'bout keeping

stock, I'd be just as glad to have it for my cows."

Patricia looked dumbly over the knee-deep green to the sun-lit tree-fringe beyond. The house, *her house*, stood in a semi-circle of woodland; the green trees folded it lovingly. What did she care about keeping stock?

Mr. Tebbits drew a vast key from his trouser-pocket; opened the front-door.

"This be what we calls the hall," he began, "the kitchens be along the passage. . . ."

Mr. Tebbits talked, as the British peasant talks, interminably repetitive, all the time they were inspecting "Sunflowers." But Patricia hardly heard him. Already in her mind she had taken the place; was settling herself and her family into it.

This hall now, with its deep fireplace, its windows either side the door, (which would need heavy brown-velvet curtains), must be the drawing-room. The dining-room, leading out of the drawing-room, would be small, still. . . . And the tiny "study" must be Peter's. "Kitchen-range good," thought Patricia. "Hope it doesn't burn too much coal. . . ."

She passed up the balustered stair-case, Tebbits clumping at her heels; found square bed-rooms, opening onto greenery, a good modern bath-room—"wonder of wonders," thought Patricia—and, best of all, at the end of the corridor, running full-length of the north side, a long apartment which would be ideal for the children. . . .

Of course, she had fallen in love with the place; meant to have it at all costs. Yet even Francis, who had as yet very little sense of home, admitted to himself, as he waited in the bare hall, the excellence of Sunflowers. It was a strange combination of solid pre-Georgian brickwork without; of old wood and modern plaster within.

Mr. Tebbits' grandfather had converted it originally, from the shell of a three-hundred-year-old tithe barn; running his floor-boards over beams of oak; letting in the heavy fan-lighted front door, the deep window-sashes; throwing out the red-tiled square-beamed kitchen. Mr. Tebbits' father had unroofed the kitchen, carefully, preserving *his* father's tilework, added the long room above. Then the grandson of the original builder, dissatisfied with the narrow entrance corridor, had broken it down, joined it to the parlour. Till finally *his* son Charlie—"he be a bit new-fangled be Charlie"—had seized the opportunity presented when the new Company ran its mains over the hill, to modernize the water-supply, to construct a bath-room. ("An' a good job they boys made of it, missis. These pipes, they *be* pipes.")

It was while replastering and "making all good with Parian" that the idea of a "garrige" had come to Charlie Tebbits: and a "garrige" he and his brothers forthwith constructed, using (as their great-grandfather had used his tithe-barn) the shell of an

old ramshackle stable, now concrete-floored and water-tight. But the “modern” stabling constructed by *their* father, the “boys” had not touched, except for the throwing of two stalls into a loose-box—just “case any one might be wanting it.”

Altogether, an amazing find. And amazing the fore-knowledge of this detail and that which overcame Patricia as she passed from room to room. But most amazing of all the certainty with which she flung open the Eastward window half-way up the staircase; looked out onto the gravel terrace, and the slopes of green pasturage dotted with dark tree-clumps through which, molten in the drooping sun, flashed far glimpses of the river Thames.

“That be Arlsfield village, missis,” explained Tebbits, pointing a two-mile-distant cluster of buildings above which the smoke spired lazily. “You can’t see the Hall from here. Them big chestnuts do hide it. Too close to the Hall, they be: and often I’ve told the old Colonel so myself. But he’s that set on his trees. . . .”

“What’s the name of the Hall?” interrupted Pat.

“Arlsfield Hall, mum.”

And, for the second time, the name sounded familiar. Indeed in all that smiling prospect—jade fields of young wheat, emerald of pasture, trees and village and far-away river—only one feature puzzled Patricia. The oily magnolia-leaves at window-sill, she seemed to know; and the ochre gravel below, and every detail of the sloping country beyond them. But the slip of orchard, foaming in wave on wave of wave-green grass and snow-white blossom between her terrace and the country-side, her strange inward memories could not recall.

“Planted they trees ’bout twenty-five years ago. Good trees they be, too. Blenheims mostly,” said Tebbits. . . .

It was long after five when Patricia finished her inspection. “Likely, you’d care for a dish of tea, missis,” invited the old man: and to tea in Mr. Tebbits’ kitchen the three went.

Miss Tebbits—she was sixty and the old man’s daughter all over, from thin lips to the hair in her ears,—served them their “dish of tea” in china which had no right to exist outside a museum; brought home-made cake, home-made bread, a great dish of saffron butter: and while the daughter served, her father talked.

“He didn’t believe in leases,” he told Patricia. “If so be she wanted the house, all she had to do was to say so. He’d always got his sixty pounds a year for it: ’cept when people didn’t keep stock. Then he took fifty-five. ’Twas a bit dear like, but his son Charlie wouldn’t have him take less. . . .” And here the old man explained how Charlie had moved the building business to Arlsfield, leaving him and Harry with the farm. “I be a bit old for the building, missis. Turned eighty-five. But Charlie, he’ll do

all the papering and the painting for you. We don't let any one 'cept ourselves touch our houses. . . ."

Tea over, he stood cap-in-hand to bid them good-bye.

"We'll be down again tomorrow, Mr. Tebbits," smiled Patricia, engine throbbing under her finger on the throttle-lever.

"Very good, missis. I'll have Charlie come up here to meet you. Likely, if you take the house, there'll be one or two things to talk over."

## § 5

They came not only next day but the day after, and the day after that. Charlie, a huge hairy man, only one degree less obstinate than his father, consented after some persuasion to an agreement being drawn up by a Henley lawyer; promised Patricia that she should be "in" by the end of June; proposed ribbed papers, whites and creams and pale lemons for the walls, brown paint for this room, cream for that; suggested diffidently that if by any chance she were short of furniture, he could easily make "chairs and tables and sideboards and such like"—in proof of which he took her to his own thatched-roofed cottage, and showed her specimens of his work, fine solid stuff, chiselled simply and lovingly from the seasoned oaks and walnuts of which his timber-yard still held store. For Charlie Tebbits was craftsman by heritage.

But the village, apart from Charlie's cottage and workshops, proved disappointing: most of the old cottages had been crowded out by jerry-built atrocities; a tin-roofed chapel, a pseudo-artistic public house, a "Recreation Room" (also of tin, but painted red), and a peculiarly offensive stucco school-house, betrayed all too clearly the trail of the urban serpent.

"Never mind, Pat," consoled Francis. "You can hardly see it from Sunflowers."

Church and vicarage stood, (as if fearing contamination, they had withdrawn themselves from these evidences of humanity), a full mile away on the road to Arlsfield Hall—a fine Georgian house, ring-fenced, among green vistas of parklands and woods much in need of the axe.

It was while circling Arlsfield Hall that Francis and Patricia found Mr. Tebbits' second "house"—a straggling cottage, brown-roofed and mellow-walled. The cottage lay in a hollow of the road. Woods crept down to it from the west; eastwards, corn fields swelled to a fringe of spruce trees. South of it, lay the park of Arlsfield Hall; and north, a mile by the trodden short-cut across the pasture, Tebbits Farm and "Sunflowers."

Exploring they found undulating corridors, quaint octagonal rooms, panelled in

age-dark oak, and—at the top of a broad shallow stair-case, up which Francis scarcely needed Patricia's arm—an enormous apartment, looking through huge windows clean across the park to sunlit hills.

"Lord, Pat," exclaimed Francis, "a man could write here."

He looked about the room, measuring with one of his sticks, the window-seat, the distance from window-seat to fireplace, the recesses on either side of the fireplace; pointing out where the desk should stand, where the bookcases. . . . And in that moment—though it took two more visits, the first accompanied by Charlie Tebbits, the second by Prout, before Francis eventually made up his mind—Patricia knew that she would not be neighbourless at Sunflowers. . . .

## § 6

The night after he had signed the agreement for Glen Cottage, Francis dined at Harley Street.

"A fine pair of idiots you two seem to have made of yourselves while I've been away," commented Heron Baynet, who had just returned from a fortnight's holiday, after listening for over an hour to the usual chatter of people obsessed with new possessions. "Within six months, you'll both be yearning for London."

"I wonder," said Francis. "Certainly Arlsfield doesn't possess a picture-palace. . . ."

"Arlsfield," interrupted the doctor, (as if by common consent, neither had mentioned the name of that unhappy village), "Arlsfield!"

For a moment he sat perfectly still, staring at one of the electric candle-sticks on the dinner-table: then he pulled note-book and pencil out of his pocket; turned to Patricia; and said, in the level voice of the consulting-room:—

"You mentioned a little while ago, Pat, that this house—what's its name again?—Sunflowers—thanks—seemed familiar to you. I want you to describe to me, as accurately as you can, just in what way it seemed familiar."

"Why do you want to know, pater?"

"Never mind about that. Tell me just how you felt both before you came to it and when you were in it. . . ."

Astonished, Patricia began her story, doing her utmost to recall each fleeting sensation of that first afternoon.

"All except the orchard, I seemed to know perfectly," she finished.

And her father, looking up from his note-book, said, "No. You couldn't be expected to know about that. As far as I can recollect, there wasn't one."

Francis, instinctively setting a story, glanced first at the lined face of the little consultant, then into the astonished eyes of his daughter.

“Explain please, pater,” commanded Patricia. “What was it? One of those cases of pre-natal vision you’ve always wanted to confirm.”

“No such luck!” Her father closed the note-book, returned it to his pocket. “Very interesting though. You *had* seen the place before. When you were two years old, your mother and I drove you there—probably through the very road up which you and Francis motored. She wanted me to buy a country practice. Sunflowers—I’d forgotten the name till Francis mentioned Arlsfield—was a doctor’s house in those days. You ask old Tebbits and see if I’m not right.”

“Curious thing the human brain,” he went on, “always taking snap-shots—just like a camera. Stores its pictures away too, and keeps them for when they’re wanted. We’re working on this ‘picture’ theory now—for our shell-shock cases. If anything weakens the brain—a shock for instance, or overwork—the pictures get mixed up: confused, we call it. No one seems to know how soon the brain starts taking its snapshots: some say the process starts prior to birth. I don’t believe that. . . . Then there are imaginative pictures. You know the impression of reality a good book makes on you, or a well-told story. . . .” He expanded the theory, ending: “It was because I didn’t want you to make imaginative pictures that I took my notes *before* I told you the truth.”

“Well I’m glad there was no mystery,” smiled Pat. “I don’t want any ghosts at Sunflowers.”

But Francis Gordon, whose writer’s brain could summon and set aside both real and imaginative pictures at will, sat very silent, visioning in pale gold against the dark panelling of his new home the head of a girl in America—a girl whose last letter had concluded:

“Somehow or other I don’t think I shall ever get married.”

# PART TWENTY-THREE

## “BEER” BATTERY

### § 1

If this were a “war-book,” at least two chapters might here be devoted to the months which the Fourth Southdown Brigade spent in and around Neuve Eglise. But since we are only considering war as it affected the fortunes of our Mr. Jameson, his wife Patricia, and a few other individuals, the reader at this point—as once before, in the City of Fear—is asked to use his or her imagination.

Suffices, that the war went on. In England, goaded by a strong Press, vacillating politicians introduced their weakling Conscription Act with a brave fanfare of trumpets; a few perverts developed a “conscience” which did not prevent their eating food brought to them at the risk of human life; the bulk of the nation, humping its pack with a shrug, were much consoled by the official announcement of the Jutland Victory as a defeat. In the firing-line, the Huns hammered vainly at Verdun, the British and French prepared counter-attack on the Somme.

But Peter Jameson, Cigar Merchant, cared for none of these things. He had reached that particular point in the soldier’s existence which is only described by the French word “*cafard*” or its Anglo-Saxon equivalent “fed-up.”

How much the mental, how much the physical contributed to this “*cafard*” of our Mr. Jameson—are questions for the psychologist. Remain the facts that he was bored, irritable, depressed—and more intolerably efficient in the routine duties of his Adjutancy than ever.

Only two thoughts consoled: one personal, “I’ve made such a muck of things at home that perhaps the front is the best place for me”: and the other, “Besides, if anything *does* happen—Pat and the kids will get that insurance money.”

His home letters, of course, continued to depict the Brigade as a permanent poker-school established some leagues behind the firing-line!

### § 2

Meanwhile, the inevitable wastages of warfare—commenced at Loos and continued in the City of Fear—went on among that collection of voluntary fighters known as the Fourth Southdown Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. Now “re-

organization” came to complete the process. “Billy” Williams and his command were transferred *en bloc* to the enlarged Divisional Ammunition Column—still presided over by that same Colonel Mallory who had dined with the Weasel on Christmas Eve, 1914: Bromley and his eighteen-pounders were exchanged for a Howitzer battery: Doctor Carson secured a specialist appointment at the Base—his place being taken by Laurillard, a young and not too sympathetic student of St. Bartholomew’s hospital: Horrocks the Veterinary officer took promotion, Morency a leg-breaking fall from his horse, and Stanley Purves to an impassioned flow of soldier poetry.

“Shan’t have a friend left at this rate,” thought our Mr. Jameson. And then to crown disasters, the Weasel announced his own promotion to Brigadier.

“Take you with me as A.D.C.,” he rasped as they wandered out, on that last morning, to inspect the batteries.

“Thank you, Colonel.” The phrase rose easily to Peter’s lips; but the tone of it was utterly non-committal.

They walked on.

“Well?” continued Stark.

“It’s very decent of you, Colonel, but—”

“Nice soft job, P.J.!”

“Too soft, Colonel.”

They looked each other in the eyes. Then the Weasel said: “You’re a married man, P.J.” and Peter, stubbornly: “What difference does that make, Colonel?”

“The pay’s better.”

“I didn’t join the army to make money, sir.”

“Damn you, P.J. Don’t ‘Sir’ me when we’re alone.” The rasp softened. “Don’t make an ass of yourself, P.J., I know you’ve had a pretty thin time, one way and another since you joined up. . . .”

“But at that,” as General Stark wrote his young wife some days later, “he seemed to freeze up completely; and when Revelsworth came to take over command—you’ll remember Revelsworth, darling, he used to be in the old show at Hillsea—P.J. asked me, as a particular favour, to send him to a battery. . . . He’s a dashed sight too good for ordinary subaltern’s work; but of course I couldn’t tell him so. . . . Bit of the fanatic about P.J. . . . Said he wanted to kill a Hun or two. . . . I shouldn’t mention anything to that nice wife of his when you write her.”

Which will serve to explain why Lieutenant-Colonel Percival Revelsworth’s orders bore the signature: “Stanley Purves, Lieutenant and Adjutant, Fourth Southdown Bde., R.F.A.”



## § 3

“Beer” Battery welcomed Peter with cordiality if not with effusion. The clean-shaven Sandiland ordered Quarter-master Sergeant (ex rough-rider) Murgatroyd to “snaffle a tent next time he saw one lyin’ about.” Pettigrew,—cheeks redder, eyes bluer, spirits higher, than even in Shoreham days—twinkled a “Wait till we’ve put you through it, P.J.” Charlie Straker held out a big hand, and stuttered: “T-thought you w-wouldn’t stand being Adjutant much longer.” Lindsay, newly-arrived junior member of the Mess—a raw-boned raw-voiced Aberdonian boy, with a budding moustache, and a passion for what he termed “Obsairvation Duties”—immediately offered to point out some “verra interesting features of the ground”; but being informed by Straker that “P.J. knew the ground a damn sight better than he did,” subsided into disciplinary silence.

Peter himself, once he grew accustomed to the restricted viewpoint of a battery-subaltern (who sees very little of war except his own particular job), lost a little of his *cafar* by the change of duties.

The open air life suited him, improved his temper. He felt further than ever removed from the annoyances of business. His by-weekly letters to Patricia, busy with the furnishing of Sunflowers, grew almost sentimental.

On the whole, he liked his new work better than the old. It held more excitement, less routine. During his first duty-spell alone at the “O. Pip” on Hill 63, he spotted a party of three Huns laying telephone-wires in the open; and managed to burst his shell exactly in their faces. The thrill of it—a thrill only to be compared with tiger shooting from an elephant howdah—kept Peter’s eye to his telescope for the rest of the day. And his two spells “in the trenches,” though spent in great peace at the sand-bagged Battalion Headquarters, also gave him a fresh experience.

But it was not only the freedom from responsibility and the excitement of fresh duties which appealed to Peter. Conway, with his usual luck, had tossed for—and of course won—the only comfortable habitation in the valley: a still intact though slightly battered farm-house, in which—equally of course—he had re-established his “poker-school.” Lodden disapproved—but came nightly. Bromley, still in touch with his old Brigade, was learning—an expensive process. They played in a room reduced to cabin-size by pit-props, sandbags and nine-by-two’s (the Army’s designation for its standard plank): constantly interrupted by the buzz of Conway’s telephone, and once by a misconceived S.O.S. call which sent every one scurrying back through intermittent shell-fire to their spurting cannons.

Altogether, not an unpleasant existence! Indeed, during that first easy fortnight

only one thing troubled Peter: his health. Somehow or other, since the gas-attack, he had developed a little spitty cough, usually painless, but occasionally stabbing—the tiniest pin-prick—just below the heart.

“You ought to see the Doc. about that bark of yours, P.J.,” said Sandiland one evening, as they sat smoking in the Armstrong hut of batten and canvas which Q.M.S. Murgatroyd had snaffled for the Mess.

“Can’t stand Laurillard,” growled Peter—the pain had stabbed twice. “Besides, he’ll only tell me to leave off smoking cigars. Let’s go and get those five hundred francs back from Conway.”

## § 4

But the easy time did not endure.

The first of July, nineteen hundred and sixteen, which turned the British front opposite Albert from a picnic-ground to a cemetery, reacted promptly on the hitherto quiescent valleys below Messines. The words “maximum activity,” scribbled by a thousand telephonists, thumped on a thousand typewriters, stripped tarpaulin from the 12-inch naval gun on the railway by the cross-roads, unroofed its sister in the canvas house opposite Divisional Baths, woke howitzer and eighteen-pounder in their pits beneath the trees, mortar and machine-gun in their hiding-places among the trenches. To these, the Boche replied with his eight-inch at Oostaverne, his 77’s behind the ridge, and a peculiarly deadly *Minenwerfer* which ran on rails and changed position whenever fired at.

Gone were the unstrenuous days, the scarcely disturbed nights. Conway’s “poker-school” vanished like a raided gambling-house.

For a week, “demonstrations” continued; and on the eighth night, a handful of infantry, faces blackened, dirks at their belts, revolvers in hand, slipped over their parapet under cover of the shrapnel-barrage, crawled along the Steenbeek, dropped down into the nine-foot duck-boarded trenches of “Bon Fermier”. . . and returned, dirks bloody, revolvers reeking, with the four dazed and cowered prisoners—(four they were asked to bring and four only they *brought*)—which Brigade orders had demanded. . . .

Came rumours of the battle, “down south”: it went well, it went badly, we made progress, we did not make enough progress. Followed amazing manœuvres: Australian gunners, six-foot men who handled their leaping pieces like toys, arrived to “take over” from the Southdowns: “Beer” Battery moved back to a farm behind Bailleul, were ordered to dig gun-pits along the Stuiverbeek, laboured three days

hauling beams and sand, were ordered back into action, “took over” from the Australians (who were “going to the Somme, by cripes”), were relieved by wrathful Ulstermen who cursed a place called Beaumont Hamel . . . and marched quietly westwards through Bailleul and Meteren and Fletre and Caestre to their old rest area in the farms about Eecke!

“I’m g-getting a bit fed-up with this,” stuttered Straker, “where the d-devil are we going to?”

“Oh, we’re going to the Somme all right, don’t you worry about that,” said Peter, wise in Staff mysteries. “This is just a preliminary canter.”

## § 5

And to the Somme they went.

They entrained at dawn, loading and lashing vehicles, coaxing horses into trucks, shepherding men, supervising equipment; slid off to the south; travelled endlessly through endless fields, past endless villages; till after three days they made Amiens.

“Now we shan’t be long,” said Gunner Mucksweat, as the last waggon came, groaning to ground, the last team backed into the swingle-trees.

“Dinna believe it, Muckie, we’ll no go into action yet,” warned his “Number Two.”

And Mucksweat’s “Number Two,” the canny Macnab, proved right. Back they marched, and back; through the broad tree-girt avenues of Amiens, where French munitionettes whirling homewards on rickety motor-lorries kissed greetings; over a vast canal below whose embankment silent *poilus*, blue-cloaked and blue-helmeted, sat glued to enormous fishing-rods; back, along the white and dusty road, to Hangest. . . .

“Told you we’d put you through it, P.J.,” chaffed Pettigrew late that night as—waggons unlimbered, horses tethered, men bivouacked at last—they flung themselves to bed in the lath-and-plaster room of a midden-courted farm.

“Dunno what’s the matter with me,” grouched Peter. “Little Willie isn’t used to being anywhere except at the head of the column. He’s been pulling my arms out all this evening. Given me a stitch or something”—he coughed acridly in the darkness—“wonder how long we shall stop here?”

“Oh, about a week, I expect. . . . Good-night,” snored his companion.

## § 6

It took three days to concentrate the four brigades of Southdown Artillery at Hangest.

Concentration concluded, there followed a period of desultory “training”—taken with immense and harassing seriousness by Lt.-Colonel Revelsworth, a dapper arrogant-looking man of forty-five, very different from the Weasel; slightly less seriously by his subordinates.

Fortunately, the Anglo-Saxon is not imaginative. Neither officers nor men of “Beer” Battery bothered as they went about their lawful (or unlawful) business, to consider the near future. To be out of action, away from the sound of guns, sufficed them.

Thus they waited—five days—six days—a week and a week-end; till there came, one warm summer’s evening while they sat at poker, a very *affaire* Purves, second star newly on his sleeve, with orders that, “The Colonel would like to see all available officers at Headquarters immediately.”

“Confound it,” said Lodden. “I’ve never been in such amazing luck.”

“Never bring messages like that yourself,” whispered Peter to Purves as they strolled across the cobbled courtyard to Headquarters. “What’s it all about?”

“Only a pi-jaw. We’re going into action tomorrow.”

And a “pi-jaw,” as Purves irreverently described it, they got.

Listening to it, Peter began to think of the Brigade in its Brighton days. So many of the faces about him were new since then: yet the Brigade, the Fourth Southdown Brigade, R.F.A.—the “Virgin-bosom” Brigade as Stark used to call them every time his meticulous recommendations for honours were struck out by the bemedalled Staff—still lived. The thing he, Peter, had helped to make, went on . . . went on, and would go on, right to the finish. . . . “A long wai ter get ter Berlin!” He seemed to hear his Cockneys again,—singing.

“So you see, when we begin moving up into action tomorrow,” interrupted Revelsworth’s voice. . . .

Peter looked round him at the mute expressionless faces above the khaki collars. There were a few of the “old gang” still. Lodden, Conway, Purves, Pettigrew and Straker, “Brat” Archdale, (acting orderly officer, grown from blushing boy to hollow-cheeked young man), Merrilees, solemn as an owl, unaltered. . . . Eight, including himself, nine. Nine out of twenty six!

How many of those nine would be left after this new show? Eight at most! One of them was done for already; couldn’t hope to last more than a month. And that one of them was himself. . . . Still, nobody need know about that till he came out of action. . . . *If* he came out of action. . . .

For Peter's cough, the cough that drove him, hacking and spitting, night after night—gum-booted, "British Warm" over his pyjamas—out of the stifling room he shared with Pettigrew into the moonlight, was not the result of over-smoking. . . . Rolleston, the kindly diffident "general practitioner" who doctored Colonel Brasenose's Brigade, had told Peter that much; told it him unconsciously.

They had met quite by accident, that very afternoon; gone to Rolleston's "surgery." Peter, accepting a drink, choked over it; put his handkerchief to his mouth.

"None of my business of course," the doctor had ventured, "but if I were you I'd consult Laurillard about that wheeze of yours. Never been gassed, have you? Slightly, I mean."

Peter kept silence.

"Funny stuff, gas," went on the doctor. "I had a case of it before I came out, while I was still in civilian practice. A young Canadian came to me with a frightful cough—rather like that cough of yours, by the way. I tested for tubercle, of course. Not a trace. Then he began talking about the first gas-attack; said he'd been in it. That put me on the track. . . ."

"But surely," interrupted Peter, "after all that time. . . ."

"Oh, he wasn't gassed, in the Army sense of the word; but there's no doubt in my mind that a tiny molecule of chlorine must have lodged in his left lung, and started the irritation. . . ."

"Did you cure him?"

"Oh, yes. But it took rather a long time. Fresh air and no exercise. Lucky he came to me when he did. Lungs are ticklish organs. If you once start 'em downhill, they take a lot of pulling back. Besides, you never know when that sort of thing won't turn to consumption: the tubercle bacillus doesn't take long to find a weak spot. . . . Still, if you've never been actually in the gas-cloud. . . ."

"No, I've never been actually in the gas-cloud." Peter had lied mechanically. His was not the breed which "goes sick" on the eve of an action. . . .

Revelsworth's voice interrupted musing. "Thank you, gentlemen," he was saying, "I don't think there's anything else—except that I should like officers to wear full equipment for tomorrow's march."

## § 5

At ten o'clock of a gorgeous late-summer morning the Fourth Brigade marched out from Hangest, and at high nooning of the third sun-scorching day, they dropped

down a swell of that bitter plain which is Picardy into the Bois de Tailles—straggling cleft of sand and trees which strides the naked chalk and the Bray-Corbie Road. Here again—officers and men bivouacked under ground-sheets among uncleanly bushes on the slopes,—horses tethered between limbers on the red-sand floor of the valley below—they waited, waited endlessly. . . .

For this battle was no action of sure attack, of reserves moving forward punctual to clock-time, of orderly pursuit and retreat. In that vast crucible of fire which bulged northwards astride the river from French Dompierre to English Ovilliers, Infantry Divisions of twelve thousand men shrivelled as paper shrivels in flame; brigades melted to battalions; battalions to companies: between a moonrise and a sun-setting they were and they were not. But always as Infantry Divisions shrivelled, fresh Infantry Divisions flung themselves into the crucible; and always, behind the shrivelling melting infantry, stayed the guns—stayed till human sinews could serve them no longer. . . .

Vague echoes of those guns, hints of their flashes, were borne o' nights to Peter Jameson as he lay sleepless among sleeping men; as he twisted over and over between the ruggled blankets on his creaking camp-bed; as he sweated away the darkness and shivered through the dawn-chill; to Peter with the spitting cough fouling his mouth and the pin-prick pain stabbing below his heart,—to Peter Jameson, one tiny glorious fool among the millions whose folly saved our world.

# *PART TWENTY-FOUR*

## IN THE NIGHT

### § 1

The "Somme Offensive" of 1916 is ancient history now: a thing of Staff maps and war-diaries, of barren paper and profitless arguments, flat as the faked film of it men once sold for profit in the market-place. The very ground over which it raged has been obliterated by the shells of vastier battles.

Yet the "Somme Offensive," bloodiest experiment ever undertaken in the laboratory of war, marked the beginning of the ending—of War's ending, as softies dream today. Compared to this holocaust, Loos was a skirmish.

Day after day, night after night, week after week, men flung themselves upon the Beast; drove him wave by wave across the barren swells of Picardy: till, at last, burning and ravaging, defiling the very beds in which he had slept, wreaking vengeance on the very trees whose fruit he had eaten, the Beast withdrew for a while—withdraw, and came on again, and was overthrown. . . . There died and were wounded in those drivings of the Beast more than two million English-speaking men.

The "Somme Offensive"! What remains of it today? Only memories, bitter memories that waken men o' nights: so that they see once more the golden Virgin of Albert, poised miraculously on her red and riven tower; Carnoy shattered in its hollow, a giant-baby's toy-village, dropped from careless hand and smashed in the falling; the ruins that were Mametz and the ruins that were Contalmaison and the ruins that were Fricourt and the ruins that were Pozières: see once more the crowded horselines blackening Happy Valley, the balloons strung like sausages across the sky, the thousand planes circling like hawks above them! So that they hear once more the staccato of machine-gun fire high in the air, the dull thump of the huge and hidden naval guns at Etinehem, the roar of squat nine-point-two's on their wheel-less mountings, the roar of the railway-gun at Becordel, the thunder of eight-inch and six-inch Howitzers in Caterpillar Valley, the ear-splitting crash of Six-Inch Mark VII's from the road by the Craters, the manifold clamour of the Archies at Montauban, the constant bark of the field-guns beyond: so that they walk once more, naked and alone, among the careless ghosts of men they knew, through that horror which was Trônes Wood. . . .

## § 2

“God, P.J., this is too damned awful.”

Sandiland stretched grimed fingers across the bacon-box which served for table; jerked a Gold-flake from its tin; lit it shakily at the guttering candle.

“Pretty bad,” admitted Peter: but his hand too shook as he tilted the whisky-bottle into his tin mug. “Better have some of this.”

A shell whistled over the dripping corrugated-iron above their heads, burst hollowly on the twisted railway behind.

“Blast that gun,” said Sandiland. . . .

They had been in action for eighteen days; and not once during that time had “B” battery’s guns been wholly silent. Of the men who had served those guns so blithely under the trees of Neuve Eglise barely one-third remained. Sergeant Ackroyd was dead, breast riven by direct hit of a gas-shell; Sergeant Duncan was dead, blown to bits as he ran for shelter; Corporal Haviland’s body lay drilled with machine-gun bullets in the No Man’s Land beyond Arrowhead Copse; seven signallers were dead, five they had watched hobble, one by one, up the sodden path to the dressing-station in Montauban. Now this ultimate horror had screamed down upon them out of the night, tearing the last veils between them and Hell. . . .

They had laboured three hours to cleanse that Hell, laboured calmly and cheerfully among their men, snatching only this brief respite for food and drink. But the Hell they had cleansed from the ground still remained, desperately and damnably clear, in their brains.

For the moment, the reticences of civilized life were in abeyance. Each of these two knew, as he crouched over the bacon-box in the sodden broken chalk-trench, that he was hanging on by the eye-teeth to his last remnant of sanity.

Each still saw the same bestial vision: smashed pit, half-buried gun, slithering soil, mangled men writhing and groaning, mangled men lying deadly still, Charlie Straker’s face white and drawn in the light of the hurricane-lamp—and the Head that watched him, the Head that still grinned under its shrapnel-helmet, the Head which had been Pettigrew. . . .

“That leaves only you and me, P.J.” Sandiland’s fingers plucked at one of the rents in his tunic sleeve. “Only you and me.” His voice quivered up into his head, and he began singing—“You and me together, love; never mind the weather, love.”

“Shut up, you bloody fool”—Peter’s haggard eyes stared across the candle-flame. “Shut up, I tell you. Why the hell don’t you drink that whisky?”

“Sorry, P.J.”—Sandiland crammed the mug against his teeth, sucked down the



raw spirit. "By God, that's good. Pour me out another, there's a good chap"—he drank again—"I suppose we ought to telephone H.Q."

"I did that while you were getting them away."

"Thanks, dear boy. Purves say anything?"

"I spoke to the Colonel"—Peter started to cough—"and he said—damn this cough of mine—he said, 'should he come up himself?' I told him the gun would be in action again by midnight, and we could carry on all right if he'd get us another subaltern. He's sending one up at once"—Peter's voice too, quivered up into his head. "Poor old Lindsay. Do you remember?"

Once again, sanity trembled in the balance. Their haggard eyes met across the candle-flame; and from behind those eyes naked soul looked at naked soul.

"God"—Sandiland's voice was low, but tense as a scream—"God, I never knew I was a coward. . . . I'm not a coward. . . . It's sending the others into it I can't stick. . . . I'd go myself. . . . You know I'd go myself, P.J. . . . But I can't stand sending these chaps to their death, day after day, one after the other. . . . I killed Lindsay. . . . It wasn't his turn for F.O.O. . . . I killed Haviland. . . ." The monologue went on. . . . "Seven of them—the best signallers a battery ever had—and I detailed them for duty. . . . One by one I detailed them, didn't I? . . . I chose this battery position, didn't I?" He began to laugh. "And it's your turn tomorrow, P.J. . . . Your turn! . . . Bloody funny if I killed our old Adjutant, too. . . . God, I wish I could go instead of you. . . . I've got to be here, P.J. Do you understand that? . . . Here, waiting by these blasted cannons for some poor devil to come crawling back and tell me you've been killed. . . ."

But Peter, listening speechless, felt himself the greater coward of the two: for he would have given everything he possessed—everything except that last scrap of gold which is a man's self-respect—not to go down on the morrow to those trenches whence he had brought back Lindsay's body.

There came the scrabble of feet above their heads; some one called down out of the darkness:

"Say, is this Beer Battery, Fourth Southdown Brigade? Is this Captain Sandiland's battery?"

"It is,"—Sandiland's voice had lost all trace of hysteria. "Who are you?"

"My name's Henry. Colonel Revelsworth told me to report to you for duty."

"Stout fellow. Come down if you can find your way. Have you got a torch?"

"Yes. Is it safe to use it?"

"Quite. Mind the wire."

Followed the sound of falling earth, and a huge man, long gloves and revolver at

belt, long torch in brown hand. The newcomer flicked out his torch; saluted with a curious courteous bend of his head; stood blinking at the light of the candle. He was well over six-foot, blue-eyed and broad-shouldered, firm of chin and clean-shaven. He wore the usual cap, collar, belt and tunic of a British second lieutenant; but his breeches bagged curiously at the knee, had the appearance of being tucked loosely into his soft field-boots, at heels of which showed a pair of swan-neck spurs, loosely strapped and formidable of rowel. Boots and spurs were both caked with white chalk. He carried no cane.

“Sit down, won’t you?” said Sandiland. “There’s a box kicking about somewhere. This is Jameson.”

“Glad to know you.” Henry made a movement as if to shake hands; thought better of it; found the box Sandiland indicated; and sat down with that peculiar straddle which denotes a horseman the world over.

There was the usual awkward Anglo-Saxon silence during which men try to sum up fresh acquaintances. To the newcomer, his two hosts seemed two very ordinary British officers; they looked terribly tired, he thought, but their controlled features gave no hint of any other emotion. (For it is only to tried friends that men in battle voice the secret fears of true courage.)

“Have a drink?” asked Sandiland.

“Thanks, no.” The man extracted a small looped bag from one pocket, a packet of cigarette papers from the other; flicked off a thin leaf of paper, moistened it at his lips. Then, holding the paper between fingers and thumb of his right hand, he opened the bag with his left; poured a little heap of tobacco onto the paper, began to roll a cigarette.

“You’re a Canadian, aren’t you?” asked the battery-commander.

“Yes, sir. I’m a Canadian.”

“Been out long?”

“No, sir. About three months. I’ve been with the Ammunition Column most of that time.”

The newcomer spoke slowly, not nasally but with a curious deliberate drawl—a drawl somehow reminiscent to Peter Jameson of five men sitting round a poker-table under the awning of a zinc-decked ship in the Caribbean. One of those five men had drawled his words with just that identical deliberation—and would have been very insulted if he had been referred to as a “Canadian.”

“How did you manage to get here so quickly?” asked Sandiland.

“Well, sir, I happened to be reporting for duty at Headquarters just when your ’phone message got through. The Colonel told me to send my horses back, and

come right along with the guide. He said you'd fix me somehow till my blankets arrived."

Now a Canadian does not talk about his "blankets," he uses the English word "kit." Nor does he—as a general rule—smoke granulated tobacco from those looped bags which are referred to as "sacks" in the display-ads of the various firms whose communal address is 111 Fifth Avenue, New York. Also, he strongly objects to walking half-a-mile of sodden ground, trenched and littered with remnants of barbed wire, in his spurs.

These details flashed subconsciously through the mind of Peter Jameson, as the three of them sat together in the crumbling trench: but he was very tired, his cough troubled him—and anyway it was none of his business. There were, he knew from experience, many such "Canadians" among the men who originally joined Kitchener's Army.

"But how in the devil," thought Peter, "did he manage to get a commission?" . . .

"Number two gun ready for action, sorr," called Sergeant Abernethy's voice from above them.

Sandiland called back: "Splendid, Sergeant. We'll come and have a look at it."

The three officers scrambled up out of the trench into the noise of the night; picked their way across to the battery. It was pitch-dark with a drizzle of rain; so that the newcomer could see nothing except the occasional crimson of gun-flashes, and the circle of Sandiland's torch as it danced over yellow pock-marked ground. They jumped a deep crumbling trench; skirted the lip of a huge shell-crater; came suddenly upon the resurrected gun.

By the vague glimmer of a hurricane lamp, men were still at work, disinterring the buried ammunition, wiping the brass cases, stacking them beside the gun-wheels. An improvised tent of tarpaulin, slung between four posts, provided the only overhead cover; a few sandbags had been piled in front of the shield.

Sergeant-Major Cresswell, a stout melancholy man with watery brown eyes and a waxed moustache, whom the death of Lindsay had summoned from the waggon-lines, saluted Sandiland, and said:

"I'm afraid that's the best we can do for tonight, sir."

"Very well, Sergeant Major. Have the men had their rum ration?"

"Yes, sir." He added *sotto voce*, "They needed it, sir."

"Right. You'd better let 'em turn in then."

Number four gun spat its tongue of crimson flame, subsided into silence for another five minutes. "You chaps can knock off now," called Cresswell's voice.

Except for the two signallers in the telephone pit and Sergeant Duncan with his

two “numbers” at the duty-gun, the whole battery-personnel—officers’ servants included—had been toiling with pick and shovel and dragropes since half-past eight. Now they disappeared into the darkness. Sergeant Abernethy and his six men—two of his own sub-section, the remainder told off from the other detachments—lay down to sleep under their piece.

A figure approached Peter, said, “Should I light the candles in your dug-out, sir?”

“You’d better turn in, I think, P.J.” interrupted Sandiland; “or you won’t get any sleep at all.”

“What about telephoning H.Q., and checking the night-lines of that cannon?”

“Never you mind about H.Q., or the cannon. Just do as you’re told and turn in, there’s a good chap.”

“Very well, *sir*”—chaffed Peter; and stumbled off, Garton leading, to his dug-out. . . .

Sandiland and Henry made their way towards the telephone-pit. “He’s an obstinate cove, is P.J.,” confided the battery-commander.

“He looks a mighty sick one,” replied the “Canadian.”

### § 3

The “dug-out” towards which Peter and Garton stumbled was a coffin-shaped hole burrowed in the soil, roofed with a piece of corrugated iron and one layer of sandbags. A mackintosh ground-sheet, supported on a wooden beam, prolonged this improvised roof; provided some protection from the rain which drove in at the “door”—a narrow entrance reached by three “steps,” mostly mud. Down these, the pair slithered.

Garton lit a match, revealing Peter’s valise, supported on two ammunition-boxes and a stolen stretcher. The mud-walls of the coffin touched the valise on either side, so that Garton had to scramble over it before he could light “the candles”—one guttering dip stuck on a wooden shelf above the head of the “bedstead.” A pool of slime on the “floor” served for carpet.

“You’d better turn in, Garton,” said Peter, sitting down heavily between the projecting stretcher-handles. “I’m afraid you’ll have to bring me my tea at half-past four. Rather a change from H.Q. at Neuve Eglise, what? Hope your lady friend there still writes to you, Garton?”

The fair-haired Yorkshireman blushed violently; bent to unlace his master’s heavy boots.

“Don’t bother about that, I’ll do ’em myself.”

But Driver Garton went on with his work; and as his muddy fingers fumbled at the muddy laces, he thought: “Poor old P.J.! He won’t last much longer. Never saw a man look so ill in my life.”

“Should I help you off with your breeches, sir?”

“No. I’ll sleep in ’em. For God’s sake get off to bed, lad.”

With a cheery “good-night, sir,” Driver Garton disappeared. His master hauled himself painfully along the valise; sat up—head touching roof; unslung his gas-helmet, which he hung from a wooden-peg driven in the wall; took off his tunic, spread it on the bed; unstudded his soft collar; felt to make sure that the box-respirator was underneath his canvas-pillow; and inserted his body inch by inch into the Jaeger blankets.

“God,” thought Peter, “what a fool I’m making of myself. I ought to have gone sick days ago.” He blew out the candle; laid himself down for sleep; closed his eyes. “Sleep,” he thought, “sleep!” And for a moment, sleep came to him. Then he felt the warning twitch below his heart; started up; groped for his handkerchief. The cough tore at his throat, seemed to be wrenching his lungs out. . . .

Pain passed, leaving him weak and sleepless. He fumbled among the litter on the wooden shelf; found matches; lit the candle again. Number four gun fired; shook a few flakes of soil onto his valise. His whole body ached for sleep; but he was afraid to lie down again. If he lay down, there would come that warning twitch below the heart, another paroxysm. . . .

Listlessly, he pulled his tunic towards him; found the morrow’s orders; began studying them. “Infantry will attack. . . . Objectives: Guillemont—Ginchy—Maurepas Road—Bois de Leuze. . . . A/4 S.F.A.B. (‘A’ Battery Fourth Southdown Field Artillery Brigade) will detail Liaison Officer on the right. . . . B/4 S.F.A.B. will detail Liaison Officer on the left. . . .”

The blurred type danced in front of Peter’s eyes. He stuffed the orders back into his tunic-pocket: doing so, his hand touched Patricia’s last letter. This, too, he read listlessly, hardly taking in the words. . . . Number four gun fired again. . . . He closed his eyes. . . . “Sunflowers—Sunflowers—rather a jolly name.” . . . For a moment he dreamed. . . .

“*Gas-shell, sir. Gas-shell!*” The voice from without wrenched him from unconsciousness.

“Right,” he called back. “All right.” Now he was wide awake, bolt upright on his haunches. Automatically he pulled the respirator from under his pillow; took up the tube; adjusted clip to nostrils, mouthpiece to lips. . . . Cough wrenched at his

throat. . . . He put the tube down again; sat listening. . . . “False alarm,” he thought. “Thank goodness for that.” . . .

Then he heard, close overhead, a low slow whistle, like a sigh through the night. . . . Sighing ceased. . . . Peter jammed the mouthpiece back to his lips, readjusted the clip to his nostrils. . . . Another shell sighed over him; he heard the faint plop of its grounding, the vague hiss of its burst. . . .

The roof quivered; a handful of soil pattered onto his valise. . . . The candle guttered: went out. . . .

Another shell sighed to ground. . . .

He knew himself afraid—horribly shamelessly afraid. The clip on his nostrils was torture: the mouthpiece stifled him: blood drummed at his ears: he wanted to cough. . . . But he dared not cough. . . .

The night above him was full of sighing poisonous things. . . . God, there must be thousands of them. . . . They were falling all about him: sighing slowly down out of the night: plopping to ground: sighing out their poison. . . . They were looking for him: tap-tap-tapping round the roof of his coffin. . . . They wanted to find the roof of his coffin: to break through it; stifle him as he lay. . . .

Courage fought panic—alone in the darkness. “Damn it,” thought Peter, “damn it. They *shan’t* get my tail down.” And shelling ceased: suddenly, miraculously, the night grew still.

Peter loosed the clips from his nostrils, sniffed cautiously. The air was pure—no trace of gas. He let the mouthpiece fall, began to cough, dropped back coughing on his pillow,—and knew neither fear nor courage, but only the blissful unconsciousness of utter exhaustion till he heard Driver Garton’s “Half-past four, sir. Half-past four. Time to get up, sir.”

# *PART TWENTY-FIVE*

## THE LAST OUNCE

### § 1

The "Canadian"—unused to gun-fire—had not slept. Now, in the first glimmer of dawn, he climbed map-in-hand out of the telephone-pit; began to locate his position. Behind, a mere dip in the ground, lay the valley through which he had walked overnight. Close on his left, bulked low shattered walls which he knew to be Montauban. In front, about five hundred yards from the battery, he could make out a ragged fringe of trees—Bernafay Wood. On his right, flat ground rose slightly to a hump near skyline which must be the Briqueterie. On three sides of him, in the valley behind, among the trees in front, and on the flat ground to his right, occasional guns flashed and smoked among the rising mists.

He looked round his own patch of this desolation—the four crazy gun-shelters, the battered trenches, the shell-pocked wire-littered ground; and thought:

"You're a longish way from home, son."

A soldier came stumbling towards him, saluted.

"Mr. Jameson's compliments, sir; and he said I was to find where you were sleeping; and to ask if there was anything I should do for you, sir."

"Where is Mr. Jameson?"

"Having breakfast, sir"—Driver Garton pointed to a wisp of smoke about fifty yards away—"over there, sir. Should I get you some breakfast, sir?"

"Thanks." Charles Henry, already accustomed to the English Army's habit of perpetual valeting, followed Garton to the "Mess"—the same broken chalk-trench, roofed with corrugated, into which he had slithered overnight. From round the traverse came smell of a wood-fire, sizzling of bacon. Peter, astride an ammunition box, mug of tea in front of him, looked up; said:

"Morning, Henry. Not been to bed yet?"

"Good morning. No. Somehow I didn't feel like turning in. You off to the show?"

"Yes. As soon as I've had something to eat."

Garton brought breakfast—bacon on a tin-plate. Peter made pretence of eating; pushed the plate away from him; lit a cigar; began to cough. Looking at this haggard white-faced man in the torn tunic and patched breeches, Henry thought to himself:

“Well, if you ever get to those trenches, it’s a miracle.” What he said was: “Aren’t you going to take a gun—revolver, I should say?”

“Oh, yes.”—Peter laughed. “I’ll be loaded like an ammunition-mule by the time Garton’s finished with me—haversack, gas-helmet, field-glasses, Sam Browne, the whole paraphernalia. Damned heavy. One gets out of the habit of wearing ’em.”

“Do you think the attack will succeed?”

“Hope so. We’ve had about four shies at the sanguinary place already.”

“It’s our own infantry, I suppose.”

“Lord, no. They got smashed up at Delville Wood weeks ago. . . . Well, it’s about time I was off”—Peter got up, took a long iron-shod stick from behind him, —“*au revoir* and enjoy yourself while I’m away.”

Henry watched him scramble painfully out of the trench, and remembered Sandiland’s words: “An obstinate cove.” “I should say so,” muttered Henry. “I should just about say so.”

## § 2

“You chaps got your rations?”

“Yes, sir.”

Peter looked at his three men: Bombardier Finlayson, tall, tight-lipped, clean-shaven, shrapnel-helmet atilt on the back of his head; Blenkinsop, a dark, keen little Northumbrian; and Mucksweat, huge, hairy, more like a bear than a man, who had volunteered for “runner.”

“Then we’d better be off.”

Dawn was not yet day as the four crossed the track in front of the guns; tramped away towards the wood. They walked slowly, eyes on the black telephone-wire. “Seems O. K., so far,” said Peter, “better test her though.” The Bombardier unslung his telephone-case, inserted pin in the wire, tapped, was answered.

Now the wire rose from ground to poles; spanned a road yellow with mud; disappeared breast-high among tree-trunks. They pashed across; tested again; passed in among the trees; began fighting their way through the undergrowth along the lip of a zig-zag and water-logged trench.

“Lucky we didn’t run her down there, sir,” grinned the Bombardier.

“Damned lucky.” Already Peter felt dog-weary. Twice he stumbled, and Mucksweat helped him to his feet. Then fatigue reacted; the poison of over-strain distilled its poison of over-energy. The apprehension of overnight disappeared. . . .

They worked their way through the wood to the hillside. In front, the world



seemed asleep. From behind, came the occasional thud of a gun. A 'plane droned over, high in air. Below them, lay the Bois de Trônes, still black in the half-light: all along the fringe of it, they could see waiting infantry. The wire dipped into a dry trench; they followed it down-hill.

They emerged from the trench—and the wire ended abruptly. "Call up the battery," ordered Peter. . . . "Battery on, sir." . . . He took the instrument: "Is Captain Sandiland there? . . . Hello—That you, Sandiland. . . . We're at the edge of Trônes Wood. . . . All O. K. up to here. . . . What's that? . . . No good trying to run her any further. . . . Quite. . . . I'll leave Finlayson here. . . . You'd better send him up a linesman. . . . What's that? . . . Oh, yes, I'm quite all right. Cheerio."

"Hadn't you better leave Blenkinsop, sir," suggested the Bombardier. "Why?" asked Peter. Finlayson's lips tightened. "Blenkinsop's a very good operator, sir."

"I know that as well as you do, Bombardier. What are you driving at?"

"Well, sir, as N.C.O. of the party. . . ."

"Sportsman!" thought Peter; and reversed an order for the first time. They left Blenkinsop at the instrument; made their way, three helmeted figures, across a road dark with slime and rotted leaves, past the waiting infantry into Trônes Wood. The wood still stank of putrefying flesh. Barbed wire looped the trailing undergrowth. Here a shell-axed tree leaned drunkenly against its bullet-pocked neighbour. There, fresh-turned earth betrayed the scavenging pick. Beyond the tree-trunks, day glimmered. Above, black branches trellised gray sky. A ditch full of water led through this place of death.

Ahead of them, something whistled into the undergrowth. They dropped into the ditch; waded along, single file, calf-deep in liquid mud; ducked under a fallen log; waded on again. Another shell whistled into the undergrowth above them. "Whizz-bang," said Peter laconically.

Now, they were under open sky; making their way along a battered trench towards the support-lines. In front of them and behind them, hidden by humped earth from the enemy, toiled little parties of infantry: bomb-carriers, water-carriers, men with loaded rifles and men with empty stretchers.

The liquid mud deepened to quagmire.

Peter, fighting his way forward, felt the false energy of over-fatigue ebbing from his veins. With every painful pace, his feet rooted themselves deeper. Sodden leather wrenched at his ankles. Heavy water bottle, heavier revolver-holster, dragged at hip and shoulder. Each gasped breath seemed to tear at his heart. His helmet was a shifting torment. Bitter sweat blinded his eyes; dripped from chin to tie. Time and again, only the long iron-shod stick saved him from collapse. . . .

Gradually they neared destination; edged way past crouching men, past the gap where Lindsay had died, to a little eminence above plain-level. Here three mud-lanes met in heaped breastworks. Listless stretcher-bearers and a bundle of S.O.S. rockets marked Battalion-Headquarters—a German dug-out, thirty feet below ground-level, reached by a deep chute of greasy slime.

Peter sank down on one of the bomb boxes which littered the ground; leaned gasping on his stick.

“Feeling tired, sir?” asked Finlayson; and getting no answer, unslung his water-bottle, drew out the cork. “Try a drop of this, sir. It’s cold tea.”

“Thanks, Bombardier—but you’d better keep it for yourself—I’ll be all right in a minute.”

A little strength came back to him; he slipped off his helmet; loosed belt at waist. A dozen times during the half mile from Trônes Wood, Peter had wanted to give in; the last three hundred yards had been just a blur of continuous effort. “Like rowing,” he thought, “got to put your last ounce into it”; and like a rowed-out oarsman he rested for a little—knowing only blessed relief.

“Where’s Mucksweat?” he asked at last.

“You told him to stop about 20 yards back, sir. Just round the corner.”

“Quite right. So I did. You’d better go and join him. I’ll observe from there. This place is rather dangerous.” He staggered to his feet; made for the entrance to Headquarters. Finlayson watched him disappear down the greasy mud-chute; shrugged shoulders; rejoined his companions.

“I dunno what you think about it, Muckie,” said Bombardier Finlayson; “but it seems to me we’re in for a hell of a day.”

Answered Mucksweat the ex-coalminer, crouching bear-like in yellow slime, “He shouldn’t have come. That’s what *I* say.”

### § 3

Peter slid, feet first, into cavernous darkness. A hand gripped him by the shoulder; helped him up. A voice said “Hello. Who are you?”

“Gunner Liaison Officer, sir.”

Darkness cleared to half light. Peter was aware of a man sitting over a map at an uncleanly table.

“Well, if you’d come from the door we might see something of you.”

“Sorry, sir.”

Peter shifted position; found himself in a square cave of concrete. The orderly

who had helped him arrive, grinned; proffered an ammunition-box. An R.A.M.C. officer emerged from the gloom; said "Good morning."

"I dunno what they send you chaps out for"—began the Infantry Colonel, a wiry resolute man, square of chin and square of forehead—"you can't *do* anything. How do you propose getting your messages back?"

"Runner to beyond Trônes Wood, sir. Then telephone."

"Hm. We can do as well as that ourselves. What's the use of information two hours old? These new creeping barrages are the very devil. No stopping 'em once they start. Where are you going to observe from?"

Peter told him; and they discussed details for ten minutes. The Colonel's servant brought him tea.

"Have some?" asked the Colonel.

Peter, wet through and shivering, accepted gratefully. Asked the doctor, watching him as he drank: "Do you go over the top with the first attack?"

"He's supposed to come with me," interrupted the Colonel. Then to Peter: "You'd rather be on your own I expect."

"I think so, sir."

"Right"—the Colonel dabbed a finger at the map—"I shall make for here. Join me if you can. I must be off now. It'll take me the best part of an hour to go round the front line." He took his helmet from the wall behind him; gripped a stout stick; and scrambled off up the mud-chute.

"Shouldn't like your job much," commented the doctor.

"Shouldn't like his," observed Peter; looking at the disappearing soles of the Colonel's boots. . . .

By now it was nearly nine o'clock. Above, all seemed quiet. Peter finished his tea; said *au revoir* to the doctor; hauled himself—breast on mud—into the upper air again; found Finlayson and Mucksweat waiting in the narrow mud-floored trench from which he had elected to observe; rested elbows on parapet; peered cautiously over.

Immediately beneath him a smashed railway-line curved northwards, ending in the heap of twisted metal, upcurved like the ribs of a skeleton horse, which had been Guillemont Station. Over the railway, straight to his front, bare ground dipped to green—cut by the narrow brown cleft of our own front line. Beyond this, four hundred yards away, great molehills of white chalk marked the enemy's position. But between the narrow brown cleft and the white molehills, lay the sunken road which had so often defied assault. At that distance it was hardly visible; showed only as a discolouration on the drab landscape—a discolouration which ended at skyline in the

three-cornered bush-clump of Arrowhead Copse. Right of the Copse—our ground—rose the trees of Trônes Wood: left of it, beyond sunk road and white molehills, the enemy's territory stretched in colourless desert tossed to occasional fountains by long-range shell-fire. Of what had been Guillemont village nothing showed except four tree-tops on the extreme left of the shell-tossed desert. . . .

It still lacked two and a half hours to the time of the attack; and Peter, having shown the ground and explained his plans to the Bombardier and Mucksweat, sat down to wait.

Ten minutes passed—a quarter of an hour—twenty minutes. He looked at his watch, lit a cigar. Half-an-hour went by. Two hours more to wait! A couple of infantrymen appeared, took station beside him. Round the traverse, he could hear other infantrymen coming up. Damn it, would the time never pass? . . . Very high overhead, five Hun machines planed gleaming across gray sky. . . . He began to be afraid. . . . Fear gripped his stomach. . . . He must look over again, make sure of his way to those white molehills. . . . Twenty past ten—a whole miserable hour and forty-three wretched minutes more. . . .

Suddenly, the first enemy shell howled across the sky, burst hollowly at the edge of Trônes Wood.

“Dommned if that one didn’t come from behind us,” ejaculated Mucksweat.

“Pretty well,” said the Bombardier calmly. “Often got ’em that way in the Salient, didn’t you? . . . Course you did. . . . Well, this is a salient too, see!”

“I see,” said the huge hairy man. Even while he spoke, the second shell screamed and lit crashing to the ground behind. Splinters whizzed over them as they crouched to cover.

Barrage fire began—a slow barrage, terrifying in its very deliberateness. Scream followed scream down the unchanging sky; crash followed crash—now right of them, now left, now directly behind. Only their own tiny portion of trench, the sodden mud-walls between which they huddled under whirling splinters, seemed immune—burrow of safety in an exploding world.

“Christ!” thought Peter, “how long can this go on?” For a second, he knew absolute panic; his legs wanted to run away with him; he couldn’t stick it, couldn’t stick it another minute. Came a pause in the crash of sound.

Peter looked at the two infantrymen, crouching white-faced below the parapet; at Finlayson, tight-lipped, apprehensive; at Mucksweat biting his huge moustache. Then, very deliberately, he stood upright; drew field-glasses from case; peered over towards the enemy. One of the infantrymen joined him. “Do you know the ground?” began Peter. . . .

The shell gave no warning. He was aware only of a terrific thunder-clap, of a savage boot-hack at ear-drum. . . . Then blackness, blackness through which he struggled for light. . . . In the slime he struggled, fighting a warm dead thing. . . . The thing lifted from him. . . . Light came back. . . . He felt hands gripping him; heard Mucksweat's voice.

Face down in the slime, lay the dead body of the infantryman, helmetless, brains oozing—crimson sweet-breads—from shattered skull. Above the body, bent its living mate—the second infantryman. Suddenly, he turned; snarled over his shoulder: “*You* killed him, damn you. You! You! You! You bastard.”

“Easy on, mate,” cut in the voice of Finlayson, “you’re talking to an officer.”

“Officer. Who the hell cares for ’tillery officers?”—the man rose, sworded rifle gripped in both hands. “Blast you. You killed him. And now you’ll bloody well bury him”—bayonet drew back for the plunge. “Come on, you bloody coward, you. We’re going over the top, you and me—going to bury my mate decent, we are—like a Christian.”

Said Peter, and he spoke as tired men speak in dreams: “Don’t make an ass of yourself, lad.”

Mucksweat’s doubled fist crashed home to chin-point. The madman’s rifle fell clattering across his mate’s body as he toppled backwards.

“Who the devil told you to do that?”—Peter’s voice was again the voice of command—“pick him up, will you?”—the bear stooped over his victim—“take his helmet off.” . . .

But already the infantryman had regained consciousness. “What happened, sir?” he asked: head on the coalminer’s knee. Then he saw the body on the ground; stared at it.

“Oh, Gawd,” he sobbed, “it’s Harry. Poor old Harry.” Swiftly the man rose to his feet; picked up his rifle; started to climb out of the trench. Mucksweat pulled him back. “Let me go,” he howled, “let me go. I’ll give ’em something for this. Christ, I’ll give ’em something they won’t forget.”

They wrestled with him, panting, there in the trench; fought him till the madness passed. Shells screamed and crashed about them as they wrestled; splinters hissed into the slime. But for the moment these four had forgotten shell-fire. . . .

Came a man through the mud, a man who shouted, “Artillery Liaison Officer. Colonel wants the Artillery Liaison Officer.”

Automatically, Peter staggered off round the traverse. A shell screamed down. He fell on his face; heard the splinters whizz over; picked himself up; saw the exploded S. O. S. rockets frizzling red and useless among a knot of crouching

stretcher-bearers. Then he was slithering down the mud-chute, slithering to a moment's safety.

## § 4

Peter stood on his feet; blinked about him in the half-light. The dug-out seemed full of men. At his table, sat the Colonel. Peter walked across to him, saluted.

"You sent for me, sir."

A shell crashed to ground thirty feet above; rocking the solid concrete. "Anybody hurt?" roared the doctor. A moment's pause; then, "No, sir," from the top of the mud-chute.

"Can't you do anything to stop this?" asked the Colonel. "I'll lose half of my men before the show starts."

Peter looked at his wrist-watch; saw that the face of it was caked solid with mud. He wiped away the mud with his sleeve. The hands pointed to eleven o'clock.

"I'm afraid not, sir. There's no time to get a message back. . . ."

Came voices from above: "Easy on there, mates. Let me get down first. That's right, now his feet. All right, sir, you'll be all right in a minute." Light vanished. Followed the sound of heavy bodies slithering down the mud-chute. Light appeared again. Peter was aware of a huge officer, helmetless, red bandage across his forehead—an officer who staggered to his feet, cursing some one who was trying to assist him. "Damn you," he cursed, "damn you, I don't want your help. I'm all right, perfectly all right, I tell you. . . ."

"Of course you are, old chap. Of course you are"—the doctor's voice sounded perfectly calm—"you come over here with me. We'll fix you up in a minute. . . ."

"But I told him to keep his helmet on, I told them all to keep their helmets on. . . ."

"Quite right, old chap. Quite right. Now just you sit down for a moment."

The officer sank down in a gloomy corner of the cave. Doctor bent over him. Delirium ebbed away to vague mutterings. Another shell exploded above.

"You'd better stop here a bit," said the Colonel.

For a second, Peter Jameson hesitated. Brain, still numb from the shell-kick, conveyed no message to faltering limbs. Then that fine sixth sense which is the inmost core of courage seemed to whisper: "And your men!"

"I think I'd better be getting back, sir," said Peter. . . .

Pain stabbed at him as he hauled himself up the mud-chute to open air. At the top of the chute, he lay gasping. A stretcher-bearer helped him to his feet. "Thanks."

Peter leaned heavily on his stick. He began to cough; stood there, racking his throat out. . . .

The barrage had shifted to the left; seemed to be slackening. Only every now and then, a near crash shook the ground. Peter stopped coughing. Fear departed from his soul. The brain cleared. He knew himself very weak. But he knew, also, knew definitely, that he was not yet beaten; that enough will-power for the ultimate effort still remained in him.

"The last ounce," he thought again, "the last absolute ounce," and started to toil back through the mud. In his absence, riflemen had packed the trench; he edged past them; found his own men.

"How much longer, sir?" asked Finlayson.

"About half-an-hour."

They waited in silence. All about them, infantrymen were grouching. "Wish we wasn't in the supports." "Supports always get it wust." "Must have had a lot of casualties already." . . . Five walking wounded, ticketed tunics buttoned over strapped arms, accountrements abandoned, puttees cut away, came toiling towards them through the mud; edged past them; disappeared wordless round the traverse. . . . Shelling increased. . . . Some one on their left cried, "Stretcher-bearers. Hi! Stretcher-bearers." . . . They saw a body on a stretcher heaved up out of the trench; saw two men bearing it steadily along the open ground behind. . . . More shells came, but the bearers trudged on. . . . A fleet of British 'planes sailed across Trônes Wood, stayed circling above them. . . .

"Ten minutes more," said Peter Jameson. He looked over the parapet towards the brown cleft below. He turned to his two signallers, repeated his instructions: "I shall make for that shell-hole the moment our barrage starts."

Again, he took his place at the parapet; glued his eyes to the ground in front.

"Five minutes more," he called over his shoulder. . . . "Three minutes." . . . "Two." . . . "One." . . .

Finlayson and Muckswheat heard a vast rush as of wings above their heads; saw Peter scramble over the parapet; followed him blind in a mad stumbling run. The three dropped in a panting heap to earth.

"So far, so good," gasped Peter, extricating his head from Finlayson's legs. He hauled himself on his elbows up the side of the crater; looked over. A hundred yards in front of him, a row of helmets marked the front line. Beyond these billowed a roaring wall of flame-spangled smoke. Above the wall, red and green rockets soared despairingly. Shells whistled over him towards the wall—a stream of shells—ceaseless. And always the wall billowed higher, blurring the rockets. Now, the

helmets rose from the ground, became men—a long line of men who walked slowly towards the flaming wall, lay down at foot of it. Sunk-road, chalk-pits, desert beyond, skyline—everything had disappeared. Peter could see only the wall, the wall and the prone figures at foot of it.

Suddenly, flame died out in the wall: the prone figures rose; flung themselves forward into the smoke. . . . From behind the smoke came the sharp reports of bombs bursting, little whickers of machine-gun fire. . . . The wall thinned, revealing the sunk road, glimmer of chalk-mounds, of shapes struggling with shapes. . . . But beyond the struggling shapes, other shapes moved forward with the moving smoke. . . .

Peter called over his shoulder, "Come on, you chaps, we've got 'em." The three rose to their feet, dashed downhill. As they ran, they were unconscious of everything except the one strong desire to get forward. All about them, from the edges of Trônes Wood, from Arrowhead Copse, other men were running; men moved by that same desire; men equally unconscious, in that one moment of supreme elation, of the enemy barrage that screamed over their heads, plunged to ground in bolts of flame behind them. . . .

Finlayson reached the old front line first; stumbled as he leaped; fell headlong. Peter and Mucksweat, slowing their pace, scrambled deliberately across; helped the Bombardier to his feet. For a second they looked back. "You were right about that shell-hole, sir," gasped Finlayson. "They're knocking hell out of the supports."

"Come on," said Peter. "They'll be barraging the sunk road next." . . .

He set off at a swift walk; scrambled up a bank; dropped down, the pair of them at his heels.

In the sodden roadway, between the bloodstained chalk, the killers were still at work; ferreting the Beast with bombs, braining him as he crawled from his hole. The place stank of cordite, of blood and the flesh of men. But the three gunners had not been sent out to kill. . . . Peter, scrambling first up the chalk-bank, saw a shattered roadway ahead; caught a glimpse of two gigantic chalk-mounds, of the barrage beyond; heard a terrific explosion overhead; felt a clanging hammer-stroke on his helmet, knew frightful pain at his heart; knew a great darkness—a darkness through which he sank to merciful oblivion. . . .

Mucksweat and Finlayson, blown back by the shell, looked at each other for one panting second. Then they scrambled up the bank.

Peter had fallen forward on his face, left arm doubled beneath him. There was a great dent as from a hammer in his helmet. They turned him over. He gave no sign of life. Blood oozed from the corner of his mouth. "Is he dead?" asked Mucksweat.



Half-a-dozen blood-mad infantrymen surged past.

“Dead or alive, we can’t leave him here”—Bombardier Finlayson’s eyes took one quick glance at the chalk mounds, Bombardier Finlayson’s mind took one quick decision. “Can you carry him, Muckie?”

“Carry him?”—Mucksweat laughed—“carry ten of him.”

“Take him to those dug-outs then. Do you understand? There’ll be some cover there. And wait till I come back.”

“What are you going to do, Bombardier?”

“Me? I’m going to do his job, of course. What the hell do you think we’re here for—a picnic.”

Lips set, eyes resolute, Finlayson set off down the shattered road towards the disappearing infantrymen. Mucksweat bent down; wound his two bare arms round Peter’s body; picked him up like a child; and started for cover. . . .

## § 5

For an hour and three quarters, “B” battery’s guns had been thudding—steady fire—one round per gun per minute. For an hour and three quarters Cresswell and Charlie Henry had been walking from shelter to quivering shelter—asking always the same question—getting always a different reply.

“What’s your range, Sergeant.”

“Four seven hundred, sir—Four seven fifty, sir—Four eight hundred, sir.”

Sandiland, watch at wrist, firing-schedule in hand, stood at the mouth of the telephone-pit. Every five minutes he called across to his subalterns, “What are you at now?” referred their answers to the paper in his hand; ticked off the ranges.

There was no excitement at the battery; and, for the moment, no danger. Work proceeded automatically.

Right and left of the battery, in the valleys behind and even among the woods in front, other batteries were firing in the same orderly unhurried manner. The great voice of massed pieces rolled and echoed in continuous thunder to the observers in the sausage-balloons behind them, to the observers in the high-circling ’planes above. Only the makers of that thunder were deaf to it, isolated, cut off by the thudding of their own labours from all other sound. Steadfastly they worked—eye and hands, ears and mind concentrated on the leaping guns.

But Sandiland’s mind was not with his guns!

“Any news?” he called down into the telephone-pit.

“Message just coming through from Headquarters, sir”—a pause—“Have we

heard from Mr. Jameson yet?"

"Tell them, No. And get on to Blenkinsop again."

"Blenkinsop's on, sir." Sandiland stepped down into the pit—a square tin-roofed cave scooped from the soil; took the instrument from his telephonist. "Captain Sandiland speaking. Are they still barraging Trônes Wood?"

"Yes, sir. Firing's very heavy. Five-nines, I think, sir."

The battery-commander returned to his guns. What could have happened to Peter? Charrington, Liaison Officer on the right, had already reported twice; "B" battery's signallers had overheard the messages repeated to Headquarters: "Infantry had gone over": "Infantry were in Guillemont."

Sandiland tried to put away apprehension. P.J. was no fool. P.J. knew that no message of his could affect the ordered barrage. P.J. would not risk a runner's life till he had definite information. And yet, Sandiland was afraid. His conscience reproached him. He ought to have made P.J. report sick days ago. If anything happened to P.J. . . . Sandiland wrenched thought back to his guns.

One fifty three? Already, the figures on the range dials marked six thousand yards. In another few minutes, they would reach maximum. "Six one hundred, sir," called Henry's voice. "Six one fifty—six two hundred. . . ."

Undoubtedly, something must have happened to P.J.!

"Six two fifty—six three hundred." Still the guns lifted. . . .

"Bombardier Finlayson on the 'phone, sir." The battery commander dived to his telephone pit as a rabbit dives to its burrow, seized the instrument.

"Our infantry crossed the Ginchy road at 12:50"—Finlayson's voice came so distinct over the wire that Sandiland could almost hear the pant in it—"and are pushing on. Patrols are going forward to Lousy Wood."

Sandiland wrote down and checked back the message; said, "Call up the Adjutant on the other 'phone." But the instrument at his ear went on.

"Is that Captain Sandiland speaking? This is Bombardier Finlayson, sir. Mr. Jameson was hit just after the infantry went over. I left him with Gunner Mucksweat and went on. . . ."

"Mr. Purves speaking, sir."

Sandiland said, "Wait, Bombardier," grabbed the second telephone, repeated Finlayson's first message, ("Splendid," murmured the voice of Purves) "and I want to speak to the Colonel. . . . Thanks. . . . Is that you, sir? . . . Jameson's been hit . . . I don't know, sir. . . . I'm to send out another F. O. O. . . . Very good, sir."

The battery-commander handed back the instrument with a little gesture of disgust. Technically, of course, Revelsworth was right. They *ought* to send out

another F. O. O. Still, it seemed unnecessary risk of a valuable life. Whom should he send? . . . He spoke to Finlayson again. Finlayson had not seen Mr. Jameson since he was hit. Finlayson could not say if Mr. Jameson were alive or dead. Finlayson had obtained his information, come straight back with it. Finlayson, too, was in the right. . . . And the battery-commander thought: "Which is worse? To face danger oneself or send others into it? There's the very devil of a barrage on Trônes Wood, and the sunk road will be hell. Cresswell's got a wife and eight kids. Henry's never been in a show before."

Then he took a five-franc piece from his pocket; said "Heads Henry. Tails Cresswell"; and spun the coin in the air.

## § 6

The mind of Peter Jameson, emerging slowly from the dark of unconsciousness, was aware of pain. Thought followed; then sight.

He was in a dug-out, lying at the foot of deep steps—atop of which light glimmered. Opposite to him, propped against the wall, sat a wounded officer—a subaltern of infantry. The subaltern, who was smoking a cigarette, said: "Hallo. Thought you were dead." Then he shouted up the steps: "Hi, you gunner—hi."

Muckswat's voice answered, "Yes, sir. What is it, sir?"

"Your officer isn't dead. He's just opened his eyes."

The huge coal-miner clambered backwards down the steps, bent over Peter; and Peter spoke to him, vaguely, as men speak in delirium: "My water-bottle. Do you understand? My water-bottle"—Muckswat unslung his own. "No. Not yours. Mine."

Muckswat pulled out his clasp-knife—it was impossible to unsling the bottle without moving the man—cut the straps, uncorked, put the aluminium neck to Peter's lips.

The whisky-and-water—a good tumbler-full of which splashed over his face as he drank—woke Peter to effort. He sat up; looked at his throbbing bandaged arm; asked where he was.

Muckswat explained: "You remember they chalk-heaps, sir. Well, we're inside one of them. Bombardier said I was to wait here till he come back. That's why I was waiting upstairs, sir."

"Who bandaged this arm of mine?"

"I did, sir."

"Good lad." Gradually, Peter's aching brain pieced the situation together. He

could just remember the scramble out of the sunken road, the hammer-clang on his helmet. "Where's the Bombardier gone to?"

"I dunno, sir. He *said* he was agoing to do your job."

"Agoing to do your job." The words acted like a spur on Peter's dazed mind. "Do *my* job"—he echoed—"I'll see the fellow damned first. Give me a hand, will you?"

Wonderingly, the coal-miner obeyed; and Peter staggered somehow to his feet. The dug-out spun round him; his arm hurt abominably; but he was going to do his job—oh, undoubtedly, he was going to do his job. It lay, the job he was going to do, somewhere up above—up those damned steps—blast the steps—there must be millions of them—and the light atop of them had gone out. . . .

"Better lay him down again," said the infantry subaltern calmly. "I expect it's only a faint."

He lit a cigarette, looked down at his own legs, both broken by machine-gun bullets, thought: "They can't get us away before dark"; and went to sleep.

Mucksweat, left alone with two unconscious officers, picked up the smouldering cigarette, put it in his mouth, scratched head meditatively—and returned to his watch at the stair-head.

## § 7

A torch, flashing in Peter's face, recalled him to a moment's consciousness. A voice asked:

"How are we going to get him up those steps, sir?"

Answered another voice: "Tote him on a blanket if we can find one, Bombardier."

Said Peter Jameson: "That's you, isn't it, Henry?"

"Yes."

"Well—all I can say is"—the words were hardly audible—"that—it's—damn—sporting—of—you—to—have—come. . . ."

Then he fainted again: leaving Charles Henry, American Citizen, to puzzle out the exact meaning of the sentence as he had puzzled his way through the barrages on Trônes Wood.

# *PART TWENTY-SIX*

## BROKEN MEN

### § 1

Charlie Tebbits, faithless to all traditions of the building trade, kept his promised date; and Patricia moved into Sunflowers by the end of June. She “moved in” without servants or children; assisted only by a great grenadier of a woman who came from Arlsfield Village just too late to prepare breakfast and left just too early to prepare dinner. But Patricia had been homeless eighteen months, long enough to revel even in the discomforts of home-making—scamped meals, chairs without loose-covers, curtainless windows, floor-boards minus carpets, workmen all day and solitude all night.

The more she grew to know this house she had fallen in love with, the more she fell in love with it. Compared to Lowndes Square, Sunflowers was tiny—she loved it for its tininess. Sunflowers possessed no second staircase—she found she had never really approved of second staircases. Sunflowers had no wine-cellar—she decided wine-cellars inevitably harboured black-beetles. All through ten unhampered days, she delivered herself up, hand and brain, to this new infatuation.

Still, infatuation apart, it really was a jolly house; and by the time that Charlie Tebbits, assisted by Harry Tebbits, old man Tebbits, Miss Tebbits, and an amazing handyman from Little Arlsfield, had laid carpets, tacked down linoleum, hung curtains, arranged old furniture and carried up new; Patricia could honestly look round and say to herself: “This is just how I planned things the day I first saw it.”

She spent a whole twenty-four hours wandering from the berugged cream-papered hall into Peter’s little study, (for which Charlie Tebbits was still making her walnut bookshelves to match Peter’s writing-table), through the dining-room and the servants’ quarters; up the balustered dark-blue-carpeted staircase, (stopping always to look out from the window-seat on the half-landing) to the nurseries, gay with Cecil Aldin hunting-friezes, with chintz curtains and shiny white furniture; and from there (giving only a casual glance at the spare room) into her own bedroom and Peter’s dressing-room—white-papered both, both looking out across the orchard towards the river.

Her own room, except for the blue carpet saved from the cupidity of M. Van Woumen, contained no relics of Lowndes Square: the low gray-painted Empire

bedstead of carved wood and basket-work, she had “looted” from her father’s house in Harley Street; Tebbits’ ingenuity provided flounced dressing-table to match; artfully enclosed wall-spaces evaded the difficulties of a wardrobe; the fireplace (as all the fireplaces at Sunflowers) was of irreproachable white tilework, devoid of unnecessary brass and iron. But Peter’s dressing-room contained all Peter’s own familiar furniture—his mahogany bow-fronted wardrobe, his brass bedstead, the glass-doored wall-case of guns and hunting-crops and fishing-rods, his collection of hunting prints.

“He must like the place,” she kept saying to herself, “he *will* like it.”

For Sunflowers represented—though Patricia would never have admitted the fact—her last bid for Peter’s love. Their house in Lowndes Square had been a ready-made residence, full of Peter’s inherited chattels: entering it, she too had become his chattel—mere Mrs. Jameson. Whereas Sunflowers was of her own finding, her own creating; the house she, Patricia, would make “home” for her man against his return from the wars.

## § 2

Rainy June turned to a glorious July. Patricia found two servants; engaged a gardener; sent for the children; dismissed their governess; was “called on” by the vicar and half-a-dozen neighbours—and began to buy her experience of life on a moderate income in the English home-counties.

Peter’s wife possessed all the town-dweller’s illusions about living in “the country”: one took a “little place”—and banished care automatically; one’s servants smiled and sang about their deft work; one’s garden grew by itself (“the man does everything, my dear”), provided vegetables, eggs, fruit and flowers as a department-store provides groceries; while one wandered about in a floppy hat with a pair of scissors, or went for long walks in green lanes where one met the most attractive people—the Squire, the sporting parson, peasant women who curtsied and farmers’ boys who touched their hats. And in this paradise—chiefly owing to the honesty of the country-folk as compared with the rascality of town—one spent literally nothing at all!

Strong in that last belief, Patricia came like a godsend to the hungry village of Arlsfield: and Arlsfield robbed her as the country mouse robs the town mouse—with effective simplicity. Roger Fry the gardener,—a hulking fellow with a sly smile—acted principal go-between. “The Grounds,” said Roger Fry, “needed a lot of seeing to.” Patricia agreed. Roger Fry saw to them: he made her a sunk lawn at the foot of

the paddock, near the walnut tree—and pouched a week's extra wages over the price of turf, he regravelled the "drive" and extracted 5/-a load commission from the gravel-supplier; he re-fenced the orchard—on the same financial basis.

Then she desired chickens—and Roger Fry found them for her, ("ten and sixpence each, Madam, and the best little lot I've seen for a long time"). Also, Roger Fry arranged with a friend of his for the supply of chicken-corn—and by a judicious admixture of maize contrived to keep the four-year-old birds in lay for nearly six weeks.

Grocer, greengrocer (she had arrived too late to plant her summer vegetables), butcher and baker, ironmonger and laundrywoman—all joined the league of plunder: keeping back their accounts till such time as memory would find it impossible to check them.

Still it was a joyous conspiracy, a conspiracy of smiles and "Thank you, Madams"—and, at the outset, none of the conspirators enjoyed it half so much as their victim.

For nearly two months Patricia was happy as husbandless woman can be. She had her disappointments, of course: the servants who made her long for the efficient Smith of Lowndes Square days, the Vicar's oleaginous questing after charity subscriptions, the persistence of callers when she wanted to be by herself: but these were very minor flies in the ointment of a sunlit existence. . . .

She began the re-education of her children; finding them hopelessly backward in everything except parrot-knowledge. She gossiped with old man Tebbits, who sold her a piglet at the exact market-price of the day, provided her with milk and butter; but kept shut mouth about the delinquencies of "the Arlsfielders." She entertained her father for a week-end, and her brother Jack—still only a Gunner Captain and rather disgruntled at having been transferred to a Kitchener battery—for half his leave. She superintended Fry's greasing and oiling of the Crossley, which the Standard Oil Company's price for petrol had put out of commission till "after the war"; and explored the country afoot.

She got up at seven and went to bed at ten, living every minute of the fifteen wonderful hours.

Towards the end of August, Francis Gordon arrived to stay for a week, while Prout engaged what he called a "female," and got Glen Cottage ready for occupation. Patricia had not seen her cousin for two months; and the first sight of him, stepping carefully down from the hired trap, shocked her. It was not his physical infirmities she noticed at that first meeting, but his face. She remembered him a smooth-faced boy, she saw him now a middle-aged man. His hair had grayed at the

temples; his eyes had lost their laughter. He walked easily enough, using only one stick; but he no longer held himself upright; his shoulders drooped as though he carried a burden on them.

She led him to a deep chair in the hall; brought him tea; began to question him.

“So they invalidated you out after all.”

“Yes. I could have got an office-job; but I wouldn’t take it.”

“Why not?”

“Frankly, Pat, I don’t know. Somehow or other, I feel done in. It wasn’t so bad in hospital, you see one had other”—he looked down at his legs—“cripples to talk to. But London. . . . No, I don’t think I could stick London. The streets, you know; and getting in and out of tubes. People jostle one.”

“But what *are* you going to do?”

“Oh, write, I suppose.”

The last sentence struck Patricia as the most hopeless words she had ever heard from human lips. She felt desperately sorry—yet furiously angry with him. She said to herself: “Here is a man who is almost whole. He has enough money to live on. He has brains. The one thing that he cares for in the world is literature, there is nothing to prevent him. . . .”

But at that, Patricia’s anger vanished: for intuition, and her own love for Peter, told her clearly that “literature” was not the one thing in the world for which Francis Gordon most cared. She remembered the photograph incident at Mecklinburgh Square, the postcard she had read unwittingly at Brighton, his look when she chaffed him about being in love at the end of her Christmas Eve visit to Endsleigh Gardens. Her curiosity itched to ask him about this mysterious girl in America. Why didn’t he marry her? Or was she already married? Wouldn’t she have anything to do with him? Had they quarrelled? Couldn’t they make it up? . . .

But Francis, during his stay at Sunflowers, repelled every attempt to extract confidences; kept conversation rigidly to the impersonal. Somehow, he frightened Patricia. It seemed to her as though he had lost all interest in life. Except for his own writing-room, he left all arrangements at Glen Cottage to Prout. The war, he never mentioned: “as far as I’m concerned,” he said, “it’s over.” Literature, he referred to contemptuously as “the last resource of people who hadn’t the capacity for doing real things.”

Even the children noticed this change. “What’s the matter with Uncle Francis?” asked Evelyn, now a precocious long-legged creature of eight. “He always used to talk such a lot, and now he hardly talks at all.”

“He’s got a bad leg, dear,” explained her mother.



"But he doesn't talk with his leg, Mummy," put in precocity; and Patricia was driven to the usual: "Go on with your lessons, darling. Uncle Francis will be quite well again soon."

But would Francis ever be well again; well in mentality; able to reconstruct his life? Patricia's reason said "Yes" to those questions; Patricia's instinct said "No." She had thought once, long ago at Wargrave, that he might yet do great things, make a name for himself: there seemed a force in him then, a power behind his self-absorption. But this new Francis was not even self-absorbed: there was nothing so positive as self-absorption about him: he might have been anybody. And when he finally shuffled off through Tebbits' cow-yard, started down the meadow path to his new home, Patricia's fantasy pictured him a stricken beast, crawling away to die in solitude. . . .

But next day's telegram from the War Office dispelled all fantasies! Peter was wounded, back in England, in London: the world, for Patricia, shrank to the size of her husband's left arm.

### § 3

Patricia had waited thirteen months for that telegram; and once her anxious eyes deciphered its exact meaning, she knew no feeling except relief. Her man was home again, out of it, not for a week's exeat but for months, perhaps for good! They would give him leave. He would see Sunflowers. She would nurse him back to health. . . .

She sent Fry into Arlsfield with telegrams to her father and the invalid; she packed her bag; she urged the children to behave themselves during her absence; she borrowed Tebbits' trap, and caught the 3:45 from Henley with exactly one minute to spare. Neither in the trap, the train, nor the taxi which whirled her through unfamiliar streets to her destination, did she panic.

At the entrance to the hospital—a great barrack of a building, set foursquare round a gravel courtyard—difficulties began. An R. A. M. C. Sergeant, standing stiffly to attention, informed Patricia that visitors were allowed only between two and four P. M. She asked to see the Matron, and was conducted down a cold stone corridor to an unfriendly waiting-room. After ten minutes, appeared a forbidding woman of uncertain age, dressed in the Regulation Red Cross uniform, who said: "She knew of no patient named Jameson in the Officers' Ward; but would make enquiries."

Patricia waited another ten minutes. The Matron returned. She had discovered

Peter: he was as well as could be expected: Mrs. Jameson could come to see him the following afternoon.

“But I want to see him at once,” insisted Patricia.

“I’m afraid we can’t allow that.” The Matron smiled a superior smile. “It’s against orders.”

“Then you must disobey orders.”

“My dear Mrs. Jameson . . .” began the woman.

But at that, Patricia’s temper exploded.

“Don’t ‘dear Mrs. Jameson’ me,” she flashed out. “He may be your patient. But he’s my husband. And I’m going to see him.”

“The Registrar *might* let you. I can’t.”

“Then please go and fetch the Registrar.”

There appeared, after a further twenty minutes during which Patricia’s annoyance rose to fever-point, a pompous but kindly individual with drooping moustaches, who peered at her through gold pince-nez, and said:

“The Matron tells me you want to see your husband. We really oughtn’t to allow it, you know. Really, we oughtn’t. Of course, if he were in any danger, it would be a different thing.”

“It’s rather natural I should want to see him, isn’t it?”

“Entirely, my dear young lady, entirely. But we have to think of the other patients, you see. Still, as a great favour, and just for ten minutes. . . .”

He led her up stone-staircases, down endless miles of corridors where blue-clad patients shuffled and limped on noiseless slippers, till they came to a white-painted doorway marked, “Officers Only”; up yet another staircase to a stone half-landing. Here a capped nurse met them.

“This is Mrs. Jameson,” said the Registrar. “I’ve promised her she may see her husband. But only for ten minutes, Sister. Only for ten minutes.”

“Is he very bad?” asked Patricia.

“He’s asleep, I think,” said the Sister.

The Registrar made his adieux; clattered off downstairs. The two women passed into the ward: a long bare room of ten beds whose occupants looked up incuriously at the accustomed swish of the Sister’s linen skirt, displaying scarcely more interest on sight of Patricia.

The last bed of all was screened.

“He’s in here,” whispered the Sister. She shifted one of the screens noiselessly; and Patricia tip-toed in.

For a moment, the joy of seeing him eclipsed judgment. Then it was no longer

merely the loving woman, Peter's wife, who looked down on him; but Patricia Baynet the doctor's daughter, sickness-wise by inheritance!

He lay on his back, bandaged arm outside the coverlet. In the shadow cast by the screens, his unshaved face showed thin and fine-drawn. She hardly noticed these symptoms; she had expected and discounted them. She noticed something else—his breathing. It came spasmodically, in quick uneven jerks through half-opened lips. Twice, during the ten minutes she stood watching him, he seemed about to awaken; moaned in his sleep. . . . The Sister signalled to her that it was time to leave him. Very quietly, she withdrew; and they passed out of the ward again.

"Well," asked the Sister, "what do you think of him?"

Patricia looked doubtfully at the unintelligent eyes under the white cap. "How long has he been here?" she asked.

"Two days, I think. I've only just come to this ward."

"Could I see the doctor who's attending him?"

"He's left, I think. But the Orderly Officer's in his room. I'll take you to him if you like."

They found the Orderly Officer, an ascetic-looking young man, seated at a large desk, telephone in front of him, fountain-pen in hand. He offered Patricia a seat, listened carefully to her questions.

"Yes," said Captain Territt, "your husband's been here two days. I saw him when he came in. He told me that a piece of shrapnel hit him on the helmet. Slight case of concussion, I expect. He'll soon get over that. And he's got a touch of bronchial catarrh. Exposure, you know."

"When did you take his temperature last?"

"Five o'clock, I expect." He turned to the nurse. "When was it, Sister?"

The girl hesitated. "I—I didn't take it. He seemed so sound asleep."

"Well, please go and do so at once."

The girl hurried out of the room. "We're frightfully understaffed, you know," explained the doctor. Patricia looked at him, summed him up. She was half mad with anxiety; but she spoke without a trace of emotion. "May I use your telephone, doctor?" "Certainly." She pulled the instrument towards her; called up her father's number. . . .

The nurse, returning white-faced, thermometer in hand, heard her say:—"Is that Jenkins speaking? . . . This is Mrs. Jameson. . . . Then you must put me through to his consulting-room. . . . Is that you, pater? . . . Did you get my wire? . . . I'm at the hospital now. . . . No, he's very ill, and I want you to come down at once. . . . It's pneumonia, I think. . . . In half-an-hour. . . . Thanks awfully, pater."

She hung up the receiver; turned to Captain Territt. "It is pneumonia, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid so. The temperature's rather high."

"How high?"

"A hundred and four point one, under the arm." Doctor and Sister hurried out of the room. . . .

She waited their return; waited miserably; visioned Peter fighting for breath as she had seen her brother Jack fighting for breath, years and years ago, in the night-nursery at Harley Street. And she, his wife, could do nothing; must sit there powerless. All the relief at knowing him saved from the firing-line, all the rosy expectations of his coming to Sunflowers, faded like silly dreams. Supposing they had only brought him home to die!

Heron Baynet, entering with the quiet unhurried step of the professional consultant, hardly recognized his daughter: her face was so drawn with agony—love-agony of which he had never dreamed her capable.

"Am I in time?" he asked, doubting the answer.

She rose, tottered towards him. "I don't know, pater, I don't know anything. . . ." He caught the panic in her voice, hardened to it. "Don't be hysterical, Pat. It does you no good: and it may harm Peter. Now, tell me exactly what has happened, and why you telephoned."

At the sound of his voice, nerve came back to her; and she told him of her suspicions, of their confirmation.

"He was asleep, you say?" asked Heron Baynet.

"Yes."

"On his back, or propped up?"

"On his back."

"Oh, you women!" Heron Baynet smiled at his daughter. "You know so much, and yet you know so little. If it had been as bad as you've imagined for the last half-hour, do you think he could have slept? Why, Pat, he'd have been bolt upright, breathing fifty to the minute. . . ."

She said, very quietly: "But supposing I hadn't insisted on seeing him. Supposing that idiot of a sister. . . ."

A step sounded outside. Captain Territt came in; stiffened at sight of the civilian; was introduced; wilted at mention of the civilian's name; answered the technical questions with the deference due to a consultant. Yes, the patient had bronchial pneumonia. At least, in Doctor Territt's opinion, it was bronchial pneumonia. Perhaps Doctor Baynet would prefer to form his own opinion. . . .

The two members of the closest Labour Union in England passed out together,

leaving Patricia again alone.

Supposing they had only brought Peter back to die! . . .

## § 4

But Peter Jameson did not die. The pneumonia ran its course—two days of choking misery for him, of mad anxiety for his wife—then the passing of crisis—the slow return to painless breath and solid foods.

For the first forty-eight hours, Patricia stayed by him. The hospital-staff, knowing her Heron Baynet's daughter, made full amends: Matron grew kindly; neglectful Sister was unremitting in service. On the third day, Peter said very weakly, "Hello, old thing, what are you doing here?"—and she went back to Harley Street a happy woman.

Followed a week of daily visits, during which she talked and he listened. Temperature dropped to ninety-nine point three. Wound in arm drained away its poison. She grew nervous about her children left alone with the servants; ran down to Sunflowers for the day; found chaotic idleness; stayed the night; straightened things out; returned to town.

At the end of the second week, her father pronounced his patient definitely out of danger; persuaded her to leave London. She yielded hesitatingly, realizing for the first time the handicaps of reduced income—lack of car, lack of governess for the children, of efficient servants; torn between her love for the man and her duty to his home. . . .

Peter himself, during that first fortnight, was too ill for emotion. To be in bed, to be under a solid roof, to be washed—these sensations contented him. He rather liked waking at night to hear rain outside, turning to sleep with the thought, "Well, I'm not in that anyway." He liked having his meals brought to him on clean china, the sounds of women's voices. He experienced a profound relief at the absence of danger. . . .

But as Peter passed from illness to convalescence, he grew aware of new dangers. These dangers were manifold, and each terrifying. Never, at the Front, had he known fear as he knew fear at home. There was the Fear in Sleep—a horror which woke him, sodden with sweat, from visions of Lindsay still dying in Trônes Wood, still dying but not yet dead. . . . There was the Fear in Daylight—a visionless misery, an immense black cap which the soul donned or doffed at its own bitter will. While that Fear lasted, the soul under the cap prayed ingratiatingly for death. . . . There was the Fear of the Future, in which the future held no hope beyond the

present: and the Fear of the Present, when the present held no hope save the future. . . . There was the Fear of Time—where time hung dead through eternity or spun so fast that none might accomplish a second's labour between his cradle and his grave. . . . There was the Fear of Pain, and the Fear of Poverty, the Fear of being Sent Back to the Front, and the Fear of having to Stop at Home: but strangest, strongest of all the fears Peter learned in those first days was the Fear of Consumption.

He used to lie for hours remembering Rolleston's story of the gassed Canadian, hearing Rolleston's words about tubercle, till every little cough seemed a warning of death: then the Fear in Daylight would come to him, whispering, "Perhaps that is best," and the Fear of Poverty would mutter, "There'll be the insurance money for them if you die." . . .

Peter did not realize that these fears were among the commonest symptoms of neurasthenia. Peter knew nothing about neurasthenia, except that "Pat's governor made rather a hobby of it"; nothing about shell-shock beyond the Army dictum of the period, "that it meant a chap got rather shocked at being shelled." His fears shamed him; and so he hid them away, as decent men hide uncleanly impulses; never dreamed of associating them with that theory about the "Limit of Human Endurance" which Heron Baynet had once propounded to him over their brandy and cigars.

This almost impossible battle, the battle of the neurasthenic with his own soul, Peter Jameson entered on unaided—feeling himself lost to all honour, coward and traitor in sight of his own manhood. Yet at the outset he fought well; so well that, so long as he remained in hospital, not even Heron Baynet suspected his condition. . . .

At the end of his first month, came letters from Garton, from Sandiland and Purves. The Brigade had been moved northwards ("quite close to where we first went into action," wrote the censor-wise Garton): "Mr. Henry" was riding Little Willie and had taken Jelks for groom: "Captain Lodden was home, 'sick.'" It all seemed very far away from the bare echoing hospital, from the gossip of the ward. . . .

Passed another month of aimless existence, varied only by Patricia's weekly visits, by a letter from his brother Arthur, by a box of cigars from Maurice Beresford, by a state-call of Sir Hubert and Lady Rawlings. . . .

His arm healed rapidly. They took away his sling, allowed him "down" to meals—where he learned the Fear of Eating in Public. He went for his first walk—and discovered the Fear of Traffic. Then, quite unexpectedly, he was summoned to a Medical Board: at which three kindly men examined his arm, tested his lungs, and asked him how he "felt in himself."

“Quite all right,” said Peter, “but of course I’d like to go home for a bit.”

They gave him three months’ leave, and advised him to take care of himself. “One never knows with lungs, you know,” said the President. . . . And Peter, the Fear of Consumption eating out his last remnant of will power, took train to the home Patricia had planned for him.

# *PART TWENTY-SEVEN*

## THE NEW SCIENCE

### § 1

Into every marriage there come times of crisis, when man and woman gaze at each other dumbly across a great wall of misunderstanding. Peter's homecoming from hospital provided that crisis in his life and Patricia's.

Poor Patricia! she had looked forward so rapturously to having him at Sunflowers; worked so hard to make the place perfect. And now it seemed to her as though not only house and children but she herself must be distasteful to him; as though even palship were ended. Night after night, his placid kisses banished her to loneliness. Night after wakeful night, she watched the light in his dressing-room glimmer through the chinks of the door between them. Poor Patricia! unable to realize that this man who annoyed her by the very placidity of his demeanour, was struggling—every minute of the day, and every hour of the night—to prevent his hands from trembling, his voice from quivering, his every tone and every attitude from betraying the terrors which were eating away his self-respect.

Poor Peter! he strove so desperately to conceal his miseries. Poor Peter, who only succeeded, by not voicing them, in finally convincing his wife that the something he strove so obviously to conceal from her must be lack of affection. . . .

Thus brick by reticent brick: he with his nameless shameless fears, she with her certainty of love lost for ever: these two built up their pathetic wall of misunderstandings.

In all their lives they had never had so many opportunities for companionship: in all their lives they had never been so uncompanionable. They were always together—but they were never in harmony. Mutual existence turned to a game of finesse—"I mustn't let her know this," "I mustn't let him see that." Yet, outwardly, they remained a very ordinary married couple. No visiting stranger, not even Francis whom they saw almost daily, perceived the barrier between them.

Walking together, talking together, in the dining-room with the children, in the garden with Fry, morning and evening, the game of misunderstanding went on.

And the man used to say to himself: "O God, am I going mad? I am afraid, afraid. Everything frightens me. One day she will know I am afraid. Then, she will despise me. The servants know I am afraid: they talk about me: I cannot hear what



they say, but I know they are talking about me, they talk about me all the time. The children know I am afraid. . . . O God, what am I afraid of? Of what am I not afraid? I wish to God I could go back to the front. Death is simpler out there. And I am only fit for death, because I am afraid to go back to the front. . . . She mustn't know that I am afraid, she must never guess that I am afraid."

And the woman used to say to herself: "O God, what is behind Peter's eyes? He hates it all—me, the children, this house I have made for him. His voice praises, but his heart condemns me. O God, if he'd only say what he is thinking. We used to be pals once—and that was not enough for me. I used to call myself his chattel. Now, I am not even chattel to him. We are strangers in a strange house. He hates me. He mustn't guess that I know of his hatred."

The woman, at any rate, had work for anodyne. By now, Patricia began to realize that country life on a moderate income is not the simple paradise which town dwellers imagine it. She was not yet fully aware of the robberies practised on her; but she had learned, at least, the necessity of personal supervision. Children, house, servants, garden, animals—all needed her. The man Fry, grown arrogant on the proceeds of speculation (he had utilized her absence to dispose of the apple-crop to a confederate—and the two were now holding forty bushels of pippins for the ultimate rise) turned lazy, insubordinate; required constant prodding. Fanny and Elizabeth—half-trained, utterly uneducated, liars by inheritance of serfdom—could not be trusted to work unwatched. Also, accounts had begun to roll in.

None of these inevitable pettinesses would have been a burden, if she could have laughed over them with Peter. But household affairs had always been taboo between them: her job and hers only. They had made that rule in the prosperity of three thousand a year; and she was not the type of woman to break it in the adversity of six hundred. Moreover, intuition warned her that he must, for the present, be shielded from financial anxieties.

Peter, who had no work for anodyne and cherished all the prejudices of the caste which is not accustomed to see its womenfolk labour, watched her busied about the house, feeding her chickens, educating the children, till the Fear of Poverty wiped out all other fears and he said to himself: "This is the way my clerks used to live. I've brought her to this. I shall bring her to worse than this. . . ." Then he would take his twelve-bore from the case in his dressing-room, drop a couple of No. 5's into the breech, and slip through Tebbits' Farm, down the hill to Francis Gordon's cottage.

"Why the devil do you always bring that gun of yours?" Francis used to ask.

"Might see a rabbit." Invariably Peter gave the same answer to his cousin's

question; invariably he felt shamed by it. For the real reason of that gun-carrying was Fear, the Fear of Open Spaces.

And when Peter used to ask, "Done any work, old man?" Francis would answer, "Oh, I'm just lying fallow for a bit." For Francis Gordon had passed beyond the Fears into the land of No-Incentive.

## § 2

Heron Baynet arrived at Sunflowers on Christmas Eve. Nothing about the house suggested tragedy: the hedges were clipped, the ground dug; holly decked the hall; above the oak dining-table hung a bunch of mistletoe; Peter's study had been cleared for the children's tree and presents. The day itself brought its usual gift-giving, its usual church-going, the usual roast-beef for lunch, the usual turkey, the usual champagne—and Francis Gordon who hobbled through Tebbits' cowyard in full evening-kit and a fur-coat—for dinner.

The usual Christmas dinner-party! Yet all through it, Heron Baynet felt conscious of tension. To his professional mind, these three fairly ordinary people—the young wife, the convalescent and the invalided soldier—seemed somehow out of tune with the world and with each other; he sensed discord in the apparent harmony of their even small-talk. Instinctively, he began to analyse them, to look for tangible symptoms of that intangible tension.

What could be the trouble? Covertly, he studied Peter. The man looked thin, of course: that was to be expected after his illness. He spoke rather more slowly than usual, drank more than his share of wine, seemed to grip knife and fork. . . . "I wonder," thought Heron Baynet. Then Fanny, entering hurriedly, caught her foot in the edge of the carpet, stumbled, recovered her balance. The doctor saw Peter's face twitch for the fraction of a second; saw the lower jaw drop, jerk back into position as the fifth nerve sent its message of control from the taut brain. "Poor devil," thought Heron Baynet. . . .

In the light of that subtle revelation, many things became clear to the neurologist's mind: he understood his daughter's occasional glances at her husband, Peter's carefully modulated voice, the whole atmosphere of watchful distrust in which these two must have been living since his son-in-law returned from hospital. Professional instinct satisfied, he turned his attention to Francis.

But nothing in Francis Gordon's demeanour betrayed tension. On the contrary, he seemed—compared with the super-alertness of Peter and Patricia—a mind gone mute. He talked, and he ate, and he drank, like an automaton. . . .

Meal over, Patricia left her three men alone in the small candle-lit dining-room. The maid brought coffee; Peter produced cigars. They talked for a little about the fall of the Asquith Cabinet, Lloyd George, Tanks, the chances of America coming in.

The last topic seemed to strike a responsive chord in Francis Gordon's mind. His eyes brightened to it for a moment: then the flame in them went dead. Peter told about Charlie Henry; Heron Baynet led him from that to his own wounding.

"I don't remember much after I was hit," said Peter, and shied off the subject.

"But were you unconscious all the way to England?"

"I suppose so."

Conversation languished for a moment. Then Peter edged his chair towards his father-in-law's; began to talk medicine. Peter opened very carefully, feeling his way with each sentence towards the topic which for the moment obsessed him: but it did not take the doctor's astute mind very long to realize that he was being pumped for information. And the information his son-in-law sought was all about one subject—tubercle. "At what age were people most liable to consumption?" "How did it start?" "Was it hereditary?" "How long did it take to kill a man?" "Could it be cured?" . . .

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"Now why on earth," thought Heron Baynet, "does a man who is obviously suffering from repressed shell-shock, want to know about tubercle?" And that night he sat up very late, peering into the flames of the wood-fire in his bed-room, seeing visions of this new science, the science of neurology, by which men who had learned how to die might be taught how to live.

### § 3

Heron Baynet had planned his return to London for Boxing Day; but he cancelled his appointments by wire, and stayed on at Sunflowers. He felt his daughter's happiness to be staked on a correct diagnosis of her husband's mental condition; and as Peter's reserve made direct methods impossible, the diagnosis necessitated vigilance and unceasing study.

After two days spent apparently in idleness, actually in the most minute observation, the doctor succeeded in decoying his daughter away from home, husband and children; suggested a little stroll through Arlsfield Woods.

It was a dull December afternoon; and as they took the footpath across the paddock, picked their way under leafless branches over slippery tree-roots, Patricia could not help contrasting this winter sombreness with the splendid springtime when she and Francis had first found Sunflowers. Then, the world had been one great

promise; now, the world and her own hope seemed withered, never to blossom again. . . .

"I wanted to talk to you about Peter." Her father's voice interrupted reverie. "Does he ever fire that gun he carries about all the time?"

She looked up astonished. "No, I don't think he ever does. Why do you ask, pater?"

But Heron Baynet only muttered, "H'm, I thought not"; and walked on in silence. "You're worried about him, aren't you?" he said at last.

"A little"—loyalty restrained her from giving the correct reason—"he doesn't seem really well yet."

"He isn't. He's very far from well. He's about as ill as any one can be."

"Pater!" she stopped in her walk, and they stood facing each other. "Not his lungs."

"No"—the man spoke very gently—"not his lungs, but his mind. You've often heard me talk about shell-shock, Pat; and I've often bored you with my jargon of neurasthenia. Well, now you'll have to listen to it all over again. Only this time, it's got a personal application."

He took her arm, and they resumed their walk, pacing slowly among the trees.

"Peter," began Heron Baynet, "is suffering from acute neurasthenia brought on partly by actual shell-shock, and partly by the general strain of war. In a weaker character the symptoms would be perfectly plain—shaky hand, general jumpiness, irritability, forgetfulness. Peter is controlling all these symptoms—and Heaven knows what impulses—with the result that, sooner or later unless we can find some means to save him, his mind will give way altogether."

"You don't mean that he'll go mad, pater." Love and horror mingled in Patricia's voice.

"Nothing of the sort," said her father angrily. "Neurasthenia isn't madness; any more than a sprained ankle is madness. Neurasthenia is a mind-sprain; and like all sprains, its primary treatment must be rest. Do you think Peter's soul ever gives his mind a rest? Not a bit of it. Peter's mind is afraid of going out by itself—that's why he always carries that gun—but Peter's soul says to it, 'Afraid, are you? I'll teach you to be afraid'; and off he goes for a walk. Result: he comes back with his mind a little more sprained than when he started. Peter's mind wants his fingers to shake, his body to start when it hears some sudden noise: Peter's soul says to his mind, 'You let those fingers shake—and there'll be trouble.' Result: more mind-sprain."

Heron Baynet elaborated his theory of the "soul and the mind"—known also in the patter of neurologists as the "mind and the brain," or the "conscious and the

subconscious”—till he succeeded in making clear to Patricia that the thing to be feared in Peter’s case was not madness, a wrong-functioning of the brain, but breakdown, a non-functioning of it.

“But surely, pater,” she said at last, “if he’s as bad inside as you think, he’d have consulted you about it?”

“My dear, he’s afraid to.”

“Afraid?” Patricia laughed incredulously. In spite of all she had just heard, she could not yet bring herself to believe Peter afraid of anything. “Afraid to consult you?”

“Yes, afraid to consult me. Scared to death! Don’t you see, Pat, that the whole trouble lies in that one word, ‘Fear’? Do you think that your so-called ‘heroes’ aren’t afraid? Of course they are—otherwise they wouldn’t be heroes. The hero is the man who controls fear—not the man who doesn’t feel it. But the process of controlling fear can’t go on indefinitely. Every man has his limit. . . .”

“But Peter!” she interrupted, still unbelieving. “Peter!”

“Peter’s gone beyond his limit and his fear-controlling apparatus is breaking down; that’s all. Take his history, and you’ll see what I mean. At eighteen, he goes into business: that means anxiety, mind-strain, fear to be controlled; at twenty-one, his father dies—more mind-strain; he gets married, takes on more responsibilities; buys another business. . . . Then, comes the War; instead of going to it with an easy mind. . . . Well, you know what’s happened since 1914.” Heron Baynet broke off for a minute, resumed: “I felt, when he came home on leave in April that the strain was telling on him. However, apparently he gets over it; goes back to the front. What do we know after that? Practically nothing. He tells us that he had a ‘cushy time’ at Neuve Eglise, that he had rather a ‘rotten time’ on the Somme. At the end of the ‘rather rotten time’ he gets a crack on the head which keeps him unconscious for the best part of three days, a wound in the fleshy part of the arm, *and* bronchial pneumonia. How did he get bronchial pneumonia?”

“Exposure,” said Patricia.

“Exposure be sugared. He was picked up the same day. . . . By the way, has he ever spoken to you about consumption?”

“Yes. Twice. He said the children ought to sleep in the open air.”

“Consumption is one of the particular fears he can’t quite control. That, I’m certain of. I wonder what his other fears are—or aren’t.”

For all her anxiety, Patricia could not restrain a feeling of relief. One thing at least, her father’s explanation had taught her: that she might still win her husband’s love—“even if he is a coward,” she said aloud.

"A coward!"—Heron Baynet snapped at the word as he had snapped at the suggestion of madness. "A coward! Were you afraid before Primula was born?"

"A little," she confessed.

"Well, multiply that fear by infinity—and you will have some idea of what Peter is going through. And remember, you *knew*; he knows nothing, except that he is afraid, and that to be afraid is to be"—Heron Baynet hesitated over the word—"caddish."

Silently, they began to retrace their steps homewards. Already, light was failing among the trees. It seemed to Patricia that she walked in cold shadows—helpless.

"Can nothing be done?" she said at last.

"Without his willingness to be treated—nothing."

"Will he have to go back to the front in March?"

For the first time that afternoon, her father laughed. "Not if I know anything about Medical Boards, Pat. He wouldn't last ten days." The doctor grew serious. "But that doesn't help us much. The damage to his mind has got to be repaired somehow. *You* might start the process; I can't."

"I?" The monosyllable carried infinite query.

"Yes. You, and you only. Get his confidence; make him tell you—under pledge of secrecy—why he carries that gun; why he's afraid of consumption for the children. Make him talk to you about the day he was wounded—about the horrors he's seen."

"Can't you talk to him, pater? He never opens his mouth about that sort of thing to me."—Her voice faltered.—"We're not such good friends as we used to be, pater."

Heron Baynet's voice did not falter. "I know you're not, Pat. But you've got to be. These repressions are killing Peter. Unless somebody can break them down, I won't be answerable for the consequences. It's no use my talking to him, he'd freeze up at once. Whereas you, you're his wife."

"But, Pater. . . ."

"Damn it, girl,"—the doctor's voice rose to fury—"can't you see that this is a matter of life or death. You *must* make him talk. Make him drunk if you like—get drunk yourself—make love to him as if you were his mistress: but for God's sake, make him talk."

Patricia blushed scarlet; quickened her pace.

"And then?" she asked.

"Persuade him somehow that he's got shell-shock, and to consult me about it." For a moment, the doctor forgot his son-in-law: neurasthenia and its treatment lay very near his professional heart, and that heart was being steadily broken by War

Office neglect. "Two years, I've been at them," he burst out, "two years! And they're only just beginning to realize that a wound in the mind can be as fatal as a wound in the body. Meanwhile, God knows how many brave men are being tortured."

By now, they had reached the paddock-gate, stood gazing down on Sunflowers. The mellow house behind the leafless walnut-tree looked a veritable English home of peace; smoke spired lazily from its tall chimneys; its square windows glinted welcome. They heard the children's voices shouting, "Daddy! Daddy!" saw Peter striding, gun over shoulder, to the front door.

"He's been to see Francis again," said Patricia.

"Agoraphobia," thought Heron Baynet, "the Fear of Open Spaces. I wonder what particular kind of horror he sees every time he goes down across that little bit of meadow-land."

But Patricia's mind had suddenly remembered Francis; Francis, alone, night after night, in that quaint up-and-down cottage, firelight glowing sombrely on panelled walls, Prout and his "female" pottering in the red-tiled kitchen.

"Pater," she said suddenly, "supposing you're wrong in your diagnosis?"

"I'm never wrong about these things," he answered, purposely boastful.

"Then tell me what's the matter with Francis. Even I can see *he's* not normal."

"Normal!"—Heron Baynet pulled a cigarette-case from his over-coat pocket, extracted and lit a Gianacis—"of course he's normal. That's his trouble. A normal man trying to live an abnormal life."

"It isn't abnormal to live in the country."

"No, it isn't abnormal to live in the country, *but*"—for the second time that afternoon, Heron Baynet laughed and his daughter blushed—"but it is abnormal, especially for a man of Francis Gordon's temperament, to live there like a monk."

"But he doesn't even work, pater," protested Patricia.

"Why should he?" said her father. "He hasn't got anybody to work *for*."

Thoughtfully, they passed into the house.

# *PART TWENTY-EIGHT*

## WOMANCRAFT

### § 1

After Heron Baynet's departure, the influence of his disclosures became infinitely disturbing to his daughter's mind.

Inheriting all the prejudices of ignorant generations—the generations who regarded nervous disorders as akin to lunacy, and made torture-chambers of our asylums—Patricia found it almost impossible to realize Peter's condition. It needed all her reasoning power, all her affection, to conquer those prejudices, to stifle her instinct of revulsion from the abnormal.

She felt immensely sorry for him. She understood; and vowed to save him from the fears which—now that her mind had been opened—she saw behind his eyes. But she could not, at the outset, quite keep the word "madness" out of her thoughts. Mad! Supposing Peter were to go mad?

Nor, in her heart of hearts, could she quite help despising him for his fears—even as she despised Francis Gordon for his idleness. Peter was no longer a Man, her husband, some one to be looked up to, leaned on, consulted in emergencies—but a weakling, a creature to be protected.

For these thoughts, she hated herself; they shamed her, as his fears shamed Peter: and she set herself to conquer them, fearlessly, resolutely. So that, by the end of two days, she had almost accustomed herself to the idea of illness. Peter was ill—she said the word over and over again—ill, not mad, ill with a sickness that she alone could cure.

This idea of illness satisfied the motherhood in her—and of the matehood she was not even yet fully unaware.

### § 2

If Patricia had been a religious woman, especially if she had been a Roman Catholic, her natural refuge in such a crisis would have been the priest. But Patricia—though she paid the customary lip-service of her caste in Arlsfield Church—regarded her God as she regarded her King. Both were symbols: the one a symbol of conduct, the other a symbol of country. As symbols one owed loyalty to both; but



individually neither could be of the slightest assistance. Every normal human being, argued Patricia, must fight its way through the world unaided. . . .

Hitherto, her own battles had been purely personal: the fights of reason (a sensible General) against instincts (a horde of hare-brained savages); and hitherto—except for one lapse, falling in love with her own husband—reason had always triumphed. Reason must triumph again; only Reason—not instinct—could save Peter. . . .

Having thus persuaded herself, as the drunkard persuades himself of his perfect sobriety, that her passion for Peter would soon be a thing of the past, Patricia took a lonely walk, tried to sum up her problems.

First and foremost of these was to carry out her father's instructions: to make Peter confess; break down the wall of reticent commonplaces which he had built up against her. How? She remembered her father's words, "Make love to him as if you were his mistress!" The words themselves conveyed nothing whatever to a woman utterly unversed in the wiles of sex; but they filled her with a delicious feeling of fright. For a moment, the idea of being Peter's "mistress" completely routed that calculating General, Reason. . . .

This "bed-room thought," as Patricia phrased it, was so disturbing that reason took refuge among its minor problems. Peter's leave had still ten weeks to run; long before it ended, she would find some way of gaining his confidence.

Meanwhile, the home, Peter's home, demanded immediate attention. She really must get rid of Fry, Fry came later and later of a morning, left earlier and earlier of an evening, Fry overfed the animals, Fry hadn't yet finished his seed-potato-sorting. . . . Thought became gloriously inconsecutive. . . . One oughtn't to keep three servants. The children would have to go to school. The Lowndes Square purchase money wouldn't last for ever. It was very good of Peter to have given her the Lowndes Square money. Peter always had been very good to her. . . .

By this time, she had circled Arlsfield Village, was beyond the Post Office. In front of her, the boundary road of Arlsfield Hall serpentine under leafless chestnuts. Still lost in thought, Patricia wandered on.

Peter's mistress! Why mistress? What did a mistress give that wife couldn't? Ridiculous! She smiled to herself. Give! What couldn't she give to a man if only. . .

There are certain moments in the life of every woman, when the sex-antagonism disappears and she realizes the sex-necessity. Such a moment came to Patricia as she tramped sturdily along the leaf-sodden road that late-December afternoon of nineteen hundred and sixteen.

Hitherto, she had been content to regard the sex-intimacies as rather shameful

necessities of married life. The man desired; the woman gave way to his desires. Her own desires, the secret pleasure she sometimes experienced in giving way to him, were of those savage hordes, the instincts, which Reason—very reasonably—did its utmost to suppress: Bedroom thoughts, in fact.

Bedroom thoughts! Suddenly she saw the absurdity of the phrase. If love meant anything at all, it meant mutuality; and mutuality could not exclude sex-instinct. Why should woman be ashamed of her desires? Bedroom thoughts—indeed. Absurd mock-modesty! Rubbish! Stuff and Nonsense! Early Victorianism at its soppiest extreme! . . .

And the woman of thirty tramped on. It was her moment of matehood: in that moment, she forgot her two children, her reduced income, her husband's illness; realized nothing except this new and to her amazing truth—that the sex-need was mutual.

There came over her a great mood of clairvoyance. The word "mistress" no longer puzzled, no longer frightened. By her love, she interpreted the meaning of it: by her love, she saw the sex-thing whole. It sufficed not that a wife surrendered her body grudgingly, even though she became her husband's pal, his childbearer, the manager of his home and the partner of his income. Marriage, to be perfect, required more than these. They twain must be one flesh, one in mutual desire as they were one in mutual interest. And in clean desire, love sanctifying, could be no shame.

Matehood-moment still on her, Patricia rounded the last bend of the road; sighted the mellow straggling roof of Francis Gordon's cottage above the leafless elder-hedges.

Francis! In the light of her new vision, the man no longer seemed despicable. Broken, foolishly ashamed of physical infirmity, irresolute, unwilling or unable to work—one thing, at least, he kept sacred. "Living like a monk!" Her father's words held the semblance of a sneer; but she, Patricia, understood.

And for the first time, understanding him, she respected this man. Intuition gave her the sure clue to his mind: like herself, Francis Gordon had climbed the pinnacles, seen the sex-thing whole. As to her, so to Francis Gordon, Love had vouchsafed the inner meanings; and now, he could accept no substitute for Love. Either the one woman,—pal and childbearer, partner and mistress; or this, the lonely cottage among the lonely woods. . . .

But intuition gave Patricia no clue to the heart of the problem, to the man's renunciation. Blind to everything except her own immediate feelings, she saw only this straggling cottage which might have been a home—this house without its woman. A girl in America! In her ignorance, Patricia hated "that girl." That girl must know

Francis loved her. She corresponded with him; sent him post-cards when he didn't write regularly. Then why didn't she marry him? Obviously, because "that girl" was a flirt, a light woman, unworthy of love. . . .

By the time she reached the low flint-wall which divided Glen Cottage from the main-road, Patricia had worked herself up into a fine state of resolution. She would talk to Francis; warn him against "that girl" who was ruining his life, warn him against himself. . . .

But, unfortunately for resolution, Francis Gordon was out.

Prout, standing in the gabled doorway, told her that "Mister Peter had come for Mister Francis, and they'd gone up to Sunflowers."

Patricia paused for one irresolute moment. Then she said, "Do you think you could get me a cup of tea, Prout, I'm feeling rather tired?"

"Certainly, Madam. Where will you have it, Madam? In the writing-room?"

"Yes, Prout. That will do nicely."

She laid down stick and gauntlets; passed through the sombre oak-panelled hallway, up the broad shallow staircase, into the long room above. "Here," thought Patricia, "he ought to be writing." She looked at the great desk under the window, across it to the swelling turf of Arlsfield Park: she looked at the cushioned settle by the writing-desk, at the fire in the Morgan-tiled grate, at the black-lacquer chairs, at the low bookshelves against the cream-distemppered walls, at the *écru* velvet curtains, the maroon carpet on the floor. Then she walked deliberately to the desk; picked up Beatrice's photograph.

"A fine face," thought Patricia, "a good face."

Prout, entering with the tea-tray, caught her in the act: she stood there, guiltily, frame in her hand; and the little gray-haired valet in the scrupulously brushed blue clothes stared at her over the rim of his high white collar. He, too, had fingered that photograph-frame; peered not once, but a hundred times, into those clear thoughtful eyes. . . .

Prout drew a little table from its corner by the fireplace, set down his tea-tray, arranged a chair. Patricia put back the photograph.

"Your tea, Madam," said Prout; but he made no move to go.

"Prout," began Patricia—and stopped as though she had accosted a stranger by mistake.

"Yes, Madam?" There was invitation in the valet's voice.

Still, Patricia hesitated.

"You were going to ask, Madam?"

She plunged in headlong, "Prout, who is that girl?"

"That, Madam, is Miss Cochrane's photograph"—the old man spoke slowly—"and, if I may be allowed to say so, Madam, it's a great pity Mister Francis ever met her."

"Why?" Patricia hated herself for asking the question: it meant the breaking-down of barriers, made her the old man's accomplice. But Prout seemed to take no notice; his voice lost no accent of respect.

"Because, Madam, if it hadn't been for Miss Cochrane, *he* might have had a chance. What chance has he got now?" The respectful voice rose. "No chance, Madam."

There fell a silence between these two: rules of conduct, honoured for generations, kept both tongue-tied. Patricia looked at her tea-cup, but made no attempt to drink from it: the valet stood stock still, as though awaiting an order. In the game of etiquette, it was the woman's move.

"Tell me more about her," said Patricia at last.

Etiquette went by the board; the valet turned suddenly man, an old man who spoke broken-heartedly about a boy he loved.

"Mrs. Jameson, she was the woman for him. I knew it the moment they met. We were on board a steamer, travelling from the Argentine to the West Indies. And I thought, I thought. . . ."

"Yes, Prout. You thought. . . ."

"I thought she was going to make him happy. . . . Look at him now, Mrs. Jameson. A broken man! Look at his life. Is it life? It isn't life, Mrs. Jameson. It's just death. And all"—he shook his hand at the photograph on the writing-table—"all because of one wretched woman who isn't fit to polish his boots. *I* polish his boots, Mrs. Jameson; *I* run this house for him; *I* do my best to make him happy. *I'd* work my fingers to the bone for him. Why? Not for the few shillings a week he gives me—I haven't been in service forty years for nothing, Mrs. Jameson—but because . . . because I'm fond of him. Is *she* fond of him? Would she let him eat out his heart for her if she was fond of him? If she was fond of him, why didn't she marry him then? Why doesn't she marry him now? Write, write, write! Three years she's been writing to him. And every time one of her letters comes, it makes him worse. Why doesn't she stop writing to him? If she doesn't want him, why can't she leave him alone? Why can't she leave him alone, Mrs. Jameson?"

The man stopped speaking: the valet went on, "Many's the time I've thought of writing to her myself, Madam. But I've served the Gordons—father and son—for over twenty years. And I know my place, Madam."

"And what would you have said in your letter, Prout?" Patricia asked the

question almost automatically.

"I should have told Miss Cochrane the truth, Madam." . . . The door closed silently. Patricia found herself alone.

A moment, she hesitated. The whole business seemed suddenly fantastic, out of its century. Men no longer died for love of one woman. Francis would get over this infatuation, recover his vitality, his joy of life. She could not do this thing. She, like Prout, "knew her place."

Then, for the mood of matehood was still strong in her, Patricia rose slowly from her chair; walked towards the desk. Again, she picked up the photograph, gazed into the eyes of it. The eyes seemed to ask a question, a matehood question. "Tell me," the eyes seemed to say, "tell me. I too, can give. . . ."

"What harm can it do?" thought Patricia. Her free hand, resting on a mass of papers, encountered something hard, something hard and flat. She put down the photograph; turned over the papers. . . . The Browning pistol lay at full cock, blue-black on the black wood of the desk; and she knew instinctively that Francis, disturbed at Peter's entrance, must have turned the papers to hide it. . . .

Now, Patricia hesitated no longer. His pen, the pen she had given him, was lying in a little lacquer pen-tray—her gift too. She picked it out; unscrewed the mechanism; sat down to the desk; drew a sheet of note-paper from its rack; and wrote, wrote for the life of a man. . . .

Her quick movements shook the desk-top; till the pistol beside her quivered. It quivered to her hand as she wrote. She could not keep her eyes away from the pistol. . . .

"Francis has probably told you about me. I am his cousin's wife—his cousin Peter's wife. He does not know I am writing to you—he has never told me *or any one* about you. I am writing this in his house—he is not here. I don't quite know what to say to you. I can only tell you that he needs you *very desperately*. If you love him you ought to come to him. I don't know if you love him or if you can come to him—but I do know that it is a question of life or death for Francis." . . .

She signed her name and address legibly at foot of the letter; rose with it in her hand; walked to the fireplace; dried the single sheet at the flame. Again, the whole affair seemed fantastic. She wanted to throw the letter on the fire: till, looking over her shoulder, she saw the pistol, black and menacing on the desk-top.

She rang the bell; walked back to the writing-desk; found an envelope, folded the sheet; sealed it up.

"You rang for me, Madam," said Prout, appearing silently in the doorway.

"Yes." She handed him the closed envelope. "You know Miss Cochrane's

address, I suppose.”

“Yes, Madam”—obviously, the valet wanted to thank her, to ask questions. He began to stammer something; but Patricia cut him short.

“Have it registered, please: and, Prout”—her eyes flickered to the pistol on the writing-desk—“I thought you said you were fond of him!”

She was out of the room and down the stairs before the old man could answer. He heard the rattle of her stick, the clang of front door closing, as he stood by the window, pistol grasped gingerly in one hand, unaddressed letter in the other. “I ought to have seen her out,” thought the valet. “I ought to have seen her out.”

### § 3

Twice, as she climbed the meadow-path, Patricia wanted to turn back. She had behaved like a lunatic. She had done two unpardonable things: gossiped with a servant, interfered between a man and a woman. The letter must not be sent—the letter must be destroyed. But Patricia did not turn back. . . .

Among the haystacks in the field behind his cow-yard, old man Tebbits was feeding his chickens. Patricia heard his quaint treble: “Come birds—come birds—come birds”; came upon him suddenly as she rounded the first rick. He plucked cap from head, said:

“Good-evening, missis.”

“Good evening, Mr. Tebbits.” She could see that old man Tebbits was ripe for a gossip. He began to talk as he scattered the corn, and she stood listening to him for a full five minutes. “Middlings was up again—and bad. He never remembered them so bad. And the bran. You couldn’t really call it bran. Same with the toppings. That gilt of hers would make a fine sow. Store-pigs didn’t pay like they used to. Ten-week pigs didn’t pay so bad. *He* always killed ‘brokes.’ ‘Brokes’ was no good.”

Patricia had not yet learned the meaning of a “broke”; but she found Tebbits’ gossip comforting. Here, at least, was somebody normal, somebody of the old kindly world, the world, that had gone to smash in August, 1914. . . . Reluctantly, she made her excuses, bade him good-night; picked her way through the cow-yard, out on to the road: reluctantly, she swung the gate of Sunflowers, passed to her home.

It was nearly five o’clock, dusk deepening to darkness. In the paddock, she could see Fry’s burly figure, locking-up the chicken-houses. But no lamp yet glowed from the hall windows. Perhaps Francis and Peter had gone upstairs to the children. . . .

She turned the knob of the front-door, heard Francis' voice through the velvet curtains. "Well, anyway it's a gentleman's death." She entered quietly, stood still for a moment. Peter's voice answered: "Oh, of course a man's got a right to kill himself if he wants to. No one asked us into this rotten world."

Patricia slipped out again, closing the door gently behind her; walked round to the back of the house. Fry was just locking up the stable-door. She called out, "Good-night, Fry." He answered surlily, "Good-night, Madam." In the red-tiled kitchen, Fanny—a fat slovenly fair-haired girl—was preparing tea. Both lamps were lit; the kitchen glowed hospitably. Patricia scraped her boots; strode in.

"Have the children had their tea, Fanny?"

"Yes, mum. Elizabeth's upstairs with them now, mum."

"Why isn't the lamp in the hall lit?"

"I'm sorry, mum. I forgot it, mum."

"Go and light it, please."

The girl rattled a box of matches in her apron pocket; went out. Patricia leaned her stick against the wall; drew off her gauntlets; re-arranged the tea-tray. Through the door, which Fanny had left open, she heard Peter's, "Mrs. Jameson not come in yet, Fanny?" and the girl's answer, "Yes. She's just come in." . . .

The two cousins were sitting in armchairs by the fireplace. They rose as Patricia entered. Francis said, "Good evening, Pat"; Peter, "Hallo, old thing."

"Why didn't you ask for the lamp?" asked Patricia.

"Forgot all about it," said Peter.

"And the room smells like a public-house."

"You always say that, Pat." Francis plopped back into his chair. "It's Peter's fault, not mine. He ought to give up cigars now he's out of the business. Besides, he'll ruin his lungs. . . ."

Patricia saw Peter wince; turned away to draw the brown window-curtains. Fanny clattered in with the tea-tray; put it down on a stool by the fireplace.

"Where are you going to sit, Pat?" Peter was still on his feet, back to the fire.

"In *your* chair, I think." She smiled at him. He walked gingerly round the tea-tray; drew himself up a third chair. She poured out; handed them their cups, plates, cakes and bread-and-butter. Talk languished. "What have you two been discussing all the afternoon?" she asked.

"Suicide," grinned Francis; "nice cheery topic!" and went on, Peter approving, to elaborate his theory.

"Suicide's the last act of a coward," decided Patricia.

"Or an altruist," interrupted Francis.

"What the devil's an altruist?" asked Peter.

"An altruist"—Patricia rose from the tea-table—"is a woman who leaves a nice comfortable fire to see that Elizabeth doesn't drown Evelyn and Primula in their baths."

But she went upstairs heavy-hearted; found no joy in the laughter of her children, in their bath-games, their quaint prayers, their snuggling "good-nights." . . .

## § 4

Francis stayed for dinner; stayed endlessly. After coffee, he and Peter drew sofa to the fireplace in the hall; began to discuss the war. Patricia, making pretence of reading the newspapers, watched them covertly from her armchair.

Both the cousins were in day-clothes: Peter still wore breeches and gaiters, his rough homespun shooting-coat; Francis, a loose gray-green suit of Lovat tweed. Her own black evening dress, high-throated, lawn at wrist, seemed to isolate her from their bodies, as thought isolated her from their conversation.

They talked quietly, but with the bitter unreasoned conviction of the fighting-man. Patricia could never accustom herself to that bitterness. In their eyes, only the fighting-man existed: they could not see the non-combatant. To them, non-combatants were traitors, shirkers, conscientious objectors, self-advertisers, money-grubbers; always ready to betray the fighting-man, to cheat him and rob him, to preach to him first and leave him in the lurch afterwards.

"Patriotism!" sneered Peter. "Why, the Boches are ten times more patriotic than we are. There aren't any conscientious objectors in Germany."

Francis sneered back, "Never mind, old boy. We shall never sheathe the sword till every munition-worker has got his own motor-car."

"Don't you believe it, Francis. Our damned politicians would sheathe the sword tomorrow if they saw the chance. Take it from me, they'll do us in the eye before it's over."

Patricia flung down her newspapers. "You're perfectly impossible, both of you. Can't you see anything good in England? Isn't everybody working? . . ."

"Isn't everybody getting paid for it?"—Peter's eyes darkled. "Who's paid worst? The front-line infantryman, of course. That's war all over. The more dangerous the job, the less the pay. And if it wasn't for the infantryman, you'd have had the Huns in England. . . ."

"No, we shouldn't," interrupted Francis. "The Navy's still at sea, isn't it?"

"It is," crowed Peter. "And that's the worst paid service of the lot."



She picked up her paper. It was useless to argue with them; they must talk themselves out. And again the thought of madness overwhelmed Patricia. The whole scene—the two lounging men, the cosy lamp-lit room—became unreal. She was in a lunatic asylum. Peter and Francis were both dead: their minds, the minds she had once known so well, existed no longer: two ghosts, two utter strangers, occupied these bodies. Two mad ghosts of minds she had known!

The hallucination passed. She felt mentality strengthen in her, felt resolution rise triumphant over weakness. These were not lunatics, but two sufferers, two sick men. And she, Patricia, would cure them both. To cure, to heal—these were the blessed functions of her womanhood. . . .

At last, Francis said good-night; lit his final cigarette; limped towards the door. Patricia helped him on with his coat; found him his torch; watched it dancing over the gravel towards the gate. "Take care of yourself," she called after him: and thought of Prout, waiting-up in that lonely cottage. She could trust Prout—but for how long? And the girl in America? What would "that girl" do? If I were her, thought Patricia, nothing on earth would keep me from him. . . . Thought expired: she turned back to her husband.

Peter had not moved from the sofa. He sat hunched-up, peering into the fire. His face showed thin and drawn in the flame-light. A great throb of pity for him suffused her: she wanted to fling herself at his feet, to ask his pardon. Mad? Her Peter mad? How had she dared so much as think it of him? He was only ill, ill and sad and broken. His life, his dreams, his health—everything he valued in the world—had gone to smash. He had flung them down, a free gift, in the temple of honour. And now, now he had no more to give! He was spent in honour, exhausted of giving. But she—she to whom he had given, all his life, ungrudgingly—she the acceptor of his gifts—she was not spent; her giving had not yet begun, the fountain of it gushed in her veins, ungrudging, inexhaustible, a great bright fountain of giving. . . .

"Peter!" Her voice woke him from reverie. He felt her warm arms round his neck; her warm lips on his cheek. Instinctively, he recoiled from them: they seemed to invade the privacy of his thought. The warmth of womanhood had no place among those cold devils of fear with whom he walked o' nights. . . . But she would not let him go. Her arms clung to him; her lips explored his face; her body snuggled against him on the sofa. . . . "Peter," she was whispering at his ear—"make love to me. Make love to me tonight. I can't bear you to be away from me any more. . . . You're being cruel to me, Peter. . . . I can't go on doing without you, I just can't. . . . Despise me if you like: but don't reject me. I want you so . . . I'm shameless. I haven't got any shame left in me. But I want you, Peter: I want you as you used to

want me. You used to want me once, Peter.” . . . He lay in her arms, passive, a man struck dumb. . . . “Peter, you must love me tonight. I can’t be alone any more. Oh, boy, boy”—the old love-word quivered at her lips—“I want you so much. I can’t be alone any more, boy. Are you afraid to love me? . . .”

He sprang from the sofa with a great shrill cry: “Afraid! Yes. I am afraid. God forgive me for being a coward. I am afraid.”

She dragged him down to her. “You mustn’t be afraid of me, boy. I love you. Do you understand. I’m your wife, your slave, your mistress. . . .”

He wrenched himself free; stood up to his full height. She saw him through a sheen of tears, towering above her. His voice carried down to her through immense distances:—

“You mustn’t touch me, Pat. You mustn’t degrade yourself by touching me. I am unclean, a leper in the sight of God and man. The soul inside me has putrefied. Putrefied! You don’t know what that means. I don’t want you to know what that means. It stinks. My soul inside me stinks. My brain is full of filthy pictures. They haunt me. And I am afraid. . . .”

She, too, was afraid; but love in her cast out fear. Brown eyes kindling, she rose to him; twined her arms about him; locked hands behind his neck; clung to him with all her body. She would have kissed him on the lips; but his lips evaded her. The breath whistled through his lips. His heart pounded against her breasts as she forced him back to the sofa. . . . Her hands unlocked from his neck. Her hands fondled him. Lower and lower she sank against him, closer and closer. She could feel all his body quiver to her. He shook under her hands as a ship shakes when she heaves propeller free. . . .

“What are you frightened of, boy? Tell me what you’re frightened of. I’m your wife, boy. I won’t hurt you.”

Suddenly, she felt his arms round her; his lips at her ear. Clinging to her, straining her to him, he spoke: fiercely, as men speak in fight:—

“You mustn’t love a coward, Pat. God knows I want you. God knows I mustn’t take you. . . . I am a coward. Do you know what that means? . . . I’ll tell you. . . . Everything frightens me. . . . I am afraid to go out alone. . . . I am afraid for the children, for you, for myself. . . . I am afraid of life. . . . I am afraid to go on living. . . . And I haven’t got the pluck to kill myself. . . . Dear Christ, I haven’t even got the pluck to kill myself. . . .”

He began to cry, clinging to her, straining her to him: cruel dry sobs, deep down in the throat. She could not move; she could not see him. Her breasts were two burning torments; her body burned as with fire.

“Peter”—would he hear her? O God! would he hear her?—“I don’t care if you’re a coward. I don’t care about anything. Only make love to me. Make love to me, boy, or I shall die. . . .”

## § 5

All that night, he lay in her arms; sleepless. All that night she lay listening to him, listening to the horrors in his brain. In the darkness, he told her of dark things, things hidden from sheltered women. For he had walked many nights with Fear, none aiding; till Fear had bitten deep into his soul. . . .

All that night she lay listening to these things, unafraid, glorying that he should tell her of them, pitying him, loving him, persuading him. . . .

But when at last, promise given, he fell asleep on her naked breast; when at last dawn peeped at her through the chinks of the window-curtains; Fear came to Patricia—and with Fear, Fear’s kinswoman, self-reproach.

Would he hate her when he awoke? Would he retract the promise given? Had she robbed him of honour, lost him his lonely battle for self-respect? Had her thoughts been all of him? Had she given herself all selflessly?

Self-reproach whispered to her in the dawning: “Delilah! Delilah! Delilah!”

# *PART TWENTY-NINE*

## THE LIFTING OF SHADOWS

### § 1

It is no use pretending that Patricia was not ashamed of herself. She was—desperately so. She felt she had been guilty of immodesty, that she had forfeited her husband's respect. Even when she realized that Peter's damaged memory retained few details of their night except his promise to consult her father about his "nerves," shame haunted her. Constantly, she expected him to remember, to judge, to condemn. . . . Yet actually, she had saved him!

For Peter's "case" was, in the terms of psycho-pathology (which is the science of soul-illnesses), one of "repressed complexes": in simpler language, of bottling-up his emotions. At their first interview, Heron Baynet put the matter to him very simply. Heron Baynet said:—

"You have been twice wounded. One wound is in your arm; the other in your mind. The flesh wound, you let us cure: you understood that it needed antiseptics, drainage, bandages, rest. The wound in your mind, you concealed from us; and it has festered. Now, tell me what you are most afraid of?"

"Consumption," admitted Peter.

"Why?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid I've got it."

"Who put that idea into your head?"

Peter told his father-in-law about the gas-attack at Neuve Église, about his cough, about Rolleston. Heron Baynet laughed.

"We'll soon settle that. Tubercle's a bacillus. I'll test you for it. Now then, what else are you afraid of?"

Peter hesitated.

"Shall I tell you a few things?" went on the doctor. "You're afraid of going out by yourself. You're afraid of noise. You're afraid of time."

"How do you know?" asked Peter wonderingly.

"My dear boy, how do *you* know things? By learning them, don't you? You were trained in business, you were trained in soldiering. You studied them. Well, I've studied the mind. . . ."

"But damn it," said Peter, "one oughtn't to be afraid of anything. At least, one

oughtn't to admit it?"

"Oughtn't"—the doctor smiled. "There's no 'oughtn't' in the mind. 'Oughtn't' is half your trouble. You've corked-up all these fears with your 'oughtn'ts' until they've become obsessions."

"Well, anyway I'm a coward," said Peter stubbornly. "You can't get over that, however much you argue about it."

"Of course you are," countered his father-in-law blandly, "of course you're a coward. So are nine-hundred and ninety-nine men out of every thousand. Otherwise, you wouldn't have tried to control this wound in your mind. You were afraid to tell anybody about it, weren't you?"

"I suppose I was."

"Why?"

"Cowardice, I suppose. According to your theory."

"Exactly. Don't you see, Peter, that cowardice and bravery are ridiculous terms?"

"No, I don't," snapped Peter. "A man either does his job, or he funks it. If he funks it, he's a coward."

"You mean, if he funks it and doesn't do it. Supposing he funks it, and does it all the same."

"Then," admitted Peter, "he's not a coward."

"Good. Now, let me tell you something. That power which drives the man to do a thing he funks, is not bravery but the will-to-be-brave. Your will-to-be-brave is damaged; you've overstrained it. If you go on overstraining it, you'll lose it altogether. Give it a rest. Do you understand me? Give it a rest. All these repressions you've been so proud of—don't interrupt, you *have* been proud of them, subconsciously proud—all these repressions are wrong. You've bound the wound up tight instead of allowing it to drain. You've been sitting on your mental safety-valves. If you want to jump when you hear a noise, for God's sake jump. It's much better for you than the effort to control yourself. If you're afraid of open spaces, avoid 'em—don't go through them with a loaded gun and pretend you're trying to shoot rabbits. . . ."

Peter blushed scarlet; and the lesson went on. One by one, Heron Baynet detailed the Fears—Fear of Open Spaces, Fear of Closed Spaces, Fear of Time, Fear of Money, Fear of Pain and Fear of Death. To his listening son-in-law, the catalogue seemed inexhaustible.

"Is everybody afraid of something?" asked the patient at last.

"Everybody with any sense," was the answer. "Fear is the beginning of

knowledge.”

“Then what are *you* afraid of?”

“I!” Heron Baynet’s quiet eyes held Peter’s for a full second. “I’m afraid of not knowing enough.”

. . . “Afraid of not knowing enough!” The phrase lingered in Peter’s mind—as Heron Baynet had intended it should linger: and with it, came back a scrap of Greek wisdom, γνωθι σεαυτον [Greek: gnôthi seauton] (“Know thyself”). For the first time in his life, Peter began to *think*.

Hitherto, he had lived automatically; actions had contented him. Now, he started in to reason about his actions. Why had he done thus? Why had he done so? What was the driving-force behind his actions? Why had that driving-force suddenly run down?

The process—study of “cause” as opposed to study of “effect”—fascinated a mind hitherto devoid of introspection; so that by the time he went up to town for his second “lesson,” the following question formulated itself:

“What,” asked Peter Jameson, “is the real cause of this neurasthenia? Is it a mental trouble or a physical one? I’ve had the devil’s own time since I saw you last. I’m as nervy as fourteen cats. My hands wobble all over the place. I don’t seem able to control my memory. I’ve had three nightmares in four nights; and woken up screaming my guts out. What’s wrong—my mind or my body?”

“Can you separate ’em?” said Heron Baynet. “You’re not God. Nor am I. I’m only a doctor: but I don’t know more about both your body and your mind than you do. Now listen. . . .”

So, twice weekly, the educative process went on. And gradually, with the coming of knowledge, fear abated.

## § 2

But Patricia’s fears did not abate. To her, the days were terror; the nights, agony. The very love she bore her husband became a scourge.

For Patricia was not interested in “cases”: her interest lay in Peter the man. And Peter the man, as she saw him now, seemed utterly broken. She lived too close to his body, too far from his mind, to be aware of the gradual cure which was being wrought in him. She saw only the shaking hands, the glaring eyes of neurasthenia; heard only its high-pitched quavering voice, its outbursts of uncontrollable rage, its intolerable depressions. Night after night, Peter’s screams woke her from tormented sleep: day after day his temper fretted her almost to breaking point.

Yet, out of the very love which scourged her, Patricia fashioned healing for him. Calm, clear-eyed, infinitely tender, mastering herself to save him, she walked by his side through the cold shadows—understanding sometimes, pitying always, but faltering never, learning with each painful step Love’s ultimate lesson, the lesson of self-sacrifice.

And always, as she walked beside him, the petty responsibilities of home-keeping—responsibilities she had never known in the sheltered days of their Kensington existence—fretted at her mind. (They are not “literature,” these responsibilities of home-keeping; they are neither dramatic, nor romantic: but, for the women of what we in England call the “middle-class,” they are “life”—the instant problem of existence, its thousand daily pettinesses which may not be postponed. Only the “middle-class” woman, the woman of moderate income who wants not a house but a *home*, will understand how much these responsibilities added to Patricia’s burden!). . . .

One other burden, too, she carried on her willing shoulders through those dark days of January, 1917—the burden of her responsibility for Francis Gordon. Her brain was never quite free from the picture of the long writing-room, the fire in the grate, the dark bookshelves against the cream walls, and the big desk under the window—the desk—and the silver photograph-frame—and the menacing fully-cocked pistol.

“Melodrama!” she used to say to herself. “Melodrama! People don’t kill themselves for love nowadays—they only kill for hate.” But intuition warned her, every time she saw Francis, that he had determined on suicide. She told herself that such a man was not worth saving, that he was a weakling, a coward . . . but her mind never ceased to make excuses for him.

“Supposing,” she used to argue, “that I had lost Peter and the children—supposing that I were a cripple—supposing that I saw nothing ahead of me but a dragged-out, sexless existence, wouldn’t I think of Death kindly, look forward to it as a relief?” . . .

Again and again, she tackled him about his writing; again and again, he gave her the same answer, “It’s a futile game, Pat. Futile! Books are the most useless things in the world. The worst-educated agricultural labourer does more good with his hoe in ten minutes than I can do with my pen in a whole life-time.” “Then why not take a hoe?” Patricia used to say. “Some of us can’t!” answered Francis Gordon. “We’re built to be brain-workers—and brain-work doesn’t satisfy us. Besides. . . .”

Patricia knew too well the meaning of that “Besides,” of the downward glance at his left leg, at the distorted boot and the crutch-stick, which accompanied it. At such

times, she was glad that she had written to "that girl." Perhaps, "that girl" would understand. . . . But January passed; February opened with threats of unlimited submarine warfare; threat turned to actuality—and still no word arrived from Beatrice.

"Why should she answer?" thought Patricia. "Why should she come? It was a crazy letter to have written. Perfectly crazy!"

### § 3

February nineteen-seventeen darkled the shadow which had lain so long across the world; but into those particular shadows which brooded over the life of Patricia Jameson it brought a little ray of light.

Peter began to get better—obviously, perceptibly better. Already, rest, freedom from constraint, and, above all, the "suggestions" with which Heron Baynet had been feeding his damaged mind, told their visible tale. There came periods—sometimes a bare ten minutes, sometimes an hour, and once a whole wonderful afternoon—when he seemed his normal self. There came nights when he slept beside her as a child sleeps—motionless, head pillowed on arm.

At first, she could hardly believe. The sudden changes from ill-tempered gloomy hypochondriac to ordinary human being bewildered her. It seemed to Patricia as though there were two Peters; and she never knew, leaving one Peter alone for a minute, whether she would find the other Peter in his place on her return.

As a matter of psychological fact, there were—at this period in the man's career—not two Peters but at least five.

To begin with, there was Peter the neurasthenic—a huddled frightened soul who lived alone in its black caves of gloom, and still prayed with whining ingratiating for death. At this creature, the new soul of Peter Jameson—Heron Baynet's creation—used to laugh. "You're a fraud," the new soul said to it, "an utter fraud. Call yourself a soul. Absurd! You're physical. Do you understand? Purely physical. If my body hadn't got that knock on the head you'd never have existed at all." Then, there was the original soul of Peter which contented itself with the assertion that both its confrères were non-existent, phantoms of the imagination: also the soul of "P.J.," sometime a Gunner in Kitchener's Army, who cared for nothing in the world except the whereabouts and well-being of the Fourth Southdown Brigade (this soul was particularly active at post-time or when reading the newspapers); and lastly, there was the soul of Peter Jameson, worker by instinct, who had begun to want employment. This last Peter spent many profitless hours in the garden, watching Fry



dawdle through his work, prowling about the stables, annoyed that they should be horseless, or slipping into the garage to inspect the dust-sheet-shrouded Crossley—and a few profitable ones with old man Tebbits and his son Harry, a blond giant of indomitable labour.

But the Peter of Patricia's dreaming—Peter the lover—was still fast asleep!

Still, he grew better—obviously, perceptibly better: and for the moment that betterment satisfied his wife's reason. The other Patricia, the unreasonable love-hungry Patricia, contented herself once more with the thought of palship. . . .

Towards the end of the month, a blizzard swept the Thames Valley, almost isolating them. Their regular callers—Parson Smithers, Doctor and Mrs. Wainwright, the Misses Rapson (who kept prize chows and were always trying to dispose of one: "a sweet doggie, Mrs. Jameson, and such breeding"), and the few other gregarious creatures whom neither Patricia's stand-offishness nor Peter's nerves had defeated—left them alone for a whole week.

Sunflowers, red roof snow-covered, looked like a house on a Christmas card. The road to Arlsfield was just passable; but the footpath to Glen Cottage lay three feet deep under crumbly drifts.

"I think I'll go over and see Francis," said Peter, one morning. "Poor old chap, he won't be able to get out much in this."

"Hadn't you better wait till this afternoon?" Patricia looked at her husband across the breakfast-table. "Then we can go together."

His eyes met hers steadily; there was a positive twinkle in them.

"I shan't take the twelve-bore," remarked our Mr. Jameson.

She postponed the children's lesson-time a good half-hour—just for the pleasure of slipping out of the house after him, of concealing herself behind Tebbits' snow-thatched rick to watch his stocky figure toiling downhill.

He came back in time for lunch, very out of breath but very delighted with his achievement; announced that, "Agoraphobia had been bloodily repulsed."

"And how was Francis?" smiled Patricia, forgetting her usual "Language, Peter!" in excitement at this tangible proof of recovery.

"Francis!"—Peter hesitated a perceptible second. "To tell you the truth, Pat, I've been rather bothered about Francis. He's brooding about something or other. His legs, I suppose. *Have* you noticed anything?"

"No," lied Patricia. "I haven't noticed anything."

"May be only my imagination," decided Peter. "But I don't like the look of him somehow. He ought to consult that father of yours. However, he seemed better this morning. He's got a new bee in his bonnet—America."

"What about America?" Patricia pricked up her ears.

"Well, as far as I could make out, this submarine campaign—according to Francis—is going to bring America in. Once America comes in—also according to Francis—the war's over; the English-speaking races are re-united; and we're in for a hundred years of peace."

"Oh, is that all?" said Patricia—who was thinking of Beatrice Cochrane.

"Yes, that's all."

Peter did not tell his wife that his "bother" about his cousin had not been allayed, but rather accentuated, by the phrase, "If I could just live to see that come off, old boy, I'd die a happy man," with which Francis had closed the topic. . . .

## § 4

March cleared the snow from the hills. Already, the leafless trees seemed hinting of springtime; already Patricia's crocuses made an orange carpet under the walnut-tree. But Peter Jameson was not thinking of crocuses. As leave-time grew shorter, so thoughts turned more and more to the Brigade. Sandiland, now a Major, wrote a long gossipy letter. Could Peter get back to Beer Battery? Had Peter heard about the new Army Artillery Brigades, about six-gun batteries? Had Peter seen Lodden? Of course, the show wasn't what it used to be—still, some of the old gang were carrying on. Conway would be glad of a sixth for poker. Charlie Henry had got his second pip. Merrilees sent his kind regards. Purves was home—Sandiland didn't think he'd come out again. The "Brat" was acting Adjutant. Mr. Black had been given a commission. "And R.," the letter concluded, "is playing up for a Brigadiership. He'll get it too."

The war had seemed a thousand miles from Sunflowers, but Sandiland's blurred handwriting brought it back with a rush. Pictures—Heron Baynet had taught his son-in-law all about brain-pictures—formed themselves in Peter's mind. He saw war again, the whole nauseating fascinating panorama of war. Did he want to go back to it? "Not much!" said our Mr. Jameson.

But would he go back? Would he have to go back? If he went back, would he be able to stick it? These questions perturbed Peter; and he began testing himself, overhauling the machinery of his mind. Deliberately, he conjured up the worst of his "out there" experiences; saw them clear-pictured at their limit of horror.

The process strained his new will-power very nearly to breaking-point. Twice, —after particularly terrible visions—he abandoned hope. The old reproach of "coward" formulated itself in his brain.

Then he began to make excuses for himself: "It was absurd to go back. Unpatriotic. Unfair to the men. His nerve might give out in a crisis. He might panic; make some ghastly mistake, involving not only his own honour but the lives of others." . . . This last thought nauseated him; and finally he defeated it.

His physical condition, curiously enough, the man omitted to consider.

"I'll go back," said P.J., "be damned if I won't go back. Self-respect demands it of me. What would happen to the country if everybody who had the slightest excuse stopped at home!"

He began to think about the country, not nebulously but as Something Definite. There were only two classes of people in any country—Citizens and Parasites. The Citizen lived *for* the country; the Parasite lived *on* the country. In time of War, the able-bodied citizen had one clear duty—to fight. And he must fight to his last gasp. Any other argument was pure eye-wash.

Peter figured the problem out in his favourite rowing-terms. You had to pull your own weight in the boat. If you didn't, you became a "passenger." Racing-eights couldn't afford "passengers." And you had to "pull your own weight" from pistol-crack to winning-post. Otherwise, *you*—not the other seven oarsmen and the cox but *you*, you yourself—lost the race; but you didn't lose it for yourself, you lost it for the School.

He tried to get round this by arguing: "But we can't all be in the Eight. The Eight is a picked body. Besides somebody has to make the boat, the oars: otherwise one couldn't row at all."

"Specious!" decided our Mr. Jameson, "very specious. But it doesn't apply to me. I'm in the Eight—a picked man. I'm trained to row—not to make oars. This is my privilege. If I throw it away—if I refuse to row. . . ." And he thought of Pat's brother-in-law, Sir Hubert Rawlings, tricked out in "colours" he had not earned, running along the tow-path, barking encouragement to the rowers.

"Swine," said Peter—and this time he spoke aloud.

His mind was made up: he would finish the course.

## § 5

. . . And the doctors laughed at him. They laughed very kindly; but all the same, they laughed.

Heron Baynet began the disillusionment when he signed the "opinion" demanded by the Medical Board.

"You haven't got a dog's chance," said his father-in-law. "Not a dog's chance.

Look at yourself in the glass; and be reasonable. I'll certify you cured of shell-shock if you insist. But what about your physical condition? You've lost three stone in weight: you admit you sweat at the slightest exertion: and your lungs wouldn't pass a medical student if you made him three-parts tight before he tested 'em."

"All the same," said Peter, stubbornly, "I'm going to have a shot for it."

Heron Baynet worded that opinion very carefully. Neither as doctor nor as father-in-law did he wish his patient to fall into the clutches of bureaucratic medicine. For although, after two years of agitation, the War Office had at last consented to admit the existence of neurasthenia, although neurasthenia was to have its own Medical Staff, its special "clinics" for treatment, its special recovery hospitals, so far, very little had been accomplished. Heron Baynet knew that there were at least thirty thousand cases to be treated—and recovery accommodation for about three thousand. The remainder . . . Heron Baynet did not like to think about the remainder: he had heard their screams too often, walked too many nights among the wards where they lay—each man's distracted mind poisoning his neighbour's. Therefore Heron Baynet did not write the word "neurasthenia" on the opinion he gave about his son-in-law: instead he wrote . . . "is still suffering, in my opinion, from slight debility."

"Is that the best you can do?" asked Peter.

"Yes," the doctor dried his crabbed handwriting with a vicious blow of the tortoise-shell blotting-pad, "and I've perjured my medical soul by writing the word 'slight.'"

Two days later, as he waited his turn for examination in a long draughty corridor, Peter drew the opinion from his tunic-pocket; re-read it with great care—and tore the paper to shreds.

He might just as well have produced the document. Nothing he could say to the three over-kind men in khaki made the slightest difference. They entered up papers; they examined papers; they made him take off his tunic; they made him put it on again. Then with great politeness they turned him out of the room.

"Well?" asked the President, a white-haired gentleman with three medal-ribbons and gold-rimmed eye-glasses.

The two younger members of the Board looked at him doubtfully. "What do you think, sir?"

"Done in," said the President laconically. . . .

They sent for Peter and put the position to him. "Go into a nursing-home—or resign your commission. Either way you'll never be fit for active service again."

Peter thought the matter over for fifteen seconds; then he said, "Very good, sir.

I'll chuck it."

They entered up more papers; certified him for a temporary pension. They advised him to live in the country; and forgot to acknowledge his meticulous salute. "Next officer, please," Peter heard behind him as his spur-chains clanked down the corridor.

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Once in the open air, he found himself trembling all over. He let himself tremble. He could tremble till Kingdom Come if it amused him. Trembling passed. He lit a cigar; hailed a taxi.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver.

Peter was conscious of three distinct impulses: to have a drink by himself, to stand somebody else a drink, and to be stood a drink by somebody.

"The Savoy Hotel," said the man who had finished the course.

# *PART THIRTY*

## THE COMMENCEMENT OF DREAMS

### § 1

Peter Jameson was no “hero,” only an average decent human being who had gone out to fight the two-legged Beasts which threatened his country, very much as his ancestors might have gone out to wage war against the four-legged beasts which threatened their caves. And being an average human being, his feelings—as the taxi whirled him Savoy-wards—expressed himself in crude song. “And another little drink wouldn’t do us any harm,” sang Peter Jameson. . . . It must be admitted that he sang execrably.

He overpaid the driver; swung through the revolving door; turned left past the grill-room; and made for the bar. It was just one o’clock, and the place hummed with drinking men.

“Good God,” said a voice, “here’s old P.J.”

Peter looked up and recognized Major Conway. The big black-haired sportsman stood, riding-cane in one hand, sherry-cobbler in the other, among a little knot of subalterns.

“What’ll you have?” he asked.

Peter decided on a Martini; swigged it down; stood a round to the party.

“When are you coming out again?” said the Major; and being told the news, “Lucky devil. Wish I were out of it. Wish I were lyin’ on a long chair in the Tanglin Club at Singapore, with an *ejao* at my elbow and a Manila cheroot stuck in my face. You ought to try the F.M.S.,<sup>[15]</sup> P.J. This country’s no good for a white man. Too many sanguinary restrictions.”

The subalterns melted away, and the two friends sat down at one of the little round marble-topped tables. “Nother drink?” suggested Conway. “Champagne cocktail?”

“All right”—Peter nodded to the waiter—“but you’ll lunch with me.”

“Sorry, old thing; but I’ve got a bird meeting me at Romano’s. Can’t afford to waste time on leave. All right for you—you lucky devil—you’re out of it.” He finished his cocktail, strode off.

“Lucky devil?” mused Peter. “I wonder if I am.” The first fine exhilaration of freedom had worn off already. He was “out of it!” He looked down at his cord

breeches, his high boots, his chained spurs. “Out of it,” thought Peter. “Cast! like some rotten hairy.<sup>[16]</sup>” . . .

Lunch, alone at a pillar-table in the crammed restaurant, proved an expensive fiasco. The music annoyed, the waiter fidgeted. Half way through, he got an attack of nerves; his left hand shook so that he could hardly hold his fork. Coffee arrived ten minutes after the sweets—stone-cold. Peter paid his bill disgustedly; retrieved cap and cane from the cloak-room; looked up his train; and passed out into the courtyard.

The usual baggage stood piled on the pavement—a miscellaneous collection, “Saratogas,” “Innovations,” flat cabin-trunks and dome-topped portmanteaux.

“People still travelling, I see,” said Peter to the commissionaire.

“Yes, sir. The *George Washington* arrived yesterday. Taxi, sir?”

“Thanks. No. I’ll walk for a bit.”

Half way down the Strand, another attack of nerves came on. He would be late for his train—he would miss his train. . . . “Undoubtedly,” thought Peter, “those chaps were right when they told me to live in the country.”

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[15] Federated Malay States.

[16] Army term for draught horses.

## § 2

Once at Paddington Station—he had taken another taxi and was twenty-five minutes too early)—Peter felt perfectly calm again. Twenty-five minutes seemed an enormous time: he inspected each of the three bookstalls; bought *Punch*, *John Bull* and *The Tatler*; lounged into the refreshment-bar for a last drink; was told he couldn’t be served after two-thirty; expostulated vainly—and made number four platform just in time to swing the door of a first-class carriage as the train got under way.

In his excitement, Peter had not noticed that the compartment was a non-smoker. Now, seeing a girl seated in the far corner of it, he flung his cigar-butt out of the window, put his cane on the rack, and settled himself down with his rather-crumpled papers. The train glided out of the station; started worming its way between smoky houses towards the country.

For a few minutes, Peter busied himself with *John Bull*—Horatio Bottomley

was rather amusing. Bottomley had just been to the front, Bottomley had been telling Douglas Haig how to run the Army. "Good old Horatio!" thought Peter. . . . Then he became aware that the girl was watching him. He looked up, and her eyes turned away.

The face seemed somehow familiar. Peter forgot all about Horatio; began to study his companion. At first, she did not strike him as pretty: her colouring was too pale, much paler than Patricia's; her eyes, from his transient glimpse of them, he imagined to be gray, pale gray; the hair, as far as hat revealed it, held the colour of ripe barley—palest gold; curved cheek, lobe of close-set ear, dimpled but resolute chin, clean-cut nostrils, all made the same impression of paleness. But the dark eyebrows, long lashes, and red bow of mouth redeemed her pallor; heightened it to significance.

"A very pretty girl," thought Peter at second glance.

She was dressed with extreme simplicity: dark blue coat and skirt, coat rather long, skirt pleated; blouse of pale silk, high at neck; gray doeskin gloves on slender hands. Patent-leather shoes and black silk stockings seemed moulded to the attractive feet and ankles. Peter judged her of medium height; put her age at twenty-three. . . .

The certainty that he knew her face grew to conviction. . . . He continued to study her over the top of his paper. She had nothing to read; seemed quite content to watch the outskirts of London—factories, fields, canal-banks, a church among greenery, an empty golf-course—as they slid past the carriage windows. Peter noticed, in the rack above her head, a suit-case of dark purple leather: but neither label nor monogram on the suit-case gave any clue to the girl's identity.

Passing West Drayton, she turned round suddenly; and their eyes met again.

"Would you care to look at one of my papers?" asked Peter, tentatively proffering *The Tatler*.

"Thank you so much," said the girl. Her voice, low and perfectly accented, betrayed no hint of shyness. "It was nice of you to throw away your cigar. But I don't mind a bit if you want to light another."

"Oh, I don't want to smoke. Really, I don't. I say"—Peter, no ladies' man, felt thoroughly uncomfortable; bit off the question. "Yes"—began the girl.

He plunged in. "It's frightfully stupid of me, of course—I mean, the question sounds perfectly idiotic—but I'm certain I've seen you before—somewhere or other."

The girl laughed. "And I've been thinking the same about you ever since you opened that carriage door. You"—she hesitated—"you're terribly like somebody I



used to know very well. Only we can't have met before, because I only landed in England for the first time yesterday evening. . . . Unless. . . ."

She stared at him, positively stared; dumb with excitement.

"Unless what? . . ." asked Peter. He too felt himself on the verge of some amazing disclosure.

"Unless you're Mr. Gordon's cousin Peter. . . ." His look alone told the girl all she wanted to know; and she rushed on, tripping over her words. . . . "You are. I felt certain of it. You're Patricia's husband, and you live at a house called Sunflowers, and you've got two children, and you're in the tobacco business, at least you were in the tobacco business, and you've been wounded and, and, and—*is* Mr. Gordon quite well?"

"He was yesterday. I didn't see him before I came up this morning. And"—Peter's mind leaped to the only possible conclusion—"your photograph's still on his writing-table."

"Oh!" She did not blush; but a faint rose tinged the pallor of her cheeks. "Is it?"

For a moment, neither spoke. Then Beatrice said: "But weren't you expecting me?"

"Expecting you! Why, I don't even know your name. But that's just like Francis—I mean like he is now—never tells anybody anything."

The train rattled through Slough Station.

"Mr. Gordon doesn't even know I'm in England. It was Mrs. Jameson who wrote to me; and I cabled her ten days ago; they wouldn't let me cable the port of arrival or the sailing-date."

"*Pat* wrote to you!" Incredulity drove Peter's voice up into his head.

"Yes. I—I thought she'd have told you. Perhaps I oughtn't to have said anything about it. And I sent her a telegram from the boat as soon as we got in."

"Well," said Peter, "I don't know about the telegram. That may have come some time today. But we've had no cable delivered. It couldn't have come without my knowing it. Besides—"

Arrival at Maidenhead Junction interrupted further conversation.

## § 3

Arlsfield Post Office does not function after lunch on Tuesdays. Telegrams are telephoned from Henley to Little Arlsfield; and if "Little Arlsfield" (which happens to be a grocery store) is not too busy, the grocer's boy delivers them sometime or other on a rickety push-bike.

All afternoon—it was a wonderful sunlit day of late March—Patricia, children at her heels, had been pottering about the garden of Sunflowers. Prudence the pig had been duly scratched till she grunted with delight; they had watched Fry sowing his peas; inspected and re-inspected the three broodies lying close under their coops in the paddock; made the round of the outhouses and the orchard; sat under the walnut-tree, and tested the new lawn-mower on the sunk lawn.

“Mummy’s got something on her mind,” observed Evelyn. “She hasn’t said anything for ages.”

Patricia smiled down on the two furry hats. “Time for tea, kids,” she said. “Run along indoors. Mummy wants to be alone.”

She watched them dart into the house; ringlets tossing, bare legs twinkling under their short red skirts. Yes! She *had* got “something on her mind.” . . . And the children were getting altogether too observant: they ought to go to school. . . . Supposing Peter had got his own way—supposing “those doctors” had passed him fit for service—how stupid men were—stupid—as if Peter were fit for anything except to be taken care of—in his own house—by his own wife. . . .

She heard the ring of a bicycle-bell; heard the gate creak on its hinges; ran up from the lawn onto the gravel drive. The podgy grocer’s boy plucked at his cap, handed her two telegrams.

“Any answer, mum?”

“No. There’s no answer,” She stood there, opened envelopes in one hand, message-forms in the other; wordless, heart beating quickly. For the fraction of a second, she forgot her anxiety about Peter. Beatrice Cochrane had not failed. Beatrice was in England. Beatrice might be at Sunflowers any moment. The first telegram, “Sailing George Washington,” had been held up by the censor; the second. . . .

“Oh, bother the telegrams,” thought Patricia. “I must get the spare room ready at once—I ought to fetch her from the station—it’s too late now—she’ll probably get a taxi—I hope to goodness Francis doesn’t turn up for tea.”

All the time she was supervising Elizabeth’s bed-making, fire-making, papering of drawers and turning-out of wardrobe, Patricia’s imagination played about Beatrice Cochrane. What on earth was she going to say to her; how explain? What would Beatrice do? Would she go to Francis at once? “Of course she will,” said Patricia. “I should. I wouldn’t wait a moment.”

Neither then, nor for many days, did Patricia stop to consider the miraculousness of Beatrice’s war-time journey. The romance of the girl’s coming sufficed its hour.

Yet the journey’s self was a romance: a romance of one girl’s persistence. There

had been so many difficulties—her parents, the U. S. passport office, British Admiralty regulations; but Beatrice, smile in her eyes and fear at her heart, surmounted them one by one. The call came! and she must answer the call. Nothing else mattered. . . .

Beatrice was thinking of these things as the taxi circled away from Henley Station; took the Harpsden road. So much lay behind her; so much she had yet to face. Of the past, nothing remained except the big trunk clumsily roped beside the driver, the suit-case at her feet.

This England amazed her. She had expected to find at least some semblance to her own country; but, except for the language, everything seemed foreign—foreign and rather hostile. Also, nobody cared. Personalities didn't exist. She was Beatrice Cochrane: she told herself this several times, as though she might forget it—and for all England cared she might have been Sally Smith. England had welcomed her gruffly in the pitch darkness of a choppy sea; pitch darkness out of which men from low decks had shouted to men on high. England had decanted her as an "alien"; fussed over her passport; shoved her into a train; told her to pull down the blinds in case of air-raids—and left her to her own devices. . . . The rest of her journey seemed to Beatrice's fantasy a threading of her way through millions of soldiers. She had never seen so many soldiers. And nobody cared!

Even the soldier at her side—the thin careworn man who looked so like Francis—didn't seem particularly interested. After his first spasm of surprise, he had subsided into Englishness. Apparently, he took it for granted that she was going to stay with him, to marry his cousin. Obviously, he neither knew nor wanted to know what his wife had written to her, or why.

"Jolly, isn't it?" said Peter. "The country, I mean."

"Yes. Very—jolly." She didn't really think it "jolly"; she thought it rather disappointing. And they were going too fast to see much more than hedges and fields switching by. The fields looked very small; the roadside cottages they passed, very modern.

"Is Sunflowers far from Henley?" she asked.

"About another five miles."

A golf-course flashed by; more hedges; a tumble-down-looking farm-house. She began to think, shyly, about Francis. What would he say to her, she to him? Had she done right in dashing half across the world at a letter from an unknown Englishwoman? . . .

Peter leaned forward, said to the driver: "Take the Arlsfield road when you come to it. Straight on through the village and then up to Tebbits' Farm."

The man merely nodded. They came to a village-green; shot across it. More hedges—a red-brick townlet. Now, the road rose straight ahead of them; looking forward over her bobbing trunk, Beatrice saw a tree-crowned ridge.

“Oh,” she said suddenly, “what a lovely house!”

“That’s Sunflowers.” He did not seem particularly proud of the place; but he jumped out of the car politely enough; swung the gate for it to enter; ran to the front door. The door was open; and Beatrice saw a woman standing in the doorway—a tall golden-haired woman.

“Pat,” ejaculated Peter, “there’s a girl—”

“I know,” said Patricia, “I’ve been expecting her.”

The next moment, Beatrice found herself being helped out of the car; shaken hands with; asked if she’d like to wash before tea.

“I must ask Peter one question first; you don’t mind, do you? He’s just been up for his Board, and I want to know what they’ve done to him. Peter!”

“Yes, dear. . . .”

Beatrice tried not to listen; but she couldn’t help hearing the brief colloquy: “What happened?” “Oh, they fired me out. *Napoo. Fini.*” Then Patricia took her by the arm; rushed her through a brightly furnished hall, up some blue-carpeted stairs to a chintz-curtained room—and there, without any warning at all, her hostess burst into tears.

The American girl put a tentative hand on the English-woman’s arm: “What is it? Oh, do tell me what it is? Has anything happened to Mr. Jameson—anything bad, I mean?”

“No, nothing bad. Just something wonderful”—Patricia smiled through her tears. “Excuse me for welcoming you so stupidly. But it’s been such a strain—nearly three years of it—and now that it’s really over, I”—she dabbed viciously at her eyes—“I’m a little upset, that’s all. Do please forgive me, Miss Cochrane.”

“Forgive?”—Beatrice’s gray eyes smiled up into her new friend’s face. “It’s I who ought to be forgiven. You wanted to talk to each other—and I was in the way. Do go down to him. I’ll be quite all right. . . .”

For answer, Patricia kissed the girl’s cheek. “My dear, I wouldn’t have him see me cry for anything in the world. That was why I ran you up the stairs so quickly.” She stepped to a bell-push by the fireplace; rang. A servant appeared. “Bring up Miss Cochrane’s bag, please, and tell Mr. Jameson we’ll be down for tea in twenty minutes.”

Beatrice, unpinning her hat at the mirror on the oak toilet-table, thought to herself, “Well, some of them care anyway.”

“And now, my dear”—her hostess’ voice interrupted reverie—“let’s talk sensibly. . . .”

When the two women at last came arm-in-arm down the staircase, it seemed to Peter Jameson as though it was Beatrice who had been crying; but she talked happily enough through tea-time—and refused his escort beyond the ricks of Tebbits’ Farm. Peter, watching the slight figure dwindling down the meadow-path into the mist of a March twilight, could not help thinking to himself, “A girl like that is much too good for poor old Francis.” Then, remembering that he had a bone to pick with Patricia, he strode rapidly back to Sunflowers.

## § 4

Francis Gordon sat at his great desk by the open window. All day he had been conscious of springtime, of a stir in his veins, a longing, a dissatisfaction. What did springtime or any time matter to him—to Francis Gordon? All his real springtimes lay behind: in front, stretched nothing but a gray void of seasons—hopeless and lonely. His brave days had gone down in dust. He was a cripple—a drag on the swift wheels of humanity—clog in a bright machine. And his one puny Power, the power of words he had once deemed so strong, that too availed nothing. “To write!” he thought, “O God, to *write* when the world’s hand is on the sword-hilt. . . .”

He looked out across Arlsfield Park. The sun, just dipping behind crest-line, irradiated the broad avenue of close-bitten turf. Feeding bunnies made sable dots all about the green: a herd of deer, antlered shadows, moved in and out among the new-leafed chestnut trees. At avenue’s end, the hills swelled blue-purple to a rose wash of sky. . . .

But sunset’s beauty made no appeal to the heart of Francis Gordon. It felt cold, the heart within him, heavy with the sorrows of the world. Sunsettings and sunrisings—beauties of inanimate senseless things—God’s mockeries at humanity! God? . . . The man laughed.

As if there were a God! He—whoever He might be—was no god, but a devil, a torturer. Yet men tricked themselves into this idea of godhead. Every cruelty in the world had been perpetrated in the name of some deity. The very Beasts in Gray wore His Name for device. And he, Francis Gordon, in the pride of his brain, had submitted to such trickery. For the sake of this fool-god, he had renounced the one woman.

In return for that renunciation, the fool-god had promised him the Power of Words. He was to write, to spend his life at this stupid desk. . . .

Meanwhile, *men* fought. . . .

He began to think of his own tiny share in that great fighting. Even there, he had not played a man's part. Better to be one of those tortured men he had seen in the prison-camps of the Beast, than—a spy. Yes, a spy—it came down to that in the end. If only he had killed one Beast, killed it with his own hands, squeezed the life-blood from its foul throat. . . .

Now, thought of the Beast obsessed him. The horrors he had seen in the Land of the Beast danced uncleanly sarabands in his brain. And God, the gentle Jesus black-coated priests still whined about on Sundays, God permitted these horrors. . . . Better then, the old gods, Thor and Odin, whose priests dipped hands in blood and slew. . . .

A vast wave of hatred surged over the man's soul. There could be no happiness on earth until the Beast was exterminated; male and cub and female, the Beast must perish. There must be one great killing! With fire and sword, men must traverse the Country of the Beast: not only the Beast, but all his works—his handiwork and his mind-work, the corrupting thought and the corrupting accomplishment—all these must be wiped out, the very memory of them be obliterated. . . . And after that, there should be no more gods, neither Jesus nor Jehovah, neither Thor nor Odin—only Men, men and women, walking a new clean earth, unafraid of any Beast or any god. . . .

In his hatred, it seemed to Francis Gordon as though Power had come back to him. In this great killing, words too might play their part. Not the words of any fool-god, but the words of a cripple—a cripple who knew that there was neither god nor devil, but only Man, man and the Beast. . . .

And suddenly a Voice spoke to Francis Gordon, a stern clear Voice from the heart of the sunset: "Thou Fool," cried the Voice. "Thou blind Fool! If the Beast perish, man also perishes. For this is God's Purpose."

But the mind of the man answered the Voice out of the sunset: "There is no God. I, a cripple, am greater than any god. In mine own mind, have I renounced Thee. Thou art the Liar of the World. There is no god save Man."

And God said: "Dost thou deny Me?"

"Aye," answered the man, "by the existence of the Beast, I deny Thee. By my own courage, I deny Thee. By the power which is mine, I deny Thee. By every tortured body in this world, and by my own tortured body, I deny Thee."

"Yet thou hearest me," said God.

Now, it was Francis Gordon who spoke. His twisted body rose from its seat by the desk; his eyes looked unafraid into the heart of the darkling sunset. "There is no

god. God's purpose is a fraud and a lie. This voice which I hear is the lying voice of my own mind."

Very faintly came the answer out of the sunset: "I am in thy mind as I am in thy body. Both by thy mind and by thy body, I send thee a Sign."

Then it seemed to Francis as though some veil had been drawn back from across the world; as though, for the first time, he saw God's Purpose plain. Never while earth endured would the Beast utterly perish: for God had created the Beast even as He created man to subdue the Beast. Without this menace of the Beast, man's finest attribute—the very manhood of him—would atrophy. He would become flabby, emasculate: and in his flabbiness, he would perish.

And looking into his own mind as the Voice bade him, Francis Gordon saw for the first time the true meaning of this dream he had christened, for want of better name, "Anglo-Saxondom." Anglo-Saxondom was Man's bulwark against the Beast: the spirit and essence of Liberty: a federation not of leagues and treaties, of obligations and entangling alliances, not even of common blood—but a Federation of Sentiment: a tie of mutual thought and mutual speech and mutual Ideals. So long as this Federation, the Federation of the English-speaking races, held together, the world could be safe from the Beast: for this Federation was selfless, it sought no domination save the domination of Good over Evil: it was of the Spirit, not of the Flesh; friend of every decent human being, foe to every Beast; God's gift for suffering Humanity. . . .

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A coal, dropping in the grate, aroused him from his dreaming. It had grown almost dark. Trees and turf and hills beyond were all veiled in misty shadows—things of the twilight, ghosts of a world. And with the glory of the sunset, the glory of his visioning departed.

Doubt tore him as with pincers. Once again, this Voice he called God had lied to him. The English-speaking races were not united, could never be united. He had imagined a vain thing. . . .

"Both by thy mind and by thy body, I send thee a Sign." The words of the Voice came back to him. Mockery! The Voice had lied. There was no God. . . .

Voices! He must get away from voices. Always, he heard voices. A second ago it had been God's voice: now, it was the voice of a girl, *her* voice. He could have sworn he heard her voice. Some one was coming upstairs. Some one was opening the door. . . .

"Francis!"—more voices, would he never be done with voices—"Francis!"

His eyes, jerked suddenly from dreaming, saw a shadow glide across the room

towards him. He felt his heart give a great leap as though he were dying.

“Beatrice!” he stammered, “Beatrice!”

Words went from them. They stood speechless. Their hands met in the twilight. Lips faltered to lips. Then she was in his arms; and God grew real at last. . . .



# PART THIRTY-ONE

## OUT OF IT

### § 1

Beatrice Cochrane stayed on at Sunflowers while the formalities of her marriage were being arranged. Patricia found her very difficult to understand. She combined, bewilderingly, idealism and common-sense, a feeling for poetry with unfailing judgment of practical values. Educationally, the Englishwoman found herself quite overmastered: the comprehensiveness of Beatrice's college-training made British standards seem entirely out of date. And yet, in a way, Beatrice was old-fashioned; she lacked, Patricia thought, adaptability; inclined to let "ought to be" dominate "is." Sometimes, this lack of adaptability irritated Patricia.

Beatrice, on her part, was equally puzzled. She had, as yet, no key to the English mentality. England, regarded from the Sunflowers viewpoint, appeared to her a country of postponement and acceptance. Rightly or wrongly, a thing *was* thus and so. If right, why seek to improve. If wrong—extraordinary, she thought, how easily the English admitted a thing could be wrong—put up with it. Sometimes, this putting-up-with-things made Beatrice perfectly furious!

But in spite of these fundamental Anglo-American differences Patricia loved Beatrice, and Beatrice—frankly—adored Patricia. At the end of three days, not only "Mrs. Jameson," but "Mr. Jameson" and "Mr. Gordon" disappeared from the American girl's vocabulary: and on the evening of April the fifth—when the last remnants of Peter's wine-cellar celebrated America's entry into the lists—it was Beatrice who proposed: "Pat! Because, just for once, she forgot to behave like an Englishwoman."

At which reference to forbidden topics, Peter's wife blushed perfectly scarlet, and looked appealingly to Francis for protection. But Francis Gordon only laughed, "It's the least you deserve for interfering."

"And I think," went on Beatrice, "that while drinking Pat's health we ought not to forget another person whose name also begins with P. . . ."

"Meaning me?" interrupted Peter.

"No, sir,"—her eyes twinkled with fun—"meaning my future"—she laughed outright—"butler. Prout!"

"Lord," said Francis Gordon. "This is what comes of getting engaged to a

Democrat.”

“Republican,” corrected Beatrice. “And I don’t believe you know the difference yet.”

Her fiancé subsided into adoring silence. . . . For already even the unobservant Peter saw quite clearly who would rule the roost at Glen Cottage!

And apparently this tender “bossing” was just the one thing needful to Francis Gordon’s temperament. He expanded under it; became positively human. His very physique seemed to improve: the hopeless shuffle became a mere limp; he carried his head erect, his shoulders unbowed. She forbade him to use the word “cripple”; and for two pins she would have taken away his stick. “But it makes me so interesting,” he protested laughingly. “My dear man”—Beatrice drawled the words in imitation—“there’s only one thing really interesting about anybody.” “And that?” he queried. “Is the work they mean to do in the world.”

On this question of work, the girl brooked no doubting. She believed in his work; and for her sake if for nobody else’s—(“there is nobody else,” he remonstrated: “there’s everybody else in the world,” she told him)—he must succeed. “You’ve got to count,” she said. “You’ve got to be *somebody*.” She did not desire money for him—she had so much money that Francis, when he first heard of it, almost wanted to cry off the marriage; but she did desire success. Until he won that “success,” neither he nor she would move from Glen Cottage. . . .

But as this is only indirectly the tale of Francis and Beatrice, we must not analyse them too deeply. It suffices that they are utterly happy in each other; that Love, which is finer than reason, does not blind but rather gives them clear vision. They know, as they tolerate, each other’s faults: and though Fame has not yet quite come to Glen Cottage, they feel they can already hear the beating of his wings. . . . And if they are a trifle “cranky” on the subject of “Anglo-Saxondom,” if they set the unity of the English-speaking races above the pipe-dreams of the internationalists,—that blame, if blame it be, their very love-story excuses. . . .

## § 2

All through his cousin’s wedding in the little church at Arlsfield, Peter—who gave away the bride—felt conscious of a reasonless but ever-growing depression. It seemed to him as though—Francis married—his last man-friend would vanish. Almost he grudged the veiled girl her obvious happiness. . . .

And this feeling of depression did not wear off as the easy April days slipped by. Rather, it increased. All the man in Peter resented ill-health; resented the lack of male

companionship; resented idleness. And idleness, Heron Baynet assured him, was imperative: two hours of manual labour in the garden and one trip to London about finance, proved the correctness of Heron Baynet's contention.

He began to worry about the future. His pension, thirty shillings a week subject to revision, barely paid a third of his assurance premiums—the children must be sent to school—the expenses of Sunflowers rose hourly with the tide of war-extravagance which had swept over England. "Things can't go on like this," exactly represents Peter's attitude.

He decided to go back into the tobacco-business—and reversed decision as soon as reached. The mere thought of London nauseated him. Somehow, he could no longer imagine himself at a desk. . . . Patricia, consulted on this point, agreed so strenuously that Peter became suspicious. "Why shouldn't I go back?" he remonstrated. "It's the only trade I know. The Imperial would give me a job tomorrow." . . . Nevertheless, he discarded the idea.

The tobacco-business, like the Army, lay behind him. He was out of the one as he was out of the other. But memories of both still haunted his mind. Of the two lives he had lived, he missed the military one most. Maurice Beresford, Elkins, Schornstein and the Bramsons seemed petty figures compared with the Weasel and General Blacklock, Conway and Sandiland and Charlie Henry. But letters from the Brigade dwindled and dwindled, soon ceased altogether; till only an occasional poem by Purves, who continued his conquering campaign in the Press, and Alice Stark's gossip letters to Patricia, reminded of khaki.

For the world, war went on; but for Peter it had stopped dead. He saw it from afar: spectator and not participant. His lack of interest in it amazed him almost as much as the glorious credulity of the civilians with whom he occasionally discussed its official versions—perversions. Finally, in a fit of ungovernable annoyance over a picture of "cheery wounded" after the battle of Messines, he barred the topic altogether. Patricia made no objection; but the children demurred furiously.

"If Daddy isn't going to tell us about killing Germans," threatened Primula one evening, "I shall refuse to go to sleep."

"You bloodthirsty little wretch," began Peter; and till their mother intervened, "bloodthirsty" became *the* school-room adjective.

However, Evelyn and Primula's passion for the word "bloodthirsty" paled into insignificance at the coming of Peter's brother Arthur. Arthur had "got a job" at the Godstone flying-school; and you never knew, as you sat at lessons or romped in the garden, what particular moment might not bring the drone of Arthur's engine, high up in the air, like an enormous bee. He used to come swooping across country, from

behind the trees at the back of the paddock; and you could always tell if it were Uncle Arthur because *his* engine made a funny noise—buzz, stop, buzz, stop, buzz—when he meant to land in Tebbits' pasture. Once, too, Uncle Arthur stunted, really "stunted," for nearly twenty minutes, miles up, right over the roof. . . . But Arthur never repeated that blissful performance; his "falling leaf" proving too much for Peter's nerves.

"You neurasthenic old idiot," growled the flying man, "there's no danger at all. One just shuts off the engine. . . ."

"I know all about that," said Peter, "but to see you turning over and over sideways frightens me out of my wits. Besides, if anything happened, you'd be court-martialled."

"By the Archangel Gabriel, I suppose," grinned Arthur; and soared off into the blue.

"Now that," thought Peter, "is a man's life. Whereas mine." . . . And again depression gripped him.

### § 3

May come gloriously. Hawthorn hedges donned their ruddiest coral; orchard foamed below the gravel terrace; wild cherry spangled blossom against the greenery of new-leaved beech woods beyond the paddock. Peter didn't care. Frankly, he was bored to tears. He wanted something to do. He missed his horses. If you couldn't hunt in May, at least you could ride. What *did* one do with oneself in the country during that rotten month, May? Fish perhaps? He dallied a day with his trout-rod, unearthed some rather dingy flies; hired a push-bike in Arlsfield (Peter detested Arlsfield); and cycled to Henley. The may-fly was on the water; not a fish would bite. Fish on the lower Thames rarely *do* bite. Still, that day re-introduced him to the river.

Next time, he left the trout-rod and took Patricia. Tebbits lent them his trap for the day; and they enjoyed themselves. He sculled her up to Wargrave; she paddled him home down the backwater.

"Good pals, you and I, aren't we, Pat," he said to her as they drove back through the twilight.

"Yes, dear." She had abandoned her love-dreams. Love, as she saw love in the eyes of Francis and Beatrice, was not for her. She must satisfy herself with palship, be content among the ranks and files of matrimony.

"I have been a fool," she thought, "a sentimental fool. Love is not for me. I am

just an average woman, an average middle-class woman. And like all women, I have expected too much of life. Life has been very kind to me; I mustn't grumble. Life has given him back to me. Isn't that enough?"

She looked at the man by her side. He drove steadily, wrist giving to horse's mouth. A loose dust-coat hid the lines of his figure: under it, legs, feet and ankles showed white in boating-attire. Soft hat, brim down-turned, shadowed the thin face, the serious eyes.

Again she thought, "I have been a fool. Life holds nothing better than this: to be one's husband's friend. Love is only for the very young. We are old married people. We have been married over ten years. I will be reasonable. I will content myself with the much that is mine. He has always been good to me. He has always been faithful to me. I have the children."

The mare trotted on, steadily, soberly, resigned to loose bit, to ungalling collar and easy load. Even so, Patricia resigned herself to matrimony. . . .

Peter set down his wife at Sunflowers, drove on to Tebbits' alone. "Back in half-an-hour," he called over his shoulder. "I'll just help the old man unharness Kitty." But old man Tebbits would never unharness the brown mare again! He had died an hour back; painlessly; asleep in the vast wooden chair Charlie had made for him.

"He always slept his few minutes after his dish of tea," explained Miss Tebbits. "And when I tried to wake him, I found I couldn't."

There was no uproar at the farm, no confusion; but none of the labourers had gone home. "He was a good father to us all," said Harry, unbuckling the traces with firm fingers. "I'm making no complaint about him." Sid Dyson, the carter—a heavy-footed shaggy man with grizzled beard—led the mare to her stable. William, a big bent fellow who lived with his mother at Little Arlsfield, came wheeling his mud-encrusted bike from the cowhouse. "Good-night, Mr. Harry," called William. "Good-night to you." The "boy"—("never keep more than one boy—two *talks*," had been one of old man Tebbits' aphorisms)—stood about, now on one leg, now on the other, uncertain of his duty.

"You'd better be off," ordered Harry. The blond giant turned to Peter. "Would you care to see him, sir? . . ."

They had carried the old man as far as the kitchen sofa; spread a patchwork quilt over his limbs. In the scullery, Miss Tebbits was washing up: Peter could hear the trickle of water, the clink of crockery, as he stood gazing down on the gnarled happy face. "Thus, men should die," thought Peter "not. . . ." Old pictures came crowding on his mind; he saw other faces, dreadful faces, faces of young men who should have been alive. . . .

Charlie Tebbits, summoned from Arlsfield, stalked hatless into the room. "He was a good father," said Charlie, "I've no complaint to make about him."

Peter wanted to get away, to leave these two alone with their dead. He held out his hand to Charlie. "I'm sorry." The man gripped it. "He always liked you, sir." Harry followed him out of the kitchen. They walked slowly down the flag-path to the gate.

Peter held out his hand again. "See you tomorrow Harry." The giant fidgeted for a moment; his blue eyes under the golden brows gazed straight into Peter's.

"Father said," began Harry, "that if anything happened to him we was to tell you about that lease."

"What about it?" asked Peter wonderingly.

"Father didn't like signing that lease," went on Harry. "He didn't ought to have signed it neither. That Henley solicitor fellow, he was altogether too sharp. And father got angry with him."

It took half-an-hour before Peter got to the bottom of matters. Apparently, the trouble lay not in the house itself, but in the paddock. House and orchard stood on a little patch of freehold ground—Tebbits' property: but the paddock, like most of Tebbits' land, was leasehold—and Tebbits' lease (an old-fashioned contract) expired with old man Tebbits.

"Well, I don't see it matters," said Peter finally. "You'll keep the farm on, I suppose."

"If we can," said Harry, pulling at his great moustache. "If we can, sir." He clumped heavily back to the house.

# *PART THIRTY-TWO*

## END—OR BEGINNING?

### § 1

Rightly to understand what follows—which is the ending (or the beginning, according to standpoint) of romance—you must recall to memory that Peter the First, grandfather of our Mr. Jameson, who left the country for the town at the commencement of the great English manufacturing era about eighteen hundred and forty, tried his luck in the City of London, and ended his days on the tobacco-farm in Guanabacoa, Cuba; also Peter the Second, father of our Mr. Jameson, and founder of Jameson & Co., Lime Street. Nor must you quite forget Captain “Chips” Bradley, Tessa Bradley, and the exotic Hebraic strain of the Miraflores. For all these played their ghostly parts in the mind of their descendant as he walked that debatable paddock in the warm sunshine of a late May morning ten days after the death of old man Tebbits. . . .

Fry had dug up half-an-acre of that paddock; and already the mauve potato-flower was in bloom above its dark leaves. “Confound it,” thought Peter, “I’m not going to be done out of this paddock. I paid to have it dug up, didn’t I?”

He looked at the two chicken-houses. They would have to be moved. It would take Fry half-a-day to move them. Half-a-day at thirty shillings a week. . . .

And immediately the word “business” formed itself in Peter’s brain. He had never before considered the country in the light of business: the country had been for him a place where town-people made holiday; a rather jolly picturesque kind of place—scenery among which one rode, or killed pheasants, or drove golf-balls. Now he saw the country as the peasant sees it—but the peasant in Peter had been sharpened by a half-a-generation among townfolk.

“It isn’t just *a* business,” he thought. “It’s *the* business. The greatest business in the world. And I’ve been living right in the middle of it for six months without grasping that simple fact.”

Then the Jew in Peter said, quite distinctly, “My boy, there’s money in this.”

Prudence the pig grunted a hint of feeding-time. But to Peter she was Prudence the pig no longer: she was Prudence the breeding sow, and the sooner she went to the boar the better. Pigs! “Little pigs pays all right,” he seemed to hear old man Tebbits speaking. Then imagination outran Tebbits; if little pigs paid to sell, big hogs

paid to rear. "Question of feeding cost," remarked the ghost of Peter the First. . . .

The man in the white flannel trousers, with the belted shooting-coat and the Old Etonian tie, looked at the woods beyond the paddock. Beeches! There were beeches in those woods; beech-mast, roots, all sorts of pig-fodder. He saw an endless procession of hogs, running through the paddock to feed in those woods.

"Damn it," said Peter, "I've got to have the paddock. . . ."

Three hens fluttered up onto the wire-netting round the potato-patch; swayed there a moment; dropped over among the potato-plants. Patricia couldn't make hens pay. Of course she couldn't. They were bad hens. And chicken food was too dear. But if one grew one's own corn. . . .

"Self-supporting," thought Peter suddenly. "Cut the middle-man's profit."

A cow lowed from across the road. Thought process went on. Peasant, soldier, Jew and business-man met round the board-room table of Peter's brain. First the land; then the men to work the land. "Don't pay rent. Buy outright," said Business. "Keep 'em in order," rasped the soldier. "Crops and stock," said the peasant, "crops and stock, stock and crops." "And your markets," whispered the Jew, "never forget your markets. Work to your markets—supply and demand, demand and supply." . . . All of which counsels the old Etonian crystallized into the words, "Why not become a gentleman-farmer?"

"Snobbish idea"—this time Peter spoke aloud. "Gentleman farmer—gentleman business-man—discharged officer would like to sell wine and cigars on commission. Rubbish! A job's a job. The man who does his job is a gentleman: the man who plays with his job is. . . ." The Expeditionary Force epithet sailed blueily into the country air.

From abstract ideas, thought switched automatically to Tebbits' Farm. The position, as far as he could gather from Harry, was this: the Colonel ("damn that Colonel," thought Peter, "why hasn't his wife called on Pat?") did not want to renew old man Tebbits' lease; the Colonel wanted to sell his land; Harry Tebbits couldn't afford to buy it. But he, Peter, could afford to buy it; and if he didn't—here the peasant in Peter grew very angry—somebody else might do him out of this very paddock. "Then sue Tebbits' estate for damage," counselled the Jew. "You don't know anything about farming. You'll make a hash of it like your brother Arthur. Farming's a difficult business, my boy. Why not lend Harry the money? Six per cent and no risk. If he can't make it pay, you foreclose. . . ."

Peter walked slowly back to the house; but the next morning, and the next, and the morning after that, he spent in the paddock. The more he considered this business of farming, the wider its scope appeared. It embraced everything he



needed: plenty of work, limitless opportunities, a bit of a fight, a bit of a gamble, men to boss, horses to ride. And if one could learn to be a gunner in six months, surely one could learn to be a farmer. . . . “In how long?” asked Reason: and Peter realized for the first time his utter practical ignorance. . . .

For two days he abandoned the scheme. Then a milking-time visit to Tebbits’ brought the whole business back. He might not know much about farming; but any ass could see *this* wasn’t right. “Filthy,” said the soldier in Peter, “filthy! Flies and filth and a dung-heap round the corner. That milk would poison a regiment.”

Finally, he decided to talk the whole thing out with Harry. If Harry would come into partnership; if Harry would listen to reason. . . . For already the business-man in Peter had realized that farming on Tebbits lines was a thing of the past; a picturesque anachronism.

“Farming”—Peter must have said this to himself at least a hundred times during those few days—“isn’t just *a* business. It’s *the* business. And like all businesses it’s got to be big. All this talk about small holdings is blather. The small-holder works himself to death for less wages than a dock-labourer.” . . .

It must be admitted that Peter’s first talk with Harry Tebbits frightened that worthy almost as much as “our Mr. Jameson” had frightened Turkovitch in Nirvana days. Still, Harry listened. “Yes, I know we don’t produce as cheap as we might, nor sell as dear as we could,” admitted Harry. “‘Tis the Government’s fault, I’m thinking.”

Peter laughed. “They don’t grow much hay in Westminster, Harry. No English Government ever helped a business-man yet. We’ve got to help ourselves. Now about the milk. Sealed bottles *and* our own deliveries, ‘guaranteed pure,’ ‘from the cow to the kid.’ Ford cars to Reading and Henley. Eggs too, *and* vegetables. Bacon. . . .”

“Bacon!” ejaculated Harry.

“Of course. If little pigs pay, big hogs pay; if it pays people to buy big hogs, it will pay us to kill, cure, smoke *and* retail ’em.”

“We can’t do anything this side of Michaelmas. Lease isn’t up till then,” said Harry, hardly convinced.

“No; but we can do an awful lot of *thinking*.” . . .

. . . And, thinking, thought expanded. With fourteen thousand pounds of capital; and the key-industry of life—what couldn’t a man accomplish? Peter sent for books, pamphlets; buried himself in statistics;—and the more he read the more he convinced himself that the secret of farming was no secret at all. Farming was just like any other business: it depended on two questions—“How cheaply can I produce? How dearly

can I sell?"

"Machinery and marketing," said Peter. "Same old problem."

The spectre of "labour" did not frighten him. Eliminate the middle-man, and there would be enough surplus profits, in the particular business of farming, to give "labour" all it wanted. "Provided," added Peter, "that 'labour' will do its job." Besides, the Tebbits-Jameson farm would be run on co-partnership lines, as the Nirvana factory was to have been. "Share and share," said our Mr. Jameson, "I'll do my job if they'll do theirs. . . ."

At which exact point in his schemes for the future—Peter Jameson fell head over ears in love with his own wife!

How the thing happened: whether he had always been "in love" with her and only just discovered the fact; whether the example of Francis and Beatrice, emerging from the seclusion of honeymoon, influenced him; whether leisure, returning health, heredity, environment, or his growing affection for Sunflowers first started the wheels of passion—it is impossible to say. Remains the fact that he did fall in love with her, head over heels, madly, crazily and unreasonably in love. To elaborate a slang expression much in vogue at the time, "he dived in at the deep end."

## § 2

Peter "dived in" at exactly five o'clock on a gorgeous afternoon in earliest June. They were having tea on the sunk lawn—she, he, Francis, Beatrice, and the two children. And quite suddenly, watching her as she bent over the table, he knew an insane impulse. He wanted to cuddle his own wife, in full sunshine, shamelessly; he wanted "these people" out of the way. Instead, he asked her for another cup of tea!

But this "insane impulse" (so he phrased it to himself) refused to be suppressed. It recurred constantly that day, the next day and the day after. It became an obsession. He argued with it: "Don't be a fool, P.J. She'll think you've gone crazy. You *have* gone crazy. . . ."

Then, he began to *think* about her, as Heron Baynet had taught him to think, in pictures. He saw her kneeling at the altar, on their honeymoon, in Lowndes Square, at Brighton, in Harley Street. Always, she had been his pal. Damn it, he didn't want her for his pal—he wanted to cuddle her. She became of a sudden so attractive that he could hardly sit opposite to her at the dinner-table. . . .

He said to himself: "But what *more* do you want of her? She's yours, isn't she?"

. . .

Followed self-reproach. What a wife she'd been to him! What a wife!! But had

he ever appreciated her? No, he had not. He'd been a perfect cad to her. . . . What a wife! Had she ever grumbled? No, she had not. Had he ever grumbled? Yes, he had. When he lost his money, did she complain? No, she didn't. Did he? Yes, he did . . . et caetera, et caetera. . . .

But the most amazing incident of those most amazing days was the simultaneous recurrence of two mind-pictures. In one picture, he lay on a bed, screens round it, and she looked down on him, love unmistakable in her eyes. In the other—but the other was incredible. He refused to believe that other. “I *have* gone crazy,” he repeated, “perfectly crazy.” . . .

He decided himself the victim of hallucinations; and went on with his farming-plans. . . . But farming-plans could not exorcise the desire to cuddle Patricia, to hold her hand, to tell her that she was the only woman in the world, that he loved her madly. . . .

Finally, he determined to risk it. At the worst, she would only laugh. He realized that if she laughed he would hit her. Courage braced to the sticking-point, he waited his opportunity. . . .

And no opportunity came! They were never alone—except late at night, and “late at night” wouldn't do. It wasn't a “late at night” mood. It wasn't a married mood at all. “Damn it!” said Peter Jameson, “can't a man cuddle his own wife in the middle of the day if he wants to?”

But he couldn't! Something or somebody always interfered: servants, children, visitors, Fry, the house. He began to hate “the house.” “The house” spoiled everything. He must get her away from the house, from Fanny and Elizabeth, from the children, from Fry and “those damn chickens” and Prudence the pig. . . .

At last, the great idea came. To himself, he called it their “second honeymoon”: to her, he said he wanted a “holiday.” The river in June and July was “top-hole”; he'd always wanted to punt—nothing but a punt seemed adequate—from Goring to Oxford, well not exactly Oxford, beyond Oxford, say Godstone. They might punt to Godstone and see Arthur. They might go further up Thames. It depended how he felt. He'd not been feeling very well lately. He wanted a change.

She demurred: one couldn't leave the children. He sulked—cannily. Then he went to see Beatrice.

“You wouldn't mind keeping an eye on things when we're away?”

“But *why* do you want to go?” asked Francis' wife. She had installed herself in the oak-panelled morning-room; looked like a *blonde cendrée* lily in the mellow gloom of its beeswaxed walls.

“Just for a holiday,” prevaricated Peter; but he blushed faintly as he spoke.

“Don’t English people ever tell the truth?” she said understandingly.

He hesitated the fraction of a second before answering: “Very rarely—about that sort of thing.”

Two days later, perfectly unconscious of the web which had been woven round her, Patricia yielded; and they started on the twelfth of June: two very ordinary people with two very ordinary suit-cases and a large luncheon-basket: he in white duck trousers, brogued buskin shoes, and flannel blazer; she in shantung coat and skirt, remnant of Lodden Lodge holidays—écru velours hat, Beatrice’s gift, shading her slumbrous eyes. . . .

### § 3

If you take punt at Hobbs’ Wharf, which banks the mill-creek beside Goring Lock; and glide out through some great morning of river-sunshine, under the white willows of “Nun’s Acre,” past Cleeve Lock ablaze with roses, into that long reach which runs lockless between oak and elm as far as Wallingford: (you will find at Molesey ferry a pleasant hostelry yclept “The Beetle and Wedge,” set a-purpose to hearten weary punters ere they pass under the almost ugliness of a red-brick railroad-causeway): and if, having rested at Wallingford, you pole on, by the narrow cleft of Benson’s Lock; and on, over the broad river-highway, through Shillingford; you will come in the fulness of even-time, past over-arching woods, to the vaulted spans of Clifton Hampden Bridge. . . .

Clifton Hampden’s self is a village of honeysuckled cottages, and quiet lost housen of quiet lost gentlefolk who climb o’ Sundays to the belled Church which looks down on Clifton Hampden’s Bridge and Clifton Hampden’s “Barley Mow.” . . .

But if you love our Thames, who is the father of England even as the sea is England’s great mother (and these twain mate in London Pool for all the world to see), you will not rest overlong at the “Barley Mow.” Father Thames will draw you on, against his own current, past Sutton Courtney’s foaming weirs and Wittenham’s “Plough,” and the mouth of the “Thame” (which is not the Thames, though it serpentine cunningly through flat fields to Dorchester, where, in an Abbey of olden stone, rest the bones of many a saint and many a Norman knight and dame); and on past Dorchester to Abingdon. . . .

At Abingdon, rest you one night—even as Peter and Patricia rested—yet rest not over-late. For beyond Abingdon (and this is a glory of wood and waterland you shall scarce believe) Radley’s flag flaunts, bright as colours at a girl’s bosom, among

the bosoming downs of English oak. . . . Yet even this glory, Father Thames—if he loves you—will bid you leave behind. It shall dwindle astern as the steady pole dives from your hand and the taut body presses you onwards. . . .

Thus, ere river-afternoon is river-evening, shall you raise the plumed smoke-stack of Sandford Mills; and, lingering not, make Iffley, and the meadow-banks beyond Iffley, and Magdalen Tower, and the mellow dome of the Bodleian Library. And haply *you* shall see the old-time Oxford of dreaming spires and leisured youth—not Patricia's khaki-haunted, headstrong, hurrying town. . . .

Oxford passed (and this passing is a sadness, for sloven houses creep down to Thames bank, and Victorian factories blacken the clear stream, and children such as should not be in England dabble thin legs in the mud), Father Thames hesitates among meadow-flats—as you will hesitate between the “Perch” and the “Trout,” neither of which will allure you, for the one is of the beanfeaster and the other (though it was a guest-house in days when Fair Rosamond languished a bow-shot away at Godstone) resounds all day to the drone of the circling 'plane. . . . Wherefore, pole up beyond Godstone: and there, where Father Thames runs young between flag-flower-stems and faded meadow-sweet and sharpening bulrush-spears, may his river-nymphs be as benign for you as they were for Peter and his Patricia on that windless evening of an English June-time. . . .

It seemed to them that they had scarce left Sunflowers behind; and yet it seemed to them as though not only Sunflowers but all their known life lay so far behind them as to be almost out of memory. They had glided out of life, over endless rippleless water, through endless sunshine, into love's own land. But no word of love had these two yet spoken. . . .

The fog of the years still hid them, each from each: only now the fog was all irradiated, a mist of sun-motes; and through the shimmering radiance of that clearing mist, their souls, not yet full-visioned, came peering and afraid. . . .

Many times, in those days of river-sunshine, their souls had caught glimpses of each other; touched, even as their bodies touched in the fragrance of the river-nights. But fulfilment and full-visioning had not yet been given. A strange shy tenderness separated them; locking Peter's lips. . . .

But already, Patricia knew! The knowledge lay deep down in her heart—maiden-knowledge. Her womanhood, her experience, the reasoning powers on which she had prided herself so long, played no part in this secret awareness of love. It seemed to her that she had never been his wife; never borne his children nor tended his house; that she would come to him virgin. And as virgins are aware, so she knew that she would be aware of the time and place appointed for her

## § 4

"I say, Pat, what about tea?"

Peter ran the long racing-punt skilfully to the slip-stage of Eynsham Weir; stood balanced on slanting pole.

She looked up from the cushions. "If you like, dear. Are you feeling tired?"

"A little," he admitted.

The weir-man (there are few locks on the upper Thames) strolled down to help them out; took the luncheon-basket.

"Have to take those bags out before we run her over, I'm afraid, sir. She'll be liable to break her back if we don't."

"Tie her up where she is for a bit. We're not in any hurry." Peter, coat over arm, followed his wife up the slipway.

"Nice," he said, eyes on the river.

To her it was more than "nice." Thames flowed down to them, circling willow-fringed through lush meadowlands, spanned in near distance by a humped bridge of mellow stone. At bridge-end, below toll-house, a farm nestled red among scant trees. Left of them, twin hillocks crested to blue of sky. At their feet, Thames plunged in gurgling gold to the weir-pool, foam-flecked under deep banks. Hitherside the stream, dyked pasturage glowed in the sun. . . .

And not thirty yards from the weir-pool—flies rolled-up, flap open—stood a tent: a perfectly good, apparently unoccupied tent!

All the time they were having their meal—the weir-man indicated a tiny arbour; boiled them hot water on the stove in his one-roomed cabin—thought of that tent obsessed their minds. To whom did that tent belong? Why shouldn't they use that tent? River-inns were hot stuffy places, whereas a tent. . . .

Peter, balancing his third cup of tea on white-flannelled leg, approached the subject diffidently. "I say, Pat," he began, "have you ever thought of camping-out? Rather jolly—camping-out. That tent reminded me. . . ."

"Oh, but we couldn't possibly use *that* tent"—Patricia started packing-up the tea-things—"it's sure to belong to somebody."

"One might as well find out." He rose from the rough bench of the tiny arbour; lounged away; came back in a few minutes, face a little flushed, eyes twinkling.

"The weir-man says that we can use it if we like. 'The gentleman isn't coming down till tomorrow evening.'"

“What gentleman?” asked Patricia.

“The gentleman who owns the tent, I suppose. I say, Pat, do let’s! It’d be a fearful lark. We could go into the town and buy our rations. . . .”

There and then, they settled the matter. The weir-man produced mattresses, blankets, a rug; unpacked the punt; directed them across the dyked pasturage towards Eynsham. And at Eynsham—which is the least interesting, ugliest village between Gravesend and Cricklade—they bought them eggs, and tinned foods, and a loaf of bread, and butter, and candles, and a huge basket of strawberries which Peter discovered hidden away in the dark of a greengrocer’s shop.

Evening began as they dawdled back, parcel-laden, along the high road; turned off from high road across the dyked pasturage. Now, willows screened the ugly village behind. They could see only the bridge, and the two hillocks beyond, and their tent—their very own tent—marking the river-bank. . . .

“It’ll be a frightful lark,” said Peter.

“Won’t it?” she answered.

Of the thing each had at heart, neither dared speech. . . .

## § 5

Twilight had come in gold and gone in crimson: only faintest hints of greens and lilacs still lingered low down on the horizon. Eynsham Bridge was a humped black shadow across the dulled silver of the stream. Eynsham hills stood out in clear sepia against a turquoise sky.

“Good-night,” called the weir-man.

“Good-night,” they called back to him.

Now, they were utterly alone. The weir plunged and gurgled; a fish leaped in the pool. Darker it grew, and darker.

They could hardly see each other across the rug which had served them for dinner-table.

“Shall I light the candles in the tent?” he asked.

“If you like, dear.”

He rose slowly to his feet; and she watched his flannelled figure disappear in the gloom. Light winked from the tent-flap; the tent glowed suddenly, a cone of saffron radiance. . . .

He came back to her, picking his way quietly across the grass; saw that she had not moved. She was aware of him, dropping down beside her in the gloom.

“Pat darling,”—his voice held a new tenderness; his hand, as it sought hers,

seemed to tremble—"I've been wanting to tell you something ever since we started."

Their fingers trembled together, met and twined. His left arm slipped round her shoulders.

"What have you wanted to tell me?"

He drew her close to him. His heart throbbed against her shoulder-blades.

"I don't quite know how to say it." She could feel him blush in the darkness. "It—it isn't the sort of thing one says to one's wife. . . ."

He couldn't go on: he was afraid she would laugh at him.

"What isn't, Peter?" The whisper hardly reached him.

"I mean"—words came stumblingly—"I mean—the thing I wanted to tell you. . . . Pat darling, it isn't very much. It's—it's just that I love you. And you mustn't laugh at me for it."

"Why should I laugh at you, boy?" she whispered.

"I don't know. Why shouldn't you laugh at me? Don't you remember—before we got married—you said that being in love was all nonsense; that husband and wife ought to be. . . ."

"Don't, Peter, don't!"—he knew, though in all his life he had never heard her cry, that she was crying. "You make me so ashamed. It's been my own fault—every bit of it has been my own fault"—he couldn't understand—he only knew that suddenly happiness had come to them both—she crept into his arms—"Peter?"

"Yes, darling."

"Am I the only woman you've ever tried to make love to? . . ."

Was she laughing now? or crying? He couldn't understand—he couldn't understand at all.

"Do answer me, boy?"

"Of course you are. I've never loved anybody but you in my life."

"Honestly?" she asked.

"On my dying oath, Pat."

Suddenly, he felt her hand on his shoulder; heard her say: "Oh, boy, boy, I believe you. . . . You're such a rotten lover, boy. . . . You haven't even asked me whether I love you. . . ."

"I—" he began.

"Don't. I'm—I'm rather glad you're such a rotten lover, boy. I—I love you for it."

Very tenderly, their lips met in the darkness. . . .

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Tent on the river-bank glowed saffron among the shadows. . . . Light vanished



from the tent. . . . Moon, riding over Eynsham Bridge, saw it, a gray ghost by the gurgling weir. . . . Moon dipped behind the willows. . . . Sky lightened. . . . Stars faded. . . . Dyked pastures silvered to the dawn-gleams. . . . Sun-rim peeped over Eynsham Hills. . . . The tent-flap parted. . . .

And out of the tent, stepping quietly lest she waken her sleeping mate, came a woman, golden hair unbound, white feet bare to the dew. . . . Very quietly she came, like a nymph in the dawn. . . . Very quietly, she sank to her white knees, alone on the river-bank by the gurgling weir. . . . Very quietly, she raised her white hands to the rising day. . . .

“O God,” prayed Patricia, “dear God—let me give him a son.”

# EPILOGUE

## § 1

"Six thirty, ack emma, sir. Time to get up, sir."

James Garton, sometime driver in the Royal Field Artillery, now convalescing from wounds, on the Tebbits-Jameson farm, tapped his sleeping master on the left shoulder. Peter, waking with a start, looked round his comfortable dressing-room, at the mauve eiderdown on his bed, the bow-fronted wardrobe, the hunting prints on the walls.

"Lord, Garton! What on earth are you playing at? We aren't on active service now."

"No, sir." The Yorkshireman grinned. "I don't think there'll be much active service after today, sir. Not if the Huns sign this armistice"—he pronounced the word *armistice*—"the newspapers are talking about."

"Thought I'd like to wake you for the last morning of the war, sir," Garton went on, producing a cup of tea and some biscuits. "Should I put out your riding-kit, sir?"

"No, Garton, you should not"—laughed Peter, falling in with the spirit of the game—"you should put out the blue suit of mufti you'll find in that wardrobe. Also, you should prepare my bath."

Said the Yorkshireman, hanging serge slacks carefully over the back of a chair, "Mister Harry says that you and Mrs. Jameson are sure to get taken up for joy-riding, sir."

"That be damned for a tale." Peter, tea finished, tumbled out of bed; stuck his feet into a pair of red morocco slippers; drew silk dressing-gown over pyjamas.

They had been speaking very quietly for fear of waking the pair in the next room: but now a voice, Patricia's voice, called through the doorway:—

"Time to get up, Peter. Are you awake, Peter?"

"Of course I'm awake. Been awake for hours. How's Peter the Fourth?"

"Slept like a top." The door opened, revealing Patricia, slipperless, golden hair falling about her white shoulders. "What on earth. . . ."

Garton, blushing furiously, fled: they heard him busy in the bath-room as they kissed good-morning.

"Funny fellow, isn't he?" Peter explained his quondam servant's presence. "And now let's have a look at the heir."

Arms linked, they passed into the curtained bed-room. Mauve-shaded candles

burned on the white over-mantel, on the table by the lace-canopied cot. Blinking at the light, still only half awake, lay Peter the Fourth. The newly-weaned baby smiled happily at its parents. Peter the Fourth, they thought, would have his mother's hair, his father's eyes: Peter the Fourth, they thought . . . but what these two thought about their eight-months old son would fill a prologue, an epilogue, and a hundred chapters in between.

As Evelyn confided, early in the summer, to Primula: "I don't believe a word of that gooseberry-bush story, Prim. I believe Mummy and the pater made that child themselves. They couldn't be so gone on it"—("gone on," acquired from Garton, was *the* school-room word of the moment)—"if they'd just *found* it."

Said Primula, sternly practical, "It must be frightfully difficult to make a baby. Think of its ears. . . ."

The two girls came running, fully dressed, into Patricia's room just as Peter slipped off for his bath; stood chattering till Patricia shooed them away and rang for Elizabeth. . . .

## § 2

The Peter Jameson who breakfasted with his wife at a quarter to eight on Armistice Morning was a very different animal from the our Mr. Jameson whose taxi had driven up to 22 a. Lowndes Square, London, four and a half years previously. Grayed hair and lined face still betrayed convalescence, the weariness of war-time; but his eyes, his voice, the whole atmosphere of happiness he exuded, testified a change in the man's mentality.

His essential creed had not altered: he still believed in work, and in successful work; he still loathed inefficiency, slackness, the never-mind-tomorrow attitude. But love, impersonated in Patricia, had softened the harshness of his youth; taught him the grand lesson of tolerance. Love had nearly bridged that vast, bitter gulf between fighting-man and stay-at-home: almost, he saw England whole—not a country divided against itself, but a People working hand-in-hand for the common cause. Love, too, had opened Peter Jameson's eyes so that they saw not only profits but also beauty in the new work to which he had dedicated himself.

This new work prospered slowly, as the land should prosper. Already Capital had begun its revivifying influence. Old man Tebbits' tumble-down milking-sheds existed no longer: instead, were clean stables of brick and tile, spotless pails and sterilized pans. Useless wooden structures, harbourage of rats, had been pulled down. The ricks stood, stone-based, two feet above ground. Charlie Tebbits had

re-built and added to old man Tebbits' insanitary pig-sties. A tractor-plough phutted in the fields. Also—Peter's first *coup*—Tebbits-Jameson Ltd. had bought out the Arlsfield "carrier," a rickety old man with a rickety old horse; replaced his creaking equipage by a petrol delivery-van; and made themselves masters of the transport-situation. This van, as Peter saw it, was to be the forerunner of a fleet which would carry passengers, market produce, sell *and buy* eggs and milk, fruit and honey and vegetables across half-a-county. Plans for bacon-factory, cheese-factory, jam-factory—(and tracings of a sugar-beet plant which Peter had not yet dared show Harry Tebbits)—all lay locked away till peace-time in the drawers of Peter's walnut-wood writing-desk.

Sunflowers, run as a separate establishment, was already unrecognizable. The paddock—silent, original founder of "T.J.'s Ltd."—existed no longer. Only the pig-path, fenced from sties to wood's edge, still showed a band of narrowing-green ribbon across the brown of plough. All autumn, the "paddock" had been a mellow-gold riot of Russian sunflowers: two acres of sunflowers whose produce, bushel upon bushel of the finest chicken-feed, filled a dozen zinc bins in the new poultry store-room. Roger Fry had gone to the war; Roger Fry's hybrids to the stock-pot. In their place, came a marvel of a man from St. Dunstan's Hospital, the cheeriest soul for all his blinded eyes that ever took good wages of a Saturday, and two hundred black Leghorns who clucked about the orchard from sunrise to sun-downing.

"And it's only in its infancy," thought Peter, helping himself to another rasher of Miss Tebbits' black-treacle curing, "only in its infancy. Scrap the 'state-control' idea. Give every man his chance. Let Capital and Labour co-operate as we're co-operating—and the Lord knows where we won't get to in a dozen years of peace."

"We ought to be off in about ten minutes," he said to his wife. "You know what Dilly and Dally are at this time in the morning."

"Dilly and Dally," at Sunflowers, meant the inhabitants of Glen Cottage, who kept a mystic time-table of their own, officially supposed to depend on Francis' working hours, but actually adjusted—with meticulous accuracy—to weather-conditions. "When it's fine," Beatrice once condescended to explain, "Prout thinks we ought to rise with the sun. When it's wet, he doesn't think we ought to get up at all."

"I told them to be ready by half-past eight"—Patricia glanced at the clock on the wall-bracket—"we don't want to scorch."

## § 3

Francis Gordon's idea of motoring up to London for Armistice Day—a pastime forbidden by the anti-joy-riding provisions of the Defence of the Realm Act—had entirely upset the Sunflowers-Tebbits routine. Usually, by breakfast-time, Peter had made his first inspection of the poultry houses; visited the milking-sheds; sped Sid Dyson on his way to Arlsfield Park (Peter, after endless finesse, had secured a timber-felling contract from the Colonel); discussed his round with ex-Corporal Hankins, who had one artificial leg, two merry blue eyes, and a mechanic's passion for the delivery-van; and argued out at least one abstruse farming-problem with Harry Tebbits. On this particular morning it was Harry Tebbits, pipe in mouth, who strode over to see Peter; found him, cap on head, coat over arm, standing under the beaten walnut tree.

The blond giant opined that if Peter really meant to go up to London, the least Peter could do would be to bring back some whisky.

"Well," said Peter, "I'll do the best I can, Harry. But if the armistice *is* signed, I expect London'll be drunk dry by half-past two. Don't suppose you'll get much out of the folk today, Harry."

The giant smiled. "Not much use telling the cows about Armistices. Still, I don't expect we'll kill ourselves with work. Not today at all events. Old Tiger's been after the skim again. Never saw such a dog for the milk."

"Tiger o' Sunflowers," an enormous silver-brindled Dane, lounged up the drive; gave his master dignified greeting. Patricia, furred and gauntleted, came hurrying out of the house.

"Well, I may as well see you safe off the premises," smiled Harry Tebbits. The three made their way to the "garrige." Passing the stables, they heard Driver Garton's, "Now then, you"; Evelyn and Primula's raised voices; the stamp of hooves on tile. Wilhelmina, the bay filly who had succeeded Little Willie in Peter's heart, was protesting as usual about her morning toilet. . . .

Peter and Corporal Hankins had spent all Sunday tinkering with the Crossley, rubbing away the grease of two years' idleness, fitting new sparking-plugs, testing brake-shoes and magneto, filling her petrol-tank and polishing her brass-work. Still, the car looked her age.

"Charlie'll have to give her a coat of varnish one of these days," hazarded Charlie's brother, tapping strong fingers on the bonnet. But the engine started sweetly enough; and Peter, running her out for Patricia to mount, felt conscious of the old driving-thrill.

"Shan't be at Dilly-Dally's till nine," he said as she climbed up beside him. Harry ran to open the gate; Tiger o' Sunflowers smelt at the Klaxon, bounded away barking at the bark of it; Evelyn and Primula waved good-bye from the stable-door. They were off.

By the meadow-patch it is a bare mile from Sunflowers to Glen Cottage; but the shortest road takes you half way to Arlsfield; circles a fair portion of the Tebbits-Jameson land before it dives towards the chestnut trees of Arlsfield Park.

It was a goodly November day; soft gray clouds, sun atween, hinting of rain to come.

They passed the eight-acre vegetable field,—inter-cropped, potatoes, already dug, with winter green-stuff, fat white-hearted savoys, inturned broccoli, curly-leaved kale and knee-high Brussels sprouts; they passed the "warren"—fenced dip of chalk pitted land on which Peter had turned down half a hundred Belgian Hare does to mate with the "original inhabitants"; they skirted two stubbles, and a new-sown patch of pedigreed wheat; hummed through the browning spinney—and made Glen Cottage by five minutes to nine.

The home of Francis and Beatrice showed no signs of intensive cultivation; meadow-land, over which Peter's merinos and Peter's Jerseys browsed and grazed at will, ran down to its very walls. Three times, the indomitable Beatrice had engaged a gardener, but each time Peter, hungry for men, enticed him away.

"Private gardens," said our Mr. Jameson, "are out of date. Besides, as your landlord, your greengrocer, your carrier, your poulterer and your dairyman—I forbid it."

Beatrice christened him the "Octopus of Arlsfield"; but eventually submitted. She was standing at the cottage-gate as the Octopus and his wife drove up. Fifteen months of matrimony had not altered her essential girlishness: but the face under the close-fitting toque of ermine seemed less pale than the day she and Peter first met; the gray eyes, though still thoughtful, held more of laughter.

"Dally won't be a minute," she smiled at them. "You've just got time to turn the car."

Peter, with a jest about not having enough "gasoline," obeyed; throttled down his engine; gave a glance at clock on dashboard as the two women kissed good-morning.

"Confound Dally," he said after a while, "it's nearly ten past already."

Francis, followed by Prout, who carried an enormous basket and a long thin parcel wrapped in brown paper, limped out of the house. He wore his usual brown overcoat, his usual cream buckskin gloves, his inevitable old Etonian tie.

"What on earth have you got there?" demanded his cousin.

"Food, fizz and flags," chuckled Francis. "Shove 'em in the tonneau, Prout. If I know London, we'll have about as much chance of getting anything to eat. . . ." He superintended the disposal of these treasures; handed Beatrice into the car—and remembered he had forgotten her muff. By the time Prout had retrieved this, tucked in the young people, and closed the door on them, it was twenty past nine.

"Shall we do it?" asked Patricia.

"Do it?"—Peter chuckled scornfully—"you watch!" He opened throttle as he spoke; fingered lever gently from neutral to first, first to second, second to top. Horse-chestnuts popped from tire-covers as the Crossley gathered way. Arlsfield Park, a blur of tree-trunks at side and interlaced branches overhead, spun behind them. They missed Sid Dyson's timber-tug by an ant's breadth; hooted past the Colonel's crested gate-pillars; switchbacked downhill towards Henley.

Dilly and Dally, feet tight-propped against the provision basket, looked at each other in mock alarm. "It wasn't our fault," stammered Francis through chattering teeth, "why wasn't the Octopus on time? He said half-past eight."

Beatrice, craning forward a moment, eyed the speedometer. "What are we doing, Beatrice?" "Forty-five and a chip." "Lord!"

The car shot on, purring—Peter, nearly recumbent, notched wheel gripped easily in gloved hands; Patricia bolt upright, eyes on the speeding hedge-rows.

They made the six miles to Henley in a fraction over twelve minutes; swirled righthanded at the railway-station; took the water-front at a bound; skidded the Bridge-corner on two wheels. Church, bridge and river vanished like mad movies.

"Going well," muttered Peter through set teeth. White Hill rose up like a roof ahead. "Open that cut-out for me." Exhaust roaring, cylinders throbbing, the Crossley hurtled up between the trees; slowed to twenty; felt herself flung back into second; topped the rise; raced engine the fraction of an instant; took top-gear again; shot on.

Houses, trees, a crawling dray, flashed astern. Gray tarmac zipped under. Ahead, the road rose; dropped; rose again. Now, they were in open country. Peter took one deep breath; fidgeted throttle-lever full open; jammed foot on accelerator. Couple behind felt the car gather herself as if for a great leap; saw passing hedge-rows fade out to a continuous blur. Speedometer-needle clicked to sixty; held there for three and a half ecstatic minutes. . . .

"Right, isn't it?" shouted Peter suddenly. "Yes." Patricia, map on knee, watched Hurley Bottom skim by. He slowed; climbed a hair-pin turn warily; nipped across the Thicket; veered left for Maidenhead.

The clock at Nicholson's Brewery showed five minutes past ten as they crawled down into the town; opened out again for the Bridge; swished over it past Skindle's Hotel.

"Shall we do it?" asked Pat.

"Question of luck." He opened the cut-out again; roared under Taplow Railway-viaduct. So far, road had been almost empty. Now, other cars appeared ahead. The Crossley raced them down the Bath Road; passed them one by one. Slough vanished. Something honked behind them; honked again. Peter, wheels almost on turf, was aware of a Rolls-Royce bonnet, of a dark-blue car sweeping by; caught a glimpse of Arthur, in sky-blue Air Service uniform, sitting rigid at the wheel. . . .

Crossley gathered way; Klaxon barked furiously; Rolls-Royce swerved; Peter, grin on his face, shot past. Beatrice, peering over the back of the cabriolet, saw Arthur's eyes light; saw his hand move slowly on the wheel. Then the Rolls-Royce was on them; creeping up, effortless, silent. . . . Honk, honk, honk. "Drat the fellow," muttered Peter. For a mile, he refused way; then Arthur, with two inches to spare, purred calmly by; recognized Peter with a wave of the hand—and disappeared in dust. . . .

Still, they made Hounslow by half-past ten; edged warily over tram-lines; pulled up for a second to avoid disaster.

"Hope you're not joy-riding, sir," grinned a blue-helmeted constable.

"Joy-riding!"—Peter, hand on gear lever, grinned back scornfully—"do we look as if we were joy-riding!" Francis, peeping overside, was understood to mutter something about, "bringing the good news from Aix to Ghent." . . .

None of the four quite remembers how they made the last lap to London. It comes back to them as a jerking, fidgety dream—houses, tram-lines, motor-omnibuses; a scrap of clear straight road here; turns there; people staring, people cursing; shop-windows in which they saw themselves skidding past; dogs diving for cover; scream of Klaxon, jar of gear-lever, throb of engine. . . . "Time?", Peter kept asking. "Time, Pat?" . . . "Ten-thirty-five." . . . "Ten-forty." . . . "Quarter to, all but ten seconds." . . . "Damn it, we must make Piccadilly by eleven o'clock." . . . More houses. . . . A saloon. . . . Francis, head down in the tonneau, groping for his flags, hitting his head against the back of the driving-seat. . . . "Twelve minutes to eleven." . . . Beatrice, eyes on Peter's cap, muttering to herself, "He'll never do it. I'll never forgive him if he doesn't do it." . . .

"Five to!" called Patricia—and Fulham Road streamed out behind as they zig-zagged in and out among sparse traffic. . . .

"Three minutes." . . . "What was that? Oh, yes, Harrods. Good old Harrods."



... "Two minutes more." ... The Hyde Park Hotel whizzed by. ... Railings. ... A clear road. ... Hyde Park Corner ahead ... and:—

"Done it, I think," remarked our Mr. Jameson, as a motor-bus, swaying out of Park Lane, missed their rear mud-guards by the grace of God and two inches. ...

Thut of cylinders dropped to steady purr. Clubland on their left, railings on their right, slackened speed; grew steady and perceptible. Traffic, through which the Crossley threaded easy way, appeared all round them. ... They were in Piccadilly!

...

Clarges Street—Half Moon Street—Bolton Street—known names, black-lettered on gray stone—Apsley House—The Ritz—corner of Bond Street. ...

And, suddenly, they heard a voice. "P.J.!" bawled the voice. "Hi! P.J.! Halt, will you! Halt, I say."

Peter, jamming brakes hard on, felt the car skid under him; felt wheels jar against sidewalk; was aware of Francis, shouting in his ear "Bravo, well-driven old thing," of Beatrice and Patricia standing up, of a taxi-back two inches from his radiator, of a motor-bus grinding to standstill—and of a little red man, with flat red moustaches on his face and faded red tabs on his uniform, a little red man in a huge cap, who came dashing out of Scott's hat-shop, bawling: "Halt, confound you, P.J. Halt! It's eleven o'clock." ...

It was the Weasel; and even as the Weasel darted across the sidewalk, London went mad and they with London!

Pandemonium broke loose—a tornado of sound—horns, whistles, rowing-rattles, bugles—men shouting—women screaming. The five in the Crossley couldn't hear pandemonium. They were of pandemonium—crazy. Brigadier General the Weasel, palms to mouth, straddling the radiator with spurred legs, beating bonnet with his cane, was hallooing like a lunatic: "Forrard away!" hallooed the Weasel. "Forrard away! Forrard away! Hi, tear 'em, tear 'em, tear 'em." Francis, scarlet in the face, bolt upright, lameness forgotten, bawled an inarticulate "Eton! Well rowed, Eton." Peter, finger pressed home on the hoarsely-shrieking Klaxon, was howling some Indian war-whoop of his own. Patricia, dumb with emotion, imagined herself to be cheering. And Beatrice, the hyper-critical, hyper-sensitive Beatrice, was yelling, yelling at the top of her voice. "Ya, ya, ya, ya, ya," yelled Beatrice—but somehow or other she couldn't finish the yell; dropped back, speechless, in the tonneau. ...

Pandemonium! Traffic had stopped. There was no traffic: only motionless vehicles—lorries, motor-omnibuses, taxis, a Rolls-Royce, a hansom-cab—yes, a veritable hansom cab. And every vehicle swarmed with men and women. Men and

women swarmed on every vehicle. Swarmed and shrieked and waved flags. . . .

Pandemonium! The very houses had gone mad. The houses were alive—alive with men and women. The houses were wide open. Men and women poured out of the houses into the streets. The streets were alive with men and women. They swarmed in the streets; swarmed and danced and cheered and shouted and waved flags. . . .

Pandemonium! The flags had gone mad. There were a million flags—Union Jacks and Stars-and-Stripes, Tricolour flags and Belgian flags and Japanese flags; Italian flags and Portuguese flags, Commonwealth flags and Dominion flags, Royal Standards and White Ensigns. . . .

Pandemonium! Everybody was moving—vehicles were moving—people were moving—flags were moving. Their own flags—Union Jack with Old Glory—were moving. The Crossley was moving. . . .

“Forrard away,” hallooed Brigadier General the Weasel, still astride the radiator. “Forrard away, sir,” Peter howled back from the driving seat. . . .

Pandemonium! Everybody was dancing. The flags were dancing. Men and women on the sidewalk were dancing. Soldiers were dancing—English soldiers and American soldiers, French soldiers and Belgian soldiers, Portuguese and Japanese and Italian soldiers—lame soldiers and legless soldiers and armless soldiers—ill soldiers and well soldiers. Sailors were dancing—English sailors and American sailors, French sailors and Italian sailors and Japanese sailors. The very houses were dancing: floods of white paper came dancing down out of the dancing houses. Their own car was dancing: her cushions were dancing: they could feel her engine dancing. They themselves were dancing: they could feel their hearts dancing inside them: the blood was dancing in their veins, dancing and dancing. . . .

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But late that Armistice Day afternoon when the five sat knee-to-knee in the closed and motionless car—Hyde Park trees at its windows, rain tapping on its taut roof, when they poured the dancing wine of Francis’ forethought from gold-foiled bottle-neck and clinked brimmed glasses in token of civilization’s triumph over the Beast; when the Weasel, speaking solemnly as though he were proposing the King’s Health on guest-night, gave them: “Our men, God bless them, our splendid, splendid men!”—then Beatrice and Patricia could have sworn that they saw the tears of their own hearts reflected not only in their lovers’ eyes, but in the hard blue eyes of Brigadier General Douglas Stark, Royal Field Artillery.

THE END

*The characters of Peter Jameson and his wife Patricia were originally conceived in Stockholm, Sweden, one night in June, 1912. Their story was finally brought to fruition at The Old Barn, Oxfordshire, England, in November, 1919.*

# *TRANSCRIBER NOTES*

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been retained.

[The end of *Peter Jameson: A Modern Romance* by Gilbert Frankau]