Out of the Ruins

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Books by Philip Gibbs

OUT OF THE RUINS
YOUNG ANARCHY
UNCHANGING QUEST
THE RECKLESS LADY
TEN YEARS AFTER
HEIRS APPARENT
THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD
LITTLE NOVELS OF NOWADAYS
THE SPIRIT OF REVOLT
THE STREET OF ADVENTURE
WOUNDED SOULS
PEOPLE OF DESTINY
THE SOUL OF THE WAR
THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME
THE STRUGGLE IN FLANDERS
THE WAY TO VICTORY, *2 Vols.*
MORE THAT MUST BE TOLD
NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

Out of the Ruins

AND OTHER LITTLE NOVELS

By
Philip Gibbs

Garden City, New York
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1928

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Out of the Ruins

OUT OF THE RUINS

It was Yvonne Gilbert who first saw the living image of Bertrand Gavaudan, who was dead.

It was a year after the Armistice, and Yvonne was sitting with her mother and father and her blind brother, Jean (who was knitting one of those woollen vests by which he earned his living now), and her lover, M. Paul Volange, the rich contractor. They were in the new house, which was one of the first to be built in the ruins of Arras.

It was nine o'clock in the evening of an August day, and still light, though the shadows of night were creeping into the stricken city, where so many houses were scarred and slashed by four years of shell-fire, where many others were but skeleton buildings burnt out or blasted out by high explosives, and where heaps of ancient masonry, which had once been shops, mansions, or churches, lay as memorials of that storm of war which had now passed from Arras, and from Europe.

M. Volange was talking about the reconstruction of the city. That word "reconstruction," the same in French as in English, but with a more rolling and sonorous sound, was like a "word of power" which the old Egyptians used for their magic. It was constantly on his lips, and he dwelt on each syllable as though he adored the sound of it. "*Re-con-struc-tion!*" And indeed for him that reconstruction of Arras meant everything in life—wealth, power, flattery, love. Yes, even love—or at least the pleasure of his approaching marriage with Yvonne Gilbert, the daughter of a former Mayor of Arras (a man of good family and high political influence) and the most beautiful young woman in the district. This marriage would be the crown of his success. It would cement his social position. It would lift him to the level of all those families who had despised him in the old days before the War, when he was a little builder and odd-job man at Blangy on the outskirts of Arras—before the work of reconstruction, when he had obtained Government contracts against all competitors (the political influence of his future father-in-law had been very useful) and brought up the claims of many poor people in the devastated region which, if properly worked, were worth more than a gold mine. Already he was getting alarmingly rich. Sometimes, with a sense of amusement, he was almost scared at his own profits from the supply of bricks, stone, cement, and timber, and by the ease with which his bought-up claims and his own figures of compensation were being passed and settled by the Government officials in Paris. Well, it was only just and right, he thought, after all the agony and sacrifice of the War. It was true that as a man of forty-five his own war service had been restricted to washing out the yards and offices of a hospital at Lyons, but spiritually he had agonized as much as the men in the trenches. Indeed, he had, he believed, suffered more than the combatants. Now it was his time of reward. He was getting prosperous, powerful, and—alas!—rather too fat.

"In a little while," he said to his future father-in-law, "the reconstruction of our beloved city will be in full swing. Already I have contracts for four hundred houses, and fifty are completed. I confess the tears come into my eyes—you know how emotional I am!—when I hear the music of trowel and hammer and saw as I walk about the streets. Arras is rising again from its ashes. The wounds of France are being healed. Men like myself are reaping the reward of our service. I shall be the happiest man in the world in a month's time, when Yvonne comes to share my new home. . . . Well, it's a fine house—the Government has been generous in accepting my claims, as I must acknowledge—and Yvonne won't be the wife of a poor man!"

He put out his plump hand across the table and took hold of Yvonne's hand, so delicate and thin, and gave it a tender little squeeze.

"Yvonne is a lucky young woman," said her father, the former Mayor of Arras, who sat smoking a cigarette with a glass of vermouth at his elbow. He stroked his white moustache and beard, and glanced at his daughter with a smile in which there was a hint of anxiety. Yvonne had made rather a fuss about this engagement with Volange. Indeed she had wept until her eyes were red. He had had to be rather stern with her, poor child! A good marriage could not be thrown away because of sickly sentiment about a young man who had been shot in the War, not in the right kind of way. Well, well, the tragedy of war was over. War, peace, and reconstruction. . . .

It was a moment after the touch of her hand by M. Volange that Yvonne dropped her needlework on to the tablecloth and went quietly to the window. Her father and mother were arranging the playing cards for a game of *bézique*. Her future husband, at whose touch she had shuddered, was lighting a pipe which he had learnt to smoke in time of war when he swept out the yards of a French hospital. Only her blind brother was conscious of her quivering sigh and her movement away from the table. He raised his head and turned his sightless eyes towards her as she stood by the window looking out to a garden which had been cleared of its *débris* of broken masonry and shell-cases. The English had used it for a battery position—one of their big nine-point-twos. The bodies of two English soldiers had been dug out of the ruins when the garden had been cleared out and tidied up by the Belgian workmen employed by Volange. Bodies were still being found—a year after the Armistice—in the cellars and backyards, under fallen stones and timber. Even in the time of reconstruction the city reeked of all that death, first French and then—for three years—British.

Yvonne Gilbert stood at the window with her pale forehead against the window-frame, staring into the garden and beyond to the gaunt ruin of the great cathedral above the broken roofs and skeleton houses. She was a tall, slim girl, typical of the beauty of Arras which had been far-famed before all its inhabitants—or most of them—had fled when German shell-fire first made a hell of the city in the autumn of '14. Her black hair was looped loosely over her ears. Her dark eyes with long lashes were filled with tragedy, though they had been so merry until a year before the Armistice, in spite of war and all its horrors. Suddenly, standing by the window there, she gave a strange, frightened cry, and turned in a swooning way, holding out her hands as though thrusting back some terrifying vision.

It was Jean, her blind brother, who was first by her side. He put his arm round her and held her.

"*Qu'est-ce-qu'il y a?*—What's the matter?" he asked loudly, with fear in his voice.

She did not answer him, though her lips—quite blanched—moved as though she tried to speak.

M. Volange had risen at the sound of her cry and overturned his glass of vermouth, so that the liquid made a pool on the red tablecloth.

"The poor child is unwell!" he said in an agitated way. "It's the excitement of my conversation, perhaps—all this talk about reconstruction and our future home."

He came forward with his arms outstretched, his short little arms hardly reaching beyond his tubby body in its tight frock coat.

Yvonne's father spoke to her sharply.

"Behave yourself, Yvonne! You seem to be losing your self-control."

Madame Gilbert, holding the playing cards in trembling hands, hushed her husband's stern words.

"It is one of her headaches. At her age I suffered like that! Before my marriage."

"Ah," said the old man. "Marriage will do her all the good in the world. It's the only thing for women."

"She is ill," said her brother Jean.

She seemed ill, but with a desperate effort controlled herself and slipped from her brother's arms.

"I'm sorry!" she said. "I felt a little unwell. It was a sudden pain . . ."

She hesitated, smiled rather pitifully, and then went to her room.

"Girls are like that before marriage," said her father. "I shall be glad when the wedding day comes, Volange."

"It will be the first wedding after the War, in Arras," said M. Volange. "I am giving my workmen a half-day's holiday. It will be a great day in the history of our new Arras—the happy symbol of reconstruction and peace."

Presently he departed in his fine motor-car—he had three cars for his work of reconstruction—and it was when the door had closed upon him that Yvonne's blind brother went up to her room. He knew his way about the house and walked upstairs quickly, with that curiously rigid position of the head which one sees in blind men, who have to listen and remember to find their way. He was a handsome young man with a little black moustache, and had been a gay fellow before a shell burst and blinded him. Now he was very sad at times and wept often out of sightless eyes because he had lost his sweetheart as well as his sight. Madeleine Baptiste had not had the courage to marry a blind man. He found his best comradeship with Yvonne, at whose door he now tapped.

She opened it and said, "What do you want, Jean?"

He stepped into her bedroom and felt for the handle of the door, which he closed behind him.

"Why were you frightened downstairs?" he asked. "What did you see in the garden?"

"Nothing," she answered. "Nothing." But there was a note of terror in her voice again.

"You saw something," he said. "I was listening to you. You were quite quiet, and then suddenly gave that scream. It wasn't pain. It was fear. I know the sound of it, in the trenches. . . ."

For a few moments she was silent and then answered with extraordinary words.

"Jean! I saw Bertrand Gavaudan—in the garden—as plain as I see you."

Jean Gilbert seemed to stare at his sister with his sightless eyes.

"It was a trick of your mind," he said quietly. "You were thinking of him—I guessed that—and then you thought you saw him. I often see things like that. I mean I think of things—faces especially—and suddenly they come before my eyes so vividly that I almost believe I have my sight back. It's subconscious memory. Illusion."

"No," said Yvonne. "It wasn't like that. He was standing there in the garden below the window, looking up. Our eyes met, and he stared into mine. He was not like he was when I saw him last—before—before his death. His face was thin and white, and he had a little beard. He was in rags. When he saw me he moved away, behind the bushes we have planted."

"It was some workman," said Jean. "One of those Belgians."

"It was Bertrand," said Yvonne. "His ghost. . . . He has come to warn me."

"His ghost? To warn you?"

"Against this marriage. This treachery to our love!" said Yvonne, and she fell into a passion of weeping.

Jean Gilbert put his arms round her again, and hushed her as though she were a child, and kissed her wet face.

Presently he spoke, quietly and gravely.

"I don't think you have seen Bertrand's ghost. It was your mental vision of him. That's almost certain. But if the dead come back—and I don't deny it altogether—they don't come with the same human passions. Bertrand wouldn't torment you because you're marrying a rich man who will try to make you happy."

"He will never make me happy!" said Yvonne. "I have no love for him. He fills me with horror. And Bertrand has come to claim me. Dead or alive, I belong to him. He died because of his love for me."

That was true, as Jean Gilbert knew. He could not deny it. Young Bertrand Gavaudan had been his fellow-officer and closest comrade in the second battalion. They had been in the trenches together at Souchez, on the Somme, at Verdun. It was Jean who had introduced him to his family, in Amiens, after their flight from Arras. He had seen at once—he had his eyes then!—that young Bertrand was tremendously enamoured of Yvonne. They had laughed and joked and danced together in those rare times of leave when Bertrand escaped from a world of death and filth to that other world where beauty still dwelt, and women, and love. It was only once that Jean and he had been on leave together. But when Bertrand came back he raved about Yvonne, and Jean was amused and pleased to think that his sister seemed so wonderful, so beautiful, so angelic to his best comrade. Up in the trenches of Verdun below Fort Douaumont, where they were under ceaseless fire, so that the daily casualties were frightful, and the very earth smelt of human corruption, Bertrand cursed the War because he was certain to be killed before he could marry Yvonne. He cried out to God that it was "unfair" that Youth should die before it had enjoyed life. Perhaps his nerve had broken a little because of that ceaseless storm of heavy shells above them. Several times in the last six months he had put in for special leave under a plea of sickness, and if it hadn't been for his great gallantry in the first three years of war—he had won the *Croix de Guerre* and had been three times cited before the Army—he would have been suspected of cowardice or malingering. Each time when his request was refused, because of the shortage of men, he was in despair. He even shed tears several times, in the dug-out which he shared with Jean. One night he had spoken mad words.

"It's nine months since I have seen Yvonne. Nine sacred months! If the Colonel doesn't grant me leave I shall take it myself. I know a way of getting back. It's easy. Why, that fellow Bidou spent a month in Paris with his little girl and came back without a word being said! A self-inflicted wound, *mon vieux*! Not too serious to spoil one's holiday, but bad enough to pass the doctor."

Jean had laughed at him—not taken his words seriously.

"You know the punishment for desertion—or self-inflicted wounds?"

Bertrand had shrugged his shoulders.

"Death—if you're found out—and worth the risk! I'm sure to be killed here anyhow, so what's the difference?"

"A little matter of honour and dishonour," Jean had answered lightly.

Bertrand had said "*Je m'en fiche*," meaning that he didn't care a tinker's curse.

It was impossible to believe him. He had been on fire with patriotism at the beginning of the War. He had risked his life a hundred times even after two wounds. He was a young man of superb courage, until his nerve had begun to fail a little, and this love for Yvonne had weakened him, perhaps.

Jean refused to believe that he could behave with such insane folly. Yet one day in the dug-out he drew his revolver, said, "Look out, *mon vieux*!" and shot himself in the foot. "A careless accident!" he said before he fainted. . . .

There was no suspicion. Accidents like that happened. Bertrand was sent down to the casualty clearing station and three weeks later Jean heard from his sister that he was in hospital at Amiens. She thanked God that his wound was not serious. In another letter she deplored the fact

that his wound was nearly healed and that he would be sent back to the fighting line. "But we have had a wonderful time of happiness," she wrote; "I have seen him in hospital every day. I love him with my heart and soul." After that there was a long silence from Yvonne and no news of Bertrand. Jean was profoundly uneasy. That self-inflicted wound had shocked him horribly. Only his long comradeship and loyalties of friendship, sealed with many acts of devotion and valour by Bertrand Gavaudan, prevented him from reporting such a crime against the honour of the battalion. Bertrand had been his hero, his ideal of gallantry and self-sacrifice. It had been Bertrand's cool nerve, his laughing contempt of death and horror, that had kept Jean steady in hours of terrible ordeal. Now he was love-making after a self-inflicted wound, and had lost his honour. . . .

The old Colonel, who had loved Bertrand like a son, was gloomy because he did not return. Impatient and angry when six weeks had passed and he did not return. One morning he blurted out the news that Bertrand Gavaudan, whom once he had called his "beautiful lieutenant," had disappeared from hospital in Amiens and had slipped off to Paris.

"A deserter," he said. "Sacred name of God, the bravest officer in my battalion has become a coward and a traitor! If he doesn't come back before the next attack I'll have him shot like a dog."

Bertrand did not come back before the next attack. He came back after the attack—that very evening—when half the battalion had been wiped out and Jean lay blind and wounded at the end of a trench under a heap of dead bodies—the men who had been his comrades. Jean had known nothing at the time. It was only afterwards, from a fellow-officer, that he had heard the frightful news. Bertrand had come back desperately conscience-stricken, mad with grief because Jean was blind and because so many of his comrades had been killed while he was hiding in Paris and having secret visits from Yvonne. He had made a clean breast of his self-inflicted wound, of his desertion for love's sake, of his treachery to France. He had wept bitterly, but no tears could wash out that month of madness. The old Colonel had listened grimly, snapped out a few terrible questions, ordered the arrest of Lieutenant Gavaudan, and prepared papers for a court-martial. But there was no time for the formalities of military law. The Germans attacked again, and the remnants of the battalion were hard pressed. By order of the Colonel, Bertrand Gavaudan was shot in the support trenches before the counter-attack. Sergeant Blum, killed later in his dug-out, had been in charge of the firing party.

There was no more fighting for Jean Gilbert. When he came home after six months in a hospital for blind officers he was silent and constrained with his sister. For several days he had hardly spoken to her. He even hated her a little because her love of Bertrand had led to such dishonour and such a shameful death. But he softened to her when she told him something of Bertrand's mad and flaming love. They had been mad together, in Paris, believing that love—this wonderful love that had come to them—was the only thing that mattered, and that duty, honour, even life itself, were unimportant. They decided to die in each other's arms. They were all ready for that death one evening in a little room on the fourth floor of the Hôtel Richelieu, when Bertrand suddenly went to the window and listened. Yvonne could hear nothing but the movement of Paris and the barking of motor-horns in the darkened streets below. But Bertrand seemed to hear something. He turned with his face as white as though he were already dead and said, "Do you hear the sound of guns and the groans of wounded men?"

She said, "I only hear the noise of Paris, dear heart."

"There's a big battle on," he told her, and seemed terribly distressed. "The Germans are attacking again at Verdun. I hear the groans of my comrades—my poor comrades whom I have deserted."

"In a little while we shall hear no more of war," answered Yvonne. "We shall be together in infinite and eternal love."

He spoke the words "My comrades" several times in a dazed, pitiful way, and then cursed himself as a traitor.

"I must go back," he said. "To-night. I've been mad. This folly of love——"

She tried to put her arms about his neck, but he thrust her back.

"I must go back," he said. "They're attacking the battalion. Jean is there. I've been utterly mad. A traitor to France. I'm going back. . . ."

He went back, to be shot in the support trenches, as a deserter and coward.

"It was my love that killed him!" cried Yvonne, when she told Jean her tragic story, and because of her grief, her agony of self-reproach, he had forgiven her.

Now once again in her bedroom, believing that she had seen the ghost of Bertrand, she cried out, "He died because of his love for me."

It was not the only time that Yvonne believed she saw the ghost of her dead lover. A week after that evening when she had given a scream at the window, she and Jean went to dinner with Madame Gavaudan and her daughter Julie, who had come back to Arras and were living in one of the fifty new houses which Volange had built under Government contract. It was about a hundred yards on the east side of the Hôtel de Ville, which was, of course, no more than a heap of ruins, unrestored, and unrestorable to its former state, when it was one of the glories of France. Jean had warned Yvonne not to say a word about the apparition of Bertrand to the mother and sister. They knew nothing of the manner of his death, which had been reported among the list of killed; and they cherished his memory as one of the heroes of France who had laid down his life on the field of honour. His portrait was on their mantelpiece, draped in the tricolour, and his smiling, handsome, boyish face was as Jean had known it in the first years of the War, when he had been so ardent and so gallant.

At dinner Madame Gavaudan spoke of her son.

"It is my dear Bertrand's birthday. He would have been thirty to-day. How happy he would have been to come back to Arras, to this new house of ours!"

"I am sure his spirit watches over us," said Julie, who was a devout Catholic and very *spirituelle*.

"Our dear dead are very close to us," answered Madame Gavaudan in a tranquil voice. Like most mothers of France, she was resigned to the loss of that son who had died so that France might live.

Yvonne sat very quiet during these allusions to her lover. Only Jean, who, like all blind men, had an acute sense of hearing, was aware of the quick breath she drew. She was still stubborn in her belief that she had seen the spirit of Bertrand.

They had a little music and Julie sang, while Yvonne played for her. It was eleven o'clock before they left the house. Jean took his sister's arm and asked how the night looked.

"It is moonlight," said Yvonne. "The ruins of the Hôtel de Ville are touched with silver, and the new houses look very white."

"I would like to see it again," said Jean. "In the trenches I used to look at the 'Man in the Moon,' smiling down, as it seemed, upon the world of desolation. The lines of the trenches were clear where the moonlight gleamed on the chalk. We never attacked on nights like that, and there was nothing doing in No Man's Land. . . . Well, I shall never see moonlight again. I don't even feel it on my face."

Yvonne pressed his arm tighter. This poor brother of hers would never get reconciled to his blindness.

They had walked only twenty yards before she stopped quite suddenly, and Jean felt her trembling upon his arm. Her body quivered against his.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She did not answer. She was staring at a figure standing motionless by the ruins of the Hôtel de Ville where the old entrance used to be. It

was partly in a black shadow flung across the pile of stones by the broken wall of a shell-wrecked house, but a ray of moonlight striking through a hole in the wall fell upon a face which was ghostly white. It was the face of a young man with unkempt hair and a little beard about his chin. It was the face of Bertrand Gavaudan, emaciated, dead-looking, with mournful staring eyes as he might have looked when they had shot him on a morning of battle somewhere near Verdun. His eyes were fixed upon Yvonne. But when she stopped, and began to tremble on her brother's arm, the figure seemed to turn away and disappeared into the blackness of the shadows behind the great pile of masonry.

"It was Bertrand again," said Yvonne in a whisper. "I saw his ghost in the moonlight."

She was terror-stricken.

Jean slipped away from her arm and walked very fast towards the heap of ruins which had been the Hôtel de Ville, and stood on a pile of stones, motionless. Presently he came back to his sister.

"It was no ghost," he said. "I heard the footsteps of a man. He stumbled over some loose stones, and then stood still because he saw me."

"It was Bertrand's ghost," said Yvonne. "I saw his face white and shining where the moonlight touched it. His eyes stared into mine."

"Morbid imagination!" answered Jean with a touch of impatience. "It was some workman waiting for a girl. You see Bertrand's face because you expect to see it. You're ill."

Yvonne gave a little cry.

"It was Bertrand. He is haunting me. I will never marry Volange. Bertrand would come between us, always. His dead face would sleep on my pillow."

"You're getting daft," said Jean, angrily this time.

Yet it was Jean himself who was next visited by the apparition of the man who had been his comrade.

Some nights after the dinner at Madame Gavaudan's he sat alone, rather late, before preparing for bed, after knitting one of those innumerable vests by which he earned a little money and kept his mind from brooding. M. Volange had spent the evening with them again. The day of his wedding with Yvonne was drawing near, and because of his happiness he had become a little fuddled over his vermouth and had been foolishly amorous, so that Yvonne had slipped away early to bed to escape his endearments. There had been a frightful scene earlier in the evening, when she had vowed to her father and mother that she would never marry Volange. Jean had taken her part, thereby making his father furious. The old man had threatened to turn Yvonne out of doors if she did not fulfil her promise to Volange. In any case, he said, it was too late to draw back now. It would make a scandal all over Artois and Picardy. For miles around people were excited by the coming wedding. Presents were already arriving. The Marquis de St. Pol had sent his compliments and a silver tea-tray. Old Madame de Rollencourt had sent an ebony crucifix saved from the ruins of the cathedral. How could Yvonne shame her whole family by ridiculous folly at the eleventh hour? She needed a good whipping, said her father, and only Yvonne's tears and Jean's harsh protests prevented this chastisement. It was all very distressing, as Jean now thought, knitting alone in the sitting-room after all the family had gone to bed. His mother had turned out the lamps. They made no difference to her blind son, who sat working in absolute darkness.

Half an hour had passed, when Jean suddenly jerked up his head. Somebody was fumbling at the latch of the long window which opened on to the garden. There was the sound of a knife-blade forcing up the catch, and a moment later Jean felt the cool night air on his face. Someone had opened the window and was already in the room, standing motionless and holding his breath.

Jean Gilbert did not feel afraid, but curiously interested in this quiet visitor. It was certainly a man. The few stealthy footsteps he had made were not those of a woman; and presently his hard breathing revealed him to Jean as a man excited by some deep emotion.

Jean sat very quiet in his chair. His brain and body were alert. It was probably a burglar come to steal Yvonne's wedding presents—those tragic wedding presents!—or anything else he could lay his hands on. Jean decided to let him get farther into the room before jumping on him.

It seemed a long time before the man moved again, but presently Jean heard him feeling his way along the wall. He stumbled over a footstool, and then stood quiet again, and drew a sharp breath. A moment later Jean heard the rattle of a box of matches, and before the light could be struck leapt out of his chair, stood between the man and the open window, and called out, "*Qui va là?*" sharply and sternly.

The man did not answer for a moment. He seemed to shrink back behind one of the armchairs.

Jean spoke again.

"I can hear every movement you make. You have no chance of escape. Answer me, or I will go for you."

A match was struck and the man answered incredible words.

"Jean! . . . It is I, Bertrand Gavaudan. . . . Your old comrade."

Jean was a brave man. He had faced death year after year in the trenches without losing his nerves or self-control, except once or twice in dreadful hours. But now he felt fear take possession of him. His hair seemed to rise on his scalp. A cold sweat moistened the palms of his hands. The words that were spoken to him were in the voice of the man who had been his comrade and had been shot as a deserter.

Out of the silence that followed Jean asked a question in a kind of whisper.

"Are you a ghost?"

There was no answer, and Jean spoke again.

"Do you come from the dead?"

He heard the figure drop the match on to the polished boards, and yet the sound of that material thing did not relieve him from his sense of fear as of being in the presence of the supernatural.

"I'm not a ghost," said the voice. "I am Bertrand Gavaudan. I have come back to see Yvonne."

Jean's sense of fear abated. And as the cold terror departed from him his mind began to work on reasonable lines. This was no ghost, therefore it could not be Bertrand Gavaudan. Bertrand was dead. This was Bertrand's voice, amazingly like, but it was the voice of a living man. Therefore it could not be Bertrand. Unanswerable logic!

"Why do you say you are Bertrand Gavaudan?" he asked. "Why this imposture when you come to rob the house?"

"Jean!" said the voice again. "Don't you know me? Ask me any question, something known only to you and me, and I will prove it to you."

Jean thought hard and quickly.

"What name did I carve on the door of the dug-out before the attack on Souchez in the first year of the war?"

"Madeleine Baptiste," said the voice of Bertrand Gavaudan.

Jean drew a quick breath. Yes, it was the name of the girl who had not had the courage to marry a blind man. He had shared that dug-out with Bertrand Gavaudan. He had carved the name on a beam over the doorway while they were waiting to attack at dawn. Bertrand alone would know.

"You broke your penknife," said the voice.

Jean went forward to the figure, whose breathing he heard between the bookcase and the armchair. He stretched out his hand and touched him. It was no ghost. He put his hand up to the man's face and passed it lightly over his features. It was the face of Bertrand Gavaudan as he

had known it, but thinner and with a little beard on the chin. He took his hand, his right hand, and felt that the third finger was missing. It had been cut off by a German machine-gun bullet that day at Souchez.

"Then there is no death!" he said in a strange strangled voice.

This blind man, standing in the darkness of that room into which only a little moonlight came, fumbling about the face and body of the man who claimed to be his comrade, was utterly bewildered and afraid.

The other man suddenly flung his arms about Jean's neck and kissed him on both cheeks, and wept, and whimpered out pitiful words.

"Jean! Oh, my dear comrade! My dear brave friend! What a curse that you are blind! What a joy to see you again, to touch you, to hear your voice! There's only one thing I want more than that. To see Yvonne. They can shoot me if they like. I don't care a damn about death. I'm dead already. Dead to France, dead to the world, dead to my own people. Living like a rat in a hole. Filthy. Always hiding. But I'll surrender and get shot—properly this time—if I can take Yvonne once more in my arms. It is for that I've been hiding and shirking death. To see her beauty once again, to kiss her dear lips, to feel her body against my breast."

Some such words as that he spoke, while he held Jean about the shoulders, and clasped him with strong hands.

"They shot you," said Jean harshly. "They left you dead in the trench of the broken Calvary."

"No," said Bertrand Gavaudan. "They left me wounded. Half the men wouldn't shoot me and all but one aimed above my head. I was their comrade. I had led them into action, before I went mad. After that the Germans attacked and captured the trench. . . . I was a prisoner in Germany until the Armistice. . . . After that a wanderer in Belgium. A labourer. . . . Now I have come back to France—to see Yvonne—before I give myself up and get shot again."

Jean listened to those words like a man stunned by heavy blows. He stood there with moisture oozing from his blind eyes, his head bowed, and his arms hanging limp. So Bertrand was not dead after all! Incredible after all that time, a year after the Armistice—and after all their mourning for him, their fixed belief in his shameful and tragic death. It was almost worse to know that he was alive, a hiding and hunted man, hunted by the memory of his desertion, with his life forfeit to France. And within a week of Yvonne's marriage with Paul Volange. . . . There would be more agony—worse tragedy.

He spoke the word "Incredible" several times, and wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and those trickling drops from his blind eyes.

"*Incroyable! . . . Pas possible! . . . Non, je ne peux pas le croire!*"

He said he could not believe, and yet, like doubting Thomas, he believed, and cried out in a hoarse voice, "My comrade! My poor comrade!"

"For a month I have been in Arras," said Bertrand. "Hiding like a rat. Coming out of my hole only at night. Twice I have seen my mother, and yearned to cry to her, *maman*! She looked so old and sad, and I was dead to her! I saw her through the window of her new house, with the lamps lighted. She was sitting at the table, sewing, as in the old days of my boyhood. My heart gushed blood at the sight of her. Oh Christ!"

Then he spoke the name of Yvonne. Twice also he had seen her. Once when he crept into the garden behind the house. She came to the window and looked out. Once when she walked with Jean by moonlight past the ruin of the Hôtel de Ville, a few nights ago.

He saw her then, or a few moments later. It was Jean's quick ears which heard her footsteps in soft slippers coming down the passage. He whispered to Bertrand.

"She's coming. Hide yourself. . . . She would die of fear——"

Bertrand slipped behind the heavy curtains by the long window, not a second before the door opened. Yvonne stood there in her dressing-gown, holding a lamp. She spoke to her brother while she put the lamp down on the table and glanced round the room.

"Jean, why do you stay up? I thought I heard voices. Were you talking to anyone?"

He lied to her.

"I was talking to myself."

She did not seem satisfied. There was some look of fear on her brother's face, and his voice was strange and trembling.

"The long window is open," she said. "And there are muddy footmarks on the boards. Someone has been in!"

"Not a soul," said Jean. "Get back to bed. I'll come with you."

"Jean!" whispered Yvonne, clutching his arm and beginning to tremble. "There is someone in the room. Behind the curtain."

She put a hand up to her throat and shrank back.

Jean put his arms about her.

"Yvonne. Be brave. I have something strange to tell you, something wonderful—unbelievable—beyond all words. It is about Bertrand——"

She spoke the words, "His ghost!" in a faint voice of terror.

"No," said Jean, "it isn't his ghost. He wasn't shot that day. The Germans took him prisoner. . . . He has been in hiding all this time. . . . He's in Arras now. . . . He's in this room."

Yvonne stood rigid and silent, and Jean could not see the look on her face, such a look as any human face might have in the presence of some miracle of God.

There was utter silence in that room for longer than Jean could ever tell. It was as if these three people had been stricken motionless and dumb. Presently, perhaps when only a few moments had passed, the curtain by the window moved and Bertrand Gavaudan came forward a few paces, and then stood still again with his hands raised. He was in shabby clothes, torn at the knees, and plastered with a whitish clay, and his hair was matted and his face unwashed. Not like the smart young officer in the sky-blue of the French chasseurs, who had looked so splendid when Yvonne first saw him, but a haggard figure into whose face tragedy had dug its claws. His face was dead white. Only his eyes seemed alive, burning with a bright light.

He spoke the name of the girl for whose love he had been shot as a traitor, though not killed.

"Yvonne!"

She swayed towards him like a girl in a trance.

He cried out to her again with a sob in his throat.

"Yvonne! Oh, my beloved!"

She fell forward into his arms, and he kissed her on the lips and eyes and throat. But she was in a dead swoon.

Jean and Bertrand together carried her to the sofa by the fireplace and laid her there unconscious.

"*Crê nom de Dieu!*" said Jean, and then he begged Bertrand to go away. The whole house would be roused. Bertrand would be caught and shot.

Bertrand was on his knees by the sofa with his arms about Yvonne, and he was calling to her, and beside himself with grief.

Jean dragged him up, almost with violence.

"Go away!" he whispered. "For God's sake go!"

"What does it matter?" asked Bertrand. "Let them shoot me now. Without Yvonne life is a curse to me."

"We will come to you," said Jean. "Where can we find you? Tell me quick and go, before my father comes down."

"You will come to me?" asked Bertrand. "You will bring Yvonne? On your sacred word of honour?"

"I will bring her," said Jean, "if you will leave her now."

His promise seemed to open up a paradise to Bertrand Gavaudan.

"I'm in the tunnels beyond the caves," he said. "Where the English bored their way through to the German front line. The best way down is by the old barracks. You follow the caves through, and take the right hand tunnel. A thousand paces, and then ten. There's a high chamber made by the English. It's there I've been living for a month. If you whistle when you come, I will meet you. On your word of honour, Jean? You will bring Yvonne?"

"We will come," said Jean.

Bertrand flung his arms about Yvonne again. Kissed her pale forehead and her white lips as she lay unconscious. Then, with a heavy sigh, he grasped Jean's hand, held it a moment in a terrible grip, and, with a whispered farewell, went out of the long window and through the bushes in the garden, as Jean could hear.

It was an hour before Yvonne was able to go up to her room again, and there was no sleep for her that night, nor for Jean. They stayed together, whispering or thinking in long silences in her room, till dawn. Even now they could hardly believe the thing that had happened. For two years they had thought of Bertrand as dead. He had been buried in their souls. A thousand times, in waking hours and in dreams, they had seen the vision of his body pierced by bullets lying in the ditch by the broken Calvary. Now he was living like a rat in the caves of Arras.

It was in the afternoon of the next day that, on some pretext to her mother, Yvonne went to those caves to meet her lover with Jean as her guide. Despite his blindness, he knew his way about Arras and that entrance to the caves in the ruins of the barracks. As a boy he had explored that subterranean world, dug out by the Spaniards when Arras was part of the Netherlands and when Alva's men, with Flemish labour, had built the city—its Hôtel de Ville, and the splendour of the Grande Place, and many fine mansions—out of the sandstone beneath. Their quarries were like great vaults and had been used as cellars and storehouses by the old merchants, and afterwards as hiding-places for aristocrats when the French Revolution choked the prisons of Arras, while a monster named Joseph le Bon fed the guillotine with the heads of the noblest citizens, with priests and nuns, and poor old ladies. In 1914, when the Germans came to the walls of the city and began a bombardment which never ceased for four years, the French used the old caves as shell-proof shelters, and Jean Gilbert, with Gavaudan as his best comrade, had been quartered there with his battalion. Afterwards, when the British Army took over Arras, they fitted up the vaults with electric light, pierced long tunnels towards the German lines, and filled them with fifty thousand men—English and Scottish troops—in the night before a day in April of 1917 when they attacked beyond Arras, leaping out of the tunnels below the German trenches. . . . Bertrand had remembered that history and the hiding-place.

"We must be careful when we go down," said Jean. "If Bertrand is seen in Arras they will search for him here."

He stood inside the ruined square of the old barracks, listening for any passing footsteps. But no one came that way. No English tourist searching out the ruins. The people of Arras were busy with their reconstruction in other streets. There was that music which Volange loved to hear, because each note was playing up his fortune—the clinking of hammers and trowels and chisels on square blocks of stone from which the new Arras was being built.

It was quite dark when Jean and his sister had left the steps leading into the mouth of the caves and turned into a long gallery, and in that darkness the blind man felt his way more surely than Yvonne. He held her hand and said "Courage!" several times when she stumbled and cried out. Every now and again they had to climb over heavy blocks of stone which had fallen from the roof of these quarries when Arras had been shaken by gun-fire in the days of war. Twice their passage seemed utterly barred until Jean, feeling the walls, discovered a way round into narrower galleries. The walls dripped with an oozy slime. There was a dank, fœtid smell in this underground world. Rats scuttled past them with little squeals and scurrying of feet.

Jean kicked something, which gave a metallic clang, and after bending down and touching it, told its meaning to Yvonne.

"A steel hat. It was here the English advanced in the battle of Arras. The place is littered with the things they left behind."

"Oh, Jean," said Yvonne, "I feel afraid. There is the smell of death here."

"Yes," he said; "they brought their wounded back this way. Perhaps some of their dead lie here unburied."

"If it were not for Bertrand——" said Yvonne.

It was only the thought of that lover waiting for her which gave her the courage to go on, that lover who had risen from the dead, as it seemed.

She saw him at last, standing at the entrance of a vault in which a light glimmered. It was the light of candles stuck into bottles on some wooden boxes. He came towards them, and Jean heard his footsteps and gave a low whistle as a signal.

"Is that you, Bertrand?" he called out, and his voice echoed down the tunnel.

"It is I," answered the voice of his comrade. "Thank God you have come!"

He came forward with a quicker step and took Yvonne's hands and said, "Oh, my dear, my dear! It's brave of you to come! For a month I've been living in this place alone, with the rats and the dead. It seemed to me like hell. Now it's paradise because you come to me."

"Bertrand!" she cried. "Is it you, alive and real?"

"Yes," he said. "Back from the dead! For a little while, but with my life still forfeit. To-morrow I shall give myself up. This is our last meeting on earth. Let us make the most of it."

He held her embraced, covering her face with kisses, as he had done the night before when she lay unconscious in his arms. Now she wept on his shoulder and cried out pitiful words.

"You mustn't give yourself up. . . . I want your love again. . . . We will hide here together. . . . I could be happy here with you, for ever."

Bertrand gave a tragic laugh.

"They would find us! I have already been seen in Arras."

"By whom?" asked Jean in a startled voice. "Who saw you, Bertrand?"

"It was Volange," said Bertrand.

Yvonne gave a little cry.

"You know him? He used to be an odd-job man out at Blangy. Now he looks fat and prosperous. I came up from the caves at midnight, for air, and bumped straight into him at the corner of the rue de la Victoire, as they call it now. It was bright moonlight and he saw me clearly and thought he had seen a ghost. When I said 'Pardon, m'sieur,' he started running, and I slipped away into the darkness of the ruins. But he knew my face again . . . and perhaps he doesn't believe in ghosts!"

Jean and Yvonne listened to those words in a stricken silence.

It was Yvonne who told Bertrand the thing which all in Arras knew except himself. She had promised to marry that man Volange. She had been forced into it by her father. But she would never marry him now that Bertrand had come back from the dead. She would rather die than do so.

Bertrand let his arms drop to his side, and his head drooped.

"It is better that you marry him," he said. "I am a brute to come back and spoil your life again. I am dead to the world. I have no right to your love."

"My love is yours for ever and ever," cried Yvonne. "Dead or alive, I belong to you, Bertrand."

It was what she had said when she believed that his ghost had come to haunt her.

"What do you do for food?" asked Jean. "How do you live in this ghastly place?"

"There's food enough for a hundred men," said Bertrand. "The English left a store of rations in this vault. Tins of meat and bottles of soda-water. Even the rats can't get at them."

He led Yvonne into the vault which he used as a living-room. He had strewn it with flowers which he had plucked in the gardens of Arras at midnight. He had made a chair for her out of wooden boxes left by the English troops, and covered it with a piece of tapestry which he had found in a ruined house. The candles—from those old British stores—burning above the packing-cases made the white-roofed vault look like a *chapelle ardente*—a mortuary chapel where a coffined body might lie on its way to the grave.

"I will keep guard outside," said Jean. "You and Yvonne have much to say."

He paced up and down the long tunnel, fifty paces one way, fifty back again, touching the damp walls, listening to the rats squeaking and fighting, smelling the dank air in which there was a faint reek of human corruption.

The blind man's mind was busy with the problem of his comrade who had come back from the dead. Supposing he gave himself up? Would he be shot again as a deserter, a year after the Armistice? Surely there would be mercy and pardon for him? . . . But why give himself up? Why not disappear again to some other part of France, or across the Belgian frontier? He had no right to come back and claim Yvonne, on the very eve of her marriage with Volange. It would spoil her life. With a hunted man for her lover, how could she be happy and at peace? . . .

For a little while Jean felt angry because Bertrand was alive again. It would have been better if he had been killed in that ditch by the broken Calvary.

Then, as he heard the murmur of those two voices in the vault, pity overwhelmed him. They were happy in their love again, for a little while. He could hear Bertrand's kisses on Yvonne's face, her little cries and whimperings. Once he heard her cry out, "Oh, my beloved, *mon bien-aimé*!" Love, in this vault of death! . . . The blind man, so lonely, in eternal darkness, without the love of the woman he had craved—she had abandoned him in his blindness—envied those two in each other's arms. He leaned against the damp walls and groaned. What a heritage of tragedy had been left by the War in France! That war which had destroyed love. That accursed war which had massacred the youth of the world, taken the joy out of life, put out the eyes of men, made them mad! Bertrand Gavaudan, so gallant, so good a soldier of France, was hiding like a wild beast because the strain of war had weakened him for a week or two. How cruel it was! How unjust! . . .

Jean went back to the entrance of the vault.

"We must be going," he said in a broken voice. "My dear Bertrand, we must leave you in this horrible place. God alone knows what is the best for you to do."

He heard Yvonne slip from the arms of Bertrand Gavaudan. She spoke in a shrill voice.

"Jean! I am not coming back. I am staying with Bertrand. Nothing but death can take him from me now. There will be no wedding with Paul Volange. God has intervened."

For a moment or two Jean was silent. Then he cried out harshly.

"That's a mad idea. Impossible, Yvonne! Come back, I beseech you!"

"Yes," said Bertrand in a low voice, "you must go back, Yvonne. You cannot stay here in this filthy hole. It's a place of horror."

"I am staying with my love," she said.

No protests nor pleadings, no arguments nor cries to God, not even Jean's effort to seize her and take her back by force could break her purpose. She slipped from her brother's grasp, clung to her lover, and like a wild thing at bay, panting, would not be induced to come out of that dreadful vault. . . . It was an hour before Jean gave up, and stumbled back alone, groping his way along the tunnels, moaning as he went like a wounded man.

That evening Volange called round as usual to play a game of cards with the family of his future wife, to talk of the progress of his "Reconstruction," to feast his eyes on the desirable beauty of Yvonne. It was three evenings from his wedding day. More presents had arrived. Also the piano which he had bought in Paris had been delivered at his house. Yet he was in low spirits, it seemed. Some uneasy thought or memory seemed to be nagging at him. And he became aware a few moments after his arrival that his future relatives were in the deepest gloom. The old man sat silent and grim. Madame Gilbert had been weeping and was trying to hide her distress. Jean was as pale as death and sat knitting with his head bowed, utterly silent.

"Where is Yvonne?" asked Volange suspiciously, with a quick glance from one face to another.

It was Madame Gilbert who answered with a little white lie.

"She is unwell this evening. She cannot come down to see you, poor child!"

"I will go up to her room," said Volange, and he rose from his chair.

Did he suspect anything? Was it possible that he had any knowledge of the thing that had happened—the return of Bertrand, the disappearance of Yvonne? Only Jean knew that Volange had seen Bertrand by moonlight and had run away from him in fright as though he had seen a ghost. He had not told that part of the story to his father and mother, who had been dazed and overwhelmed by the news of Bertrand's return and of Yvonne's refusal to leave the caves.

Madame Gilbert rose from her chair and put a trembling hand on the arm of the man to whom her daughter was betrothed.

"It would be a pity to disturb her. She might be sleeping."

Volange looked around angrily and breathed hard.

"What is all the mystery? Why do you all look as though you were hiding a murder from me? I demand to see Yvonne. If she does not come down I will go up to her. . . . In three days she will be my wife. I have the right——"

"She is not at home this evening," said Madame Gilbert desperately. "She—she is staying at a friend's house."

"What friend?" asked Volange harshly.

Madame Gilbert hesitated. Volange knew everyone in Arras. Whatever name she mentioned he would know. And he would find out that she had lied.

Volange stared at her, waiting for her answer, and then asked a question with a violent emotion which he tried to restrain.

"Has she gone away with Bertrand Gavaudan?"

Madame Gilbert began to weep and tremble. Her husband sat with one hand plucking at his short white beard. Jean jerked his head up and his sightless eyes were fixed on Volange as though he saw that red flushed face and bald forehead wet with the sweat of rage and fear.

"Sacred name of God!" said Volange in a rasping voice. "Why do you lie to me, all of you? How long have you kept this secret from me? Why did you pretend to me that young Gavaudan was dead, when he is skulking here in Arras, afraid to show himself in daylight?"

"You have seen him?" asked Jean quietly.

"I bumped into him last night," said Volange. "I thought it was a ghost until he spoke. If I had had my wits about me I should have seized him and called the police. He was sentenced to death as a deserter, a traitor to France. Somehow he escaped. Well, he sha'n't escape a second time. The French law has a long arm, my friends."

So he knew the secret of Bertrand's crime! Was there nothing this man did not know about the people of Arras, out of whose ruin he was growing rich and fat?

Jean drew a deep breath. He understood the nature of Volange—greedy, selfish, ruthless. There would be no mercy for Bertrand Gavaudan with this man on his trail.

"He was Yvonne's lover," said Jean. "It was his love for her which led him into trouble. Before then he fought nobly for France. If you have any pity for human weakness, any generosity of heart for youth and love——"

"I have no pity for traitors to France," said Volange harshly, "and I have a right to Yvonne's love—body and soul. Is she not going to be my wife, in three days' time? Isn't the whole of Arras getting ready for our wedding?"

"There will be no wedding," said Jean coldly. He knew now that he hated this man. "Yvonne will never be your wife. She belongs to Bertrand Gavaudan, dead or alive, and she is with him now, and will never leave him."

Volange gave a cry like a wounded beast. If Jean had not hated him, he would have felt some pity for him.

He raged and stormed in uncontrollable fury. He demanded to know the whereabouts of Bertrand and Yvonne. With his own hands he would go and kill that traitor who had escaped his death sentence and come back to steal other men's women.

"Where are they?" he cried. He came over and grasped Jean with his fat little hands and screamed at him.

"Where are they hiding? . . . Sacred Name! . . . Tell me where I can find them, or I'll throttle you."

"They're well hidden," said Jean. "You will never find them, Volange. And if you don't take your greasy hands off me I'll smash your face."

"I want my wife!" cried Volange. He burst into tears and babbled about his "reputation," his "honour," his good name. He cared nothing, it seemed, for Yvonne's happiness.

Then Jean heard his father speak and the old man's words made him turn pale.

"Our loyalty is to you, Volange. That's plain enough. Yvonne is pledged to you. That lover of hers has forfeited his right to her love, as well as his life to France. In my mind he is dead. I don't acknowledge him among living men. In any case he'll be shot when he's caught. I will tell you where to find him."

"Father!" cried Jean. "I implore you! By these blind eyes of mine I beseech you. For Yvonne's sake——"

"Silence!" said the old man sternly. "I am tired of all this nonsense, Yvonne's folly—her undutiful conduct, her ingratitude. I have promised her to Volange. That is enough. Is it right, anyhow, to allow a young girl to spend the night in the caves of Arras——"

Volange repeated those last words as though a light had burst upon him.

"The caves of Arras! . . . So that is it! . . . I might have guessed."

He crossed the room and took up his hat and stick and then spoke with a harsh gravity.

"For Yvonne's sake I advise you to keep this thing quiet. I shall have the man arrested by the military police. The Commandant is a good friend of mine. I can rely on his discretion."

Jean made one more plea to him, but he waved it aside and left the house.

And that night through the streets of Arras in the darkness there was the quick march of four soldiers and a sergeant and one young man, their prisoner, with whitish clay upon his ragged clothes, and unkempt hair, and a little beard. There were no people in the ruined streets to see the face of a man whom some had known as a gallant young officer, now walking, handcuffed, with a haggard face, dead white, and agony in his eyes. Nor did anyone see a motor-car in which Yvonne sat weeping by the side of a French officer, who had had to use force to tear her from her lover's arms in a flower-strewn vault, but now was pitiful.

Jean did not see his sister that night; though he heard her weeping in her room.

Early next morning some peasant woman helped him into a second-class carriage of the train to Paris, where he sat staring out of the window as though he saw the fields of France and the poppies in the tall growing wheat, and the poplars down the long straight roads.

In Paris he was nearly run over by a taxi-cab driver, not seeing he was blind, shouted at him as a *sacré imbécile*.

But again some women, with pity in their eyes, helped him to cross the road and get into another taxi. "What address, monsieur?" they asked.

He drove to the War Office on the left bank of the river, and was saluted by the sentries and led up the steps by an old Colonel who happened to be passing.

"You want to see someone?" he asked, looking at this young blind man with kindly eyes.

"I want to see the Chief of Staff," said Jean. "He used to be my General of Division. It's a matter of life and death."

The old Colonel whistled.

"As bad as that? In time of peace!"

"It's one of the tragedies of war. Not my own, but worse than mine."

"The War has left many tragedies," said the Colonel gravely.

He told Jean to wait in a room at the end of a long corridor.

"I will speak a little word to the Chief of Staff. He's an old comrade of mine. Otherwise—without an appointment——"

He laughed, thinking of the red tape which strangled everyone in this "sacred" War Office.

Even with his "little word" Jean had to wait for two hours, and sat in a whitewashed room, dejected, with impatience nagging at his nerves.

Then at last the door opened, an orderly summoned him, and led the way down the stone-flagged corridor, which echoed with their footsteps.

"The Chief of Staff," he said, opening a green baize door.

Jean stepped inside the room on to a soft carpet, and stood listening, at attention. He could hear a rustle of papers and then the shifting of a chair. A man said, "*Bien, mon général*," and left the room by another door. Then Jean heard a heavy tread across the carpet and two hands

took him by the shoulders, and drew him close to a broad chest. He was being embraced by the Chief of Staff, who had been his General of Division in the first year of the War—that great hero of France, so ruthless and yet so gentle, so terrible in attack, and yet so careful of the comforts of his troops, so regardless of men's lives, and yet so generous in praise of valour. They had cursed him, feared him, and adored him.

"What can I do for you, *mon vieux*? It's a long time since you led that raid at Souchez, *hein*? Well, well, I've not forgotten. Nor all your other service in great and dreadful days."

"*Mon général!*" stammered Jean. "I have come here to ask your favour for a comrade of mine, your bravest lieutenant in the early years of the War. At Souchez. On the Somme. Before Verdun. He went a little mad. He deserted for a time. He was shot by order of the Colonel. Now he is alive again."

The Chief of Staff gave a searching glance at the tragic face of the young blind man.

"Alive again? That seems rather unusual!"

Jean stammered out the whole pitiful story, how Bertrand had escaped, how he had been taken by the Germans from that ditch by the broken Calvary, how he had come back from Belgium and hidden in the caves of Arras, and come up like a ghost at night, and seen Yvonne again. And then that scene in the cave. . . .

The Chief of Staff was much moved. He remembered young Bertrand Gavaudan and his years of valour. And the love story of Yvonne and that young man touched some chord of pity in his heart.

He spoke wonderful words.

"My dear young man," he said after a long silence, when Jean's narrative had ended with a plea for mercy, "in time of war I should have had no mercy for any man who deserted France in her hour of need, even for love's sake, even for a day. Otherwise, the whole army would have fallen to pieces. French soldiers are great lovers! . . . But now in peace time it is different. We have had enough bloodshed for a generation, and France needs children. I shall be glad if the man you call Bertrand Gavaudan marries your beautiful sister."

Jean sprang to his feet with a wonderful happiness in his face.

"Then he is pardoned, *mon général*? He is a free man?"

The French Chief of Staff gave a queer little laugh.

"There is some mistake," he said. "That man arrested in the caves of Arras cannot be Bertrand Gavaudan. A man who has been shot as a deserter cannot be alive again. Such a thing is not recognized in the War Office. It's against the best traditions of red tape and military boards. I will telephone to the Commandant at Arras to set his prisoner at liberty. I am glad you enabled me to prevent a grave error of justice."

He came across the room again and patted Jean on the shoulder.

"You understand? It's best for that young man to remain dead—officially. It saves a lot of trouble. Unofficially I rejoice that you have found your comrade, and your sister her lover. By the time you get back to Arras they will be holding hands again. . . . Now I have a thousand papers to sign!"

He touched a bell and cut short the thanks which Jean Gilbert stammered out to him, with the tears streaming from his blind eyes.

The end of the story was in a paragraph at the bottom of a page in *Le Matin*.

"M. Paul Volange, builder and contractor of Arras, was arrested yesterday for corrupt claims and illegal charges against the Government, in the reconstruction of the devastated regions. It was on the eve of his marriage with the beautiful daughter of the ex-Mayor of Arras, where his arrest has caused a painful sensation."

THE WANDERING BIRDS

Few people outside Germany know the names of Hans Ritter and Elsa Windt, whose love story seems to me extraordinary and startling, and even—strange as it may seem—of international importance. Yet I suppose most people have now heard of the *Wandervögel*—those bands of "Wandering Birds," as the young men and women call themselves, who go walking from town to town and village to village, singing and dancing in return for food and a night's lodging. Hans and Elsa were caught up in that movement, and were perhaps its first martyrs, so that their story is worth telling, apart from its drama of love.

Worth telling because it is possible that this movement in Germany—that "fever" they caught—may be some new phenomenon which is going to change the conditions of things in Europe and, perhaps, the philosophy of modern life. In Germany it is more than a "movement." It is already a revolution—a revolt of youth against the authority of old people, the old laws, the old restraints, and the old traditions of industrial civilization. It began before the War. It has become a tidal wave, or let me say without exaggeration an epidemic, after the War. The whole spirit of it is summed up in some words spoken by Elsa Windt at the gate of the public gardens of Düsseldorf when my friend Captain Prichard heard her for the first time and was immensely impressed (against his will) by her beauty and eloquence.

"Our aim, dear people," she said, "is to return from this decadent, this cruel, civilization, to natural simplicity. We want to get away from what is merely external to what is inward and spontaneous, from futile pleasures to real joy, from selfishness to the spirit of love. We seek to set our souls right with God, with ourselves, with our fellows and with Nature."

Again she said a sentence which Prichard remembered.

"We must change ourselves before we can hope to change the world. . . . See how I at least am changed!"

She spoke the last words with a smile, and many people in the crowd laughed as though at a joke they understood, though at that time one in the audience—Captain Prichard—did not know her meaning.

It was a young French officer—Raymond de Vaux—standing next to him in the crowd who explained the significance of Elsa's last words, the reference to her own "change."

"That girl," he said grumpily (because he had no friendly feeling to any German, man or woman), "is the daughter of Otto Windt, the head of the great Steel Trust and the most sinister figure in Germany. At the present time he is the leader of the monarchist reaction which is already preparing—in mad dreams—another war against France."

"But the girl?" asked Prichard, who was a recent arrival in the British Army of Occupation in Cologne. "What is she doing among this crowd of young people? Why is she dressed like one of Isadora Duncan's Greek dancers?"

He stared at the girl standing on a raised platform, speaking to the crowd and surrounded by a body-guard of young men and women. She wore a white linen frock without sleeves and cut low so that her arms and neck were bare and tanned by sun and wind. Her legs were also bare below the knee and she wore no shoes or stockings, but leather sandals. Her fine-spun gold hair was looped over the ears and fastened in little plaits like a peasant girl. Prichard noticed that most of the young girls about her were dressed in similar style, while the men—boys mostly—were like young shepherds in loose shirts open at the chest, and "shorts" like those worn by rowing men, and sandals or low shoes. Most of them carried long sticks with crooked handles, and they had knapsacks strapped over their shoulders as though they were on a walking tour.

Raymond de Vaux shrugged his elegant shoulders as Prichard asked his questions, and shifted the belt over his blue tunic.

"She used to be a society butterfly. Now she's one of those ridiculous '*Wandervögel*.' They don't believe in wearing many clothes, as you see. The cult of simplicity and all that *blague*. In my opinion, it's an excuse for immorality—a return to paganism—free love—irreligion. Doubtless it's agreeable to young German swine."

"But what's the main idea?" asked Prichard. "What are they out for?"

Raymond de Vaux shrugged his shoulders again disdainfully.

"Personally, I believe it's another trick to create a secret army to act against France. They're tramping through Germany in swarms, rousing the spirit of the people. *Très dangereux, mon ami!* I'd sweep them down with machine-gun fire if I were something more than a French lieutenant."

Elsa Windt, standing on the platform at the entrance to the public gardens of Düsseldorf—it was a Sunday afternoon in May and there was a dense crowd of shop-people and their families—raised her long sun-browned arms (very charming arms, thought Prichard, who could never resist feminine beauty, whatever its nationality) and began to sing in a fresh, clear voice. It was some old German song with a merry lilt in it, written perhaps (that was Prichard's idea) in the May-time of German history before Nietzsche, and world-wars, and other things; a childish dancing song which was taken up in a chorus by the other young people near the platform and by some of the older folk in the crowd. Presently at the end of a few verses Elsa was lifted off the platform by a tall German boy in one of those "shepherd" costumes—a handsome lad, in Prichard's opinion, with a painter's or poet's look, except for his broad shoulders and great height—and the whole party of *Wandervögel*, some fifty or sixty of those young men and women, moved away with raised sticks in a kind of dance step, singing as they went. Groups of small children danced away with them, and Prichard noticed that here and there a young man or woman, not dressed like the *Wandervögel* but in the Sunday clothes of the German middle class, broke through the crowd and joined the singing procession, with a look of ecstasy as though caught up by some magic spell. There was even one young crippled fellow, smashed in the War perhaps, who hobbled after them waving one crutch until two of the *Wandervögel* drew him into their ranks, supporting him with his arms about their necks, laughing, and cheering this new recruit.

The crippled boy's family had been standing close by Prichard. They were a middle-aged man and woman, worn-looking and haggard, in decent working clothes, and a small boy holding the woman's skirt. It was the mother who cried out to the cripple.

"*Karl! Mein lieber Sohn! Komm' zurück!*"

She called him back as though he were leaving her for ever. But the crippled lad turned his head and laughed and in a shrill joyous voice, shouted the word "*Jugend! Jugend!*"—"Youth! Youth!"

"*C'est idiot!*" said the French lieutenant scornfully. "Madness! Hysteria! If I were in command of the French Army of Occupation——"

He stood suddenly at the salute as the French guard passed, carrying the regimental flag, and played up the road at a quick step by a band of bugles and drums. Between each fanfare the bugles were tossed high so that there was a flash of brass, with a gesture of splendid arrogance.

The German citizens scowled at this noisy demonstration of foreign occupation, the visible and audible sign of their immense defeat, and Captain Prichard was startled by the contrast between this passing of French military force and that other procession, going the other way, of German youth singing and dancing to an old tune, and inspired by some faith in a new world of simplicity and beauty and Nature. Was it a

contrast between force and idealism, between old ideas and new hopes? He had been strangely stirred by the look of that girl, Elsa Windt, the daughter of a man whom Raymond de Vaux, this French officer by his side, had rightly described as the most sinister power in Europe, certainly the richest, most brutal, and most ruthless man in Germany. She had a look of virginal beauty, and in her eyes there was a shining charity and sweetness which had quite melted Prichard (a susceptible fellow, as I have said) when her glance had fallen on him once as she had stood on the little platform above the crowd.

"If you want to know more about that dough-faced Fräulein," said Raymond de Vaux, "you can get all her story from our friend Major Macdonald, your liaison officer with the Allied Commission at Essen. He was billeted in her house. He makes no secret of his profound admiration of the lady. Some British officers have more heart than head, if you will permit a little French cynicism!"

He saluted amiably, turned on his heel, and strolled back to the Breidenbacherhof for an early cocktail (which would cost him millions of marks) and a glance at the *Vie Parisienne*, due from Paris by aërial post.

By a coincidence, as it seemed, Captain Prichard came face to face with Major Macdonald (younger than himself though higher in rank) outside a café in the Königsallee. He was drinking a cup of chocolate at one of the little tables between the bay-trees in green tubs, and Prichard joined him.

"Just the man I want to meet," he said.

"Splendid!" answered Macdonald, with his Aberdeen accent. "Do you want to know the rate of exchange? Nineteen billion to the pound sterling!"

He laughed in this throaty way and ordered a cup of chocolate for Prichard.

"I want you to tell me about Elsa Windt," said Prichard. "And the meaning of this *Wandervögel* movement."

Macdonald blushed slightly and looked annoyed.

"Who's been suggesting that I know anything about Fräulein Windt?"

"Raymond de Vaux," said Prichard.

"Let him keep his Gallic impertinence between his own pretty lips," growled Macdonald angrily.

"No impertinence," answered Prichard, "only the amiable suggestion that you can tell me an interesting piece of German history."

Macdonald was not inclined to tell the tale. Yet, being a Scotsman and somewhat of a philosopher, he could not resist the temptation of discussing the *Wandervögel* movement.

"It's part of the same movement that's happening all over the world. I mean the revolt of youth against the old ideas and the old restraints and social tyrannies. Of youth on the way to a new scheme of life—something like that! . . . Do you remember in England and Scotland—after the War there was a lot of talk about the Old People?"

"Rather hostile talk," said Prichard.

"Yes. It was the Old People who made the mess in Europe. It was the Old People who wanted youth to clear it up, and get ready for another massacre. Youth wasn't having it. They said, 'Clear up your own dirty mess—and don't count on us for another preparation for war. We want peace, and joy, and we're going to dance and have a good time, and scrap all the old ideas.' The flapper in England—and America—the wildness of the younger crowd, their carelessness of conventions, and all that, their laziness, and hatred of industrialism and machine-made life—it's all part of the new spirit that is beginning to change things. A social revolution!"

"It's changing poor old England all right!" said Prichard, with something like a groan, belonging to the old-fashioned type.

"It has gone farther in Germany," answered Macdonald. "It's more idealized. It's a new religion. This *Wandervögel* movement is a new gospel of youth. Extraordinary! I don't know where it's going to lead—whether it's going to save the world or wreck it. That girl Elsa Windt ——"

It was then that he told his story about the girl who had interested Prichard so much when he had seen her standing on the platform at the entrance to the public gardens.

It was not true that MacDonald had been billeted in her house, as Raymond de Vaux had said. But he had lived opposite in Krupp's private hotel at Essen—kept in the old days for visitors to the Krupp works—where he was assistant to the commission of allied officers responsible for the destruction of the big-gun plant and all the elaborate and wonderful mechanism which had enabled Germany to produce the most formidable artillery in the world.

It was pretty dull in that private hotel, full of large, empty, heavily-furnished rooms, with nothing to do in the evening but play ping-pong or bridge with three elderly officers who were enormously bored with their long exile in this ugly little city of factories and furnaces where the workers—putting up passive resistance to French occupation—lounged about the streets, sullen, dispirited, half starved, month after month. It was a relief to young Macdonald when he and Colonel Mitchell, his chief, were invited over now and then to spend the evening at the Windts' house.

Otto Windt, the head of the great Trust which controlled most of the steel and coal of Germany, reaching out into Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, and Russia, was "devilishly" polite, said Macdonald. He was a tall, giant-shouldered, bearded man with a bald head and a grim expression. It was obvious that he invited British officers to dinner—and very good dinners they were while the workers of Essen were tightening their belts—not for any love of them but for the purpose of getting their opinion about the political point of view in England and feeding them up with propaganda against the French, whom he hated with a cold passion masked under a cynical contempt. He was a widower and his daughter did the honours of his table.

It was the daughter, needless to say, who attracted young Macdonald's interest, and perhaps (though he did not confess it) something more than that.

She was haughty at first, and as cold as ice with Macdonald, who through sheer nervousness blundered horribly at the first dinner-party by allusions to the War when he had fought in the Highland Division.

"We wish to forget all that," she said freezingly.

"Perhaps it is better," answered Macdonald mildly, yet with a touch of sarcasm.

She was always elegantly dressed, and wore a diamond bracelet, and a diamond band in her hair, which must have been worth astronomical numbers of German marks. Once or twice when several young men were present—mostly ex-officers of the German cavalry—Macdonald was humiliated because she ignored him entirely and devoted all her attention, and her smiles, to these rather stiff and unattractive young men who clicked heels before her, and kissed her hand at parting, and discussed the theatres and operas in Berlin as though there were no starving people in Germany, no universal ruin of the whole industrial life of that country, no threat of revolution and disintegration. Elsa Windt seemed to spend many months of the year in Berlin, and to be in the centre of its gayest and most selfish life.

She was engaged to one of those officers, Ernst von Zedlitz, a monocled young man with three sword cuts—the mark of old duelling days—on his right cheek. He was an arrogant fellow, self-conceited, and with a look of brutality under his mask of courtesy and drawing-room

elegance. But he was obviously devoted to Elsa Windt, to whom he behaved with great deference and tenderness, though she was a little disdainful of him, it seemed.

"Heartless!" thought Macdonald.

Yet after two or three visits he reconsidered that judgment.

The first time when he believed that she was not quite heartless was when her father, at the dinner-table, asked her suddenly why she was not wearing her diamonds. Macdonald had noticed the absence of them.

She laughed, rather nervously, and looked at her father with challenging eyes.

"They have gone into the stewpot," she said. "They will make excellent soup for starving people."

Otto Windt stared at his daughter with a heavy frown.

"What do you mean, Elsa?" he asked sternly. "I gave you those jewels on your twenty-first birthday, last year. They cost a great sum of money, as an expression of my love."

"I have turned them back into love," said the girl. "I gave them to the Relief Committee in your name, as well as mine, father. They were overjoyed at so fine a gift."

Otto Windt's heavy face coloured darkly up to his bald forehead.

"You did not ask my permission," he said, breathing rather heavily. "In any case, I object to those soup-kitchens. The out-of-work pay is enough for the factory hands, and if they are too well fed they become demoralized, insolent, and revolutionary. A little hunger will do them no harm. It keeps them obedient and dependent upon those who pay their wages."

All this was spoken in German, which Colonel Mitchell, Macdonald's chief, did not understand very well. Macdonald had not yet revealed that he understood German as well as his own language. He noticed that Elsa's eyes filled with tears and that she gave her father a look of scorn and dislike.

"Father!" she said in a low voice, "those are outrageous words! In spite of hunger, the spirit of our people's resistance to French tyranny has been heroic and glorious."

"They are miserable dogs," said Otto Windt. "Too many Communists among them. They would be the first to attack me, if they didn't know they would starve to death without the wages I give them. In any case, Elsa, I am deeply angry that you gave away those diamonds. It was ungrateful and disobedient."

"I would strip myself for the people's sake," answered Elsa, and Macdonald noticed that she had gone white to the lips.

It was that evening after dinner that Macdonald was alone with her for the first time. She took him into the drawing-room and presently asked him if he liked music.

"I adore it," said Macdonald truthfully. "If you would play, Fräulein, it would give me the greatest pleasure. I crave for music like a parched traveller for water in the desert."

She smiled, and asked, "As much as that?"

Then she played some Schubert with a pretty touch, and after that a piece by Liszt, but did not finish it. She turned round on the piano-stool and said, "You sing, perhaps?"

"Just a little," Macdonald confessed bashfully, though he had a good baritone and liked using it.

"Before the War," said Elsa, "I had an English governess. We used to sing together. Look, I will get one of the books we used—not opened since I was a little girl, though I remember every song in it."

She brought out the old "Student's Song Book" and asked Macdonald what he would sing. He sang "Annie Laurie," and afterwards "The Bonnie Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond," and then "Drink to me only with thine eyes."

Elsa Windt was deeply moved, and those songs broke the ice between her and Macdonald.

"Those songs were loved in many German homes before the War," she said. "How terrible that war should have come between your people and mine!"

"Terrible—and unnecessary, but for the wickedness of great people," he said, and by that he meant the German War-lords and the professors of a poisonous philosophy.

"Yes," she said eagerly. "Wickedness! Wickedness! On both sides. On all sides."

He did not answer that point of hers. It was beyond argument now. The dead lay in their graves. His comrades, and her brothers—two of them, as he knew.

She touched him on the sleeve and spoke in a low, nervous voice, looking towards the door.

"Is it going to happen again?" she asked. "I am afraid it may happen some time in the future. This Europe of ours is full of hatreds, worse than before the last war. The French have shown us no chivalry, no justice, no generosity. It is beyond endurance to our pride, to our honour! It cannot last like this for ever."

"What is the spirit of the people?" asked Macdonald. Lately he had had a little sympathy with the Germans, surprising to himself after his years in the War and his hatred of these people. Now, five years after war, they were in despair, hopeless and hunger-stricken.

Elsa Windt put her arms down on the keyboard of the piano, slurring the notes.

"There is no hope for Germany!" she said. "The people must work for ever to pay off their debts. They must work like slaves for men like my father, who grinds them in his great machines, careless of their souls and bodies. He will arrange things with the French. His factory hands will work ten hours a day instead of eight hours a day, on less wages. They will starve a little more, that's all!"

She spoke bitterly, with dreadful irony.

"Well, anyhow," said Macdonald, "that is better than another war."

Elsa Windt raised her head and looked at Macdonald as he stood beside her at the piano, as though wondering how far she could trust him.

"There are people arranging the next war," she said. "Getting ready for it. Drilling, inventing new aëroplanes, new gases, new weapons more deadly than the old. If it happens, Europe will be a graveyard."

"Only a few madmen believe in that," said Macdonald.

"Yes, madmen," answered Elsa. "But more than a few. The Old Men are plotting again. The Old Ideas are working again, even among the younger men. If you knew what I hear at my father's dinner-table——"

She broke off her sentence, seemed to regret her words, and became very pale.

Just then Macdonald heard a sound of singing down in the street below. It was as though a number of people were singing in chorus, some quaint old German song, with a dance step in its rhythm, merry and lilting.

Elsa Windt rose from the piano-stool with a laughing cry.

"Listen! The *Wandervögel*! How sweet their voices sound!"

She went to the open windows and pulled aside the curtains and looked down into the open square below her father's house. Macdonald, standing by her side, saw a great crowd of people, the factory hands of Essen, gathered round a group of rustic-looking boys and girls—young men and women like those Prichard had seen later outside the gardens of Düsseldorf. They were singing and dancing an old folk-song, taking hands, making a "ladies'-chain," winding in and out, keeping time to the tune played on guitars and country pipes by five or six musicians. Their figures were vague and dream-like in the evening twilight and the flickering rays of the street-lamps. Presently the crowd started dancing. The factory hands of Essen were not too hungry to dance then! Even some old people, close under the windows of Otto Windt's big house, clasped hands and danced, laughing and panting, as Macdonald could hear through the open windows.

"They bring the spirit of joy," said Elsa, "the *Wandervögel*! It is strange how they sing and dance while Germany is in despair, and many folk are starving to death."

"It's a kind of madness," said Macdonald. "The dancing disease."

"It's the folly of youth," answered Elsa, and her eyes had brightened as though her own spirit of youth had been stirred by that music of singing voices.

Presently the singing ceased and there was the sound of a boy's voice speaking to the crowd. At the same time Macdonald saw a tall young figure detach itself from the crowd and come through the garden gates of Otto Windt's house. A moment later there was the clanging of a bell.

"They are coming to ask for a night's lodging," said Elsa. "My father will refuse them. He disapproves of their movement because they believe in Peace!"

But it was of Elsa herself that permission was asked. An old manservant tapped at the drawing-room door and stood there humbly as he delivered his message.

"A party of *Wandervögel* beg for a night's lodging, *gnädiges Fräulein*. I cannot ask your honoured father as he has gone to the office with the English gentleman."

Elsa hesitated. There was a little smile about her lips.

"I will see the leader of the *Wandervögel*," she said.

"He is not properly dressed for the drawing-room," grumbled the old man disapprovingly.

"Let him come in, Franz," said Elsa, with a note of command in her voice.

So it was that Macdonald was present at that meeting between Elsa Windt and Hans Ritter which led to their love story and strange tragedy.

The drawing-room door was opened again by the old man, who stood on one side as the leader of the *Wandervögel* came in. He was a tall fellow, over six foot, and finely built, as Macdonald could see by the size of his shoulders and the breadth of chest showing through his open shirt. He had longish hair, rather like the "bobbed" style of the English and American flapper, though shorter than that, and would have looked like a handsome young peasant of South Germany but for his finely cut features and air of refinement.

"Good evening, *gnädiges Fräulein*," he said pleasantly and unaffectedly. "I have come to beg for a night's lodging for six or seven of my comrades—in your out-houses or garage. The others have found rooms in the town."

Elsa Windt still had smiling lips, and she did not answer his question, but asked another, while her eyes regarded the young man with a frank expression.

"Do you know whose house this is, Mr. Wandering Bird?"

Hans Ritter laughed and gave a quick glance round the large, elaborate drawing-room with its rich, ugly furniture.

"It's the house of the richest man in Germany, and perhaps the most evil, though there are many others."

"My father," said Elsa Windt. "Have you come here to insult him?"

"By no means," answered Hans Ritter lightly. "We pity him a little, that is all. He is not evil by deliberate choice. He was created by the conditions which built up this industrial civilization and all its tyrannies over the bodies and souls of men. He thinks himself the master of these conditions, perhaps the creator of them, but he is only the slave and victim of their blind forces."

"Would you dare tell him that to his face?" asked Elsa. "If so, he would have you flogged out of doors."

She did not speak angrily, but with a cold sarcasm.

Hans Ritter smiled at her, as a man might be amused by a child's anger.

"I am rather large," he said. "Not easy to put out of any door against my will."

He leaned on his tall, crooked stick and asked another question simply.

"You are against us, then, *gnädiges Fräulein*? Against the spirit of the *Wandervögel*?"

"I know little about it," said Elsa. "It seems to me rather foolish. That you should wander about like gipsies, singing in the public places. But harmless, I daresay!"

Again her voice was cold and sarcastic, but Macdonald, listening and watching her, thought that underneath that pose of the butterfly girl there was some hidden emotion.

"You, of all people, should join us," said Hans Ritter. "It must be terrible to be the daughter of Otto Windt."

She raised her eyebrows and gave a little gaze of anger or amazement.

"He is the arch-type of the Old Men who have brought Germany to ruin," said Hans Ritter. "He is rich while the people starve. He is plotting for another war while the bodies of our Youth are still fresh in their graves. He lives there among those great machines which will destroy humanity unless they are destroyed. He is the slave-driver of machine-made slaves, stunted in their bodies and souls. Look at the fires of his hell on earth!"

He strode to the window and pulled the curtain on one side, roughly, and stared out at the glare of the furnace fires above the city of Essen.

After a silence in which Macdonald heard the breathing of Elsa Windt and the slow ticking of an ormolu clock on the marble mantelpiece, Hans Ritter spoke again.

"The *Wandervögel* are the enemies of *that*!" he said. "We are liberating ourselves from the ugliness of machine-made life. We are in revolt against that industrial era which enslaved the workers so that others might live in a corrupt and selfish luxury, the breeding-ground of vice and hate, the motive power of greed and war. We go out from the great cities into the woods and fields where beauty dwells. We live simply, eating very little, wearing few clothes, abandoning luxurious desires, so that there will no longer be the need of these great gun-making machines and that ugly labour and that world of greed and struggle. We find pleasure in the songs of the birds, and in our own songs; in the pageant of Nature, through which we go wandering; in the love of brothers and sisters—the divine brotherhood of the human family; in the laughter of children and simple folk who listen to our songs and tales. We are getting back to the old German spirit of good nature and Christian worship which was corrupted and almost killed by the evil philosophy of war-lords and scientists and blasphemers of God. We are the *Wandervögel*,

returning to the Youth of the World, claiming the joys and hardships of the primitive life, finding sweetness in simplicity, and the love of God in self-denial."

He spoke like that, so Macdonald said, while he stood with his back to the windows through which the furnace fires of Essen glowed, holding the curtain in his hands, and looking ardently at Elsa Windt, whose lips were parted a little and whose eyes were held by his.

"Come away with us!" he said presently, after a little silence. "Come out of the prison of this great grim house into the liberty of the open sky, and the long, straight roads. Come and sing with us through the little old villages where the folk are glad of our coming, and even the old people dance to our tunes. Come. Why not? A tramping holiday with a knapsack on your back, and a little cheese and some onions for a relish! At the end of the roads are camps and colonies where we work at the old arts and crafts, and build our own houses and make gardens of delight. It's wonderful with the *Wandervögel*!"

Elsa Windt rose from her chair with her hands on her breast, which was stirred by her gentle breathing.

"It sounds like a fairy-tale!" she said.

"It's real," cried Hans Ritter. "We are making life a fairy-tale. Come away with us, *gnädiges Fräulein*!"

He seemed to have forgotten all about the need for a night's lodging, and indeed said nothing more about it until Elsa Windt told him that there was a room for six of his comrades in the work-shed behind the house. She offered to send out some food and hot drinks, but Hans Ritter shook his head and laughed, and said, "We refuse to be pampered. It's against our principles. But all the same, *besten Dank*!"

So he left the room, and shortly afterwards Macdonald took his leave, strangely moved by the scene he had witnessed. He did not guess what would happen, so quickly afterwards, and he was astounded when Colonel Mitchell, his chief, came into his bedroom next night and, after shutting the door, spoke excitedly.

"Strange news, Macdonald! That pretty girl Elsa Windt—in whom you're so interested, by the by!—has done a flitting from the old man. Gone off with the *Wandervögel*!"

"No!" said Macdonald, greatly startled.

"A fact," said Colonel Mitchell. "Old Otto Windt came to me this afternoon fairly broken. Cried like a baby, and afterwards stormed and raged so that I thought he'd have a stroke. A terrific scene, I can assure you, and I'm bound to say all my sympathy is with the old man. Those *Wandervögel*! An immoral lot, in my opinion."

"I'm not so sure," said Macdonald, in his slow, Scotch, cautious way. "They seem to be idealists."

"Idealists be blowed!" said Colonel Mitchell. "How can there be any idealism when young girls go wandering about the countryside with young men, sleeping in barns and out-houses, or in the open fields? Human nature is human nature, my lad, and you're old enough to know it."

"Human nature is a damned queer thing," said Macdonald. "And modern youth is the biggest mystery of all."

"Modern youth wants a big stick behind its back," said Colonel Mitchell, who belonged to the old school and believed in discipline and authority and Mother Grundy.

It was then that Macdonald told Colonel Mitchell about the scene in the Windts' drawing-room after the arrival of the young leader of the *Wandervögel* who called himself Hans Ritter. The Colonel repeated the name once or twice, as though groping back to some memory, and then struck his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Hans Ritter! . . . What sort of a fellow, Macdonald? What did he look like?"

"Six foot three in his socks. A blond young giant, with a face like a South German peasant."

"That's the lad," said Colonel Mitchell. "I know him. I took him prisoner!"

It was in September of the last year of the War. There was a big battle for the Hindenburg switch line up by Wancourt on the other side of Arras. The Second German Guards were there and put up a stiff resistance until they were surrounded. Even then some of them fought like rats in their dug-out. There was one crowd who refused to surrender, about twenty of them led by a young lieutenant, very tall so that his steel helmet towered above the other men. He called out in very good English, "No surrender! To hell with the British!" He had a pile of bombs at the entrance of his dug-out and hurled them at the company of Bedfords, who advanced behind the cover of a tank. Several men were wounded, and Colonel Mitchell, who had come up from Divisional headquarters, gave the order to rush the dug-out and bayonet the lot. As it happened the German lieutenant—that tall fellow—was bayoneted through the right arm and fell under the bodies of his men. When he was hauled out afterwards there was nothing the matter with him except a flesh wound in the arm and a bad headache. Colonel Mitchell had him brought to the headquarters dug-out and offered him a drink of whisky out of his flask and then a cigar out of his case.

It was this courtesy which broke down the fellow's sulkiness. He became very polite, and thanked the Colonel for what he called his "chivalry," and then quite suddenly, through weakness or the effect of the whisky, or the reaction after that bloody fight, burst into tears.

"He was just a boy," said the Colonel. "No older than my own son. I felt sorry for him, especially when he told me that he desired death because the German army was defeated and there was no hope left. For a long time he refused to tell me his name, and then said he was Hans Ritter. As a matter of fact, when his papers were searched we found that he was Baron von Lichtendorf, son of the Chief of Staff of the XVIIth Corps."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Macdonald. "The leader of the monarchists at Bonn."

"Yes," said Colonel Mitchell; "and I wonder what his distinguished papa thinks of his son as one of the *Wandervögel*!—in revolt against the Old Men, and vowed to pacifist principles!"

It was Macdonald who obtained some light on that question, and it was not by accident or coincidence, but by careful diplomacy that he took tea one afternoon at the house of Field-Marshal von Lichtendorf. It was not difficult to arrange. The old Field-Marshal was perfectly willing to receive English officers in his house at Bonn for precisely the same reason that Otto Windt invited them to dinner now and then—not from affection or even courtesy but with the desire to get information of British public opinion and to cause a breach of sentiment between England and France, which would be necessary to German plans for a future war of revenge.

Macdonald went there with a British General of Cavalry from Cologne, and, as it happened, sat next to Frau von Lichtendorf, who was serving the tea like any ordinary German *Hausfrau*. She was a plump, handsome lady, much younger than the Field-Marshal, and Macdonald was instantly aware that "Hans Ritter," the leader of the *Wandervögel*, bore a remarkable resemblance to his mother. Deliberately, in his dry, Scottish way, he gave the lady a surprise.

"I had the pleasure of meeting your son the other day, *gnädige Frau*."

The lady's hand trembled so violently that she nearly upset a cup, and indeed spilt the tea into its saucer. Her blue, faded eyes travelled nervously to her husband sitting, at the other end of the room, bolt upright in a straight-backed chair talking to the English General.

"My son is far from here," said Frau von Lichtendorf. "I think you must be mistaken, sir."

"He was with a party of *Wandervögel*," said Macdonald tactlessly.

Frau von Lichtendorf dropped her hands into her lap, and Macdonald noticed that she plucked her skirt in a nervous way.

"Please!" she said. "Please! Do not speak of him aloud. His name is forbidden in this household. His father——"

She did not finish her sentence but crossed the room with a cup of tea for her husband, who grunted a "*Dank*!" and went on with his talk to the English General. He was saying, as Macdonald heard, that the professional classes in Germany were starving to death. The Rector of the Bonn University received no more salary than the wages of a street-sweeper. The French occupation of the Ruhr had completed the financial ruin of Germany. It was a crime that one day would be heavily repaid, he said, if the justice of God should prevail.

It was when the Field-Marshal left the room to show the English cavalry General some old hunting trophies that Frau von Lichtendorf spoke to Macdonald again.

"Tell me," she said nervously and with a kind of anguish. "My son! My dear, dear son! When did you see him?"

Macdonald told her of "Hans Ritter's" arrival in the drawing-room at Essen, dressed like a shepherd, speaking glowing words about "the Revolt of Youth."

"Yes," she said, "that is Hans. He is mad about it. The revolt of Youth against the Old Men, the old traditions. He has behaved to his father without respect, without gratitude. There were dreadful scenes in this house, and in this very room."

She glanced round the room, as if seeing again, with anguish, those family quarrels.

"His father refuses to forgive him," she said. "He cursed the War in which my husband held so great a command. He spoke words about Peace which his father thought were cowardly and treacherous. Unforgivable. He reviled our most glorious and unhappy Emperor as a murderer of the world's youth. It was then that the worst happened. . . . My husband struck his own son and turned him out of doors."

The unhappy lady wept a little, and Macdonald was touched by her grief.

"And you?" he asked. "You cannot forgive your son?"

"He is my son, my youngest," she said simply. "I would give all my heart to see him again."

"He seems happy with the *Wandervögel*," said Macdonald, with the idea of comforting her. But she raised her hand and spoke with anger and even passion.

"The *Wandervögel*! That shameful madness of youth! . . . I cannot understand it. Young girls leave their fathers and mothers and wander about with young men in the countryside. Sometimes it is only in the holidays or the week-ends, but many tramp their way through Germany month after month. They abandon their good homes, the decencies of civilization, and live like gipsies. It leads inevitably to broken lives, loose marriages, the ruin of girlhood and young manhood. In the name of liberty and love they abandon the very laws of God. What is going to happen to our poor Germany, with this madness of youth in the midst of all our troubles?"

"It is dangerous," said Macdonald, in his cautious way, and yet his Scottish soul had been touched a little by the eloquence of "Hans Ritter," the leader of the *Wandervögel*, the pacifist son of that old Field-Marshal who talked openly of a future war against France. He had spoken of making life a fairy-tale. It was perhaps that dream of life, and not immortality, which lured the youth of Germany away from the cities to the open fields.

"If you see Hans again," said poor Frau von Lichtendorf, "give him my dearest love. Tell him to come back to his father's house, to his own rank in life, to his mother's arms. There will be forgiveness for the son who repents."

Macdonald took away that message, not believing that he would ever see the lady's son again. And yet only a few weeks passed before he came face to face with him, and Elsa Windt was by his side.

It was on an afternoon when, after his return from Bonn, Macdonald was motoring across the outskirts of Cologne on his way to Essen. He had left the streets behind and the last glimpse of the cathedral spire above the red-roofed houses along the Rhine banks when he came upon a party of *Wandervögel* grouped outside a row of cottages under the shade of some tall poplar trees. There were about a dozen of them, powdered with the white dust of the roads and rather weary-looking, as though after a long tramp. Some of them had unstrapped their knapsacks and were sitting down on a grass bank on the other side of the road. A woman came out of one of the cottages and gave them a jug of milk and some newly baked bread, which they received with a clapping of hands and cries of thanks. Two of the "Wandering Birds" sat apart on a wooden bench, and it was at the sight of these that Macdonald slowed down his car and then stopped. One was a tall young man who sat with his long stick between his knees and his knapsack lying in the dust at his feet. The other was a girl with blonde hair and bare arms and neck beautifully coloured by the sun and weather, in a plain white frock. Her legs were bare and she had sandalled feet white with dust. They were "Hans Ritter" (as he called himself) and Elsa Windt.

They were startled when Macdonald pulled up his car and called out "Good morning!" and Elsa blushed rather deeply at this recognition from one who had seen her in her father's house. But she seemed pleased to see Macdonald and gave him her hand very graciously.

"Let me lunch with you," said Macdonald. "It is pleasant here under these poplar trees."

It was Hans Ritter who answered.

"The good *Hausfrau* in that cottage has given us some milk and fresh-baked bread. We shall be glad to share it with you. There is more than enough for all."

Though he said that, Macdonald noticed that the young man took but a small piece of bread for himself and only a few drops of milk in the tin mug which he pulled from his knapsack.

Macdonald turned to Elsa, astounded by the change in her look. It was difficult to realize that this sun-browned girl in a slip of a frock and bare feet was the daughter of Otto Windt, the richest man in Germany. She had a gipsy look, or rather, perhaps, the look of the Goose-girl in German fairy-tales.

"How do you like your wandering life?" he asked. "Isn't it rather wearisome when the novelty passes?"

"It is life," she answered. "I have escaped from a prison in which my soul was caged."

She laughed a little, and looked across the road to where the other young men and women lay on the grass munching their meal and humming little songs between their bread and milk. One boy was lying on his back with his knees up, playing a mouth-organ.

"The merry comradeship of the 'Wandering Birds'!" she said. "We walk and sing and dance. We gather the flowers in the woods. The birds are not afraid of us. At night sometimes we sleep under the stars, and wake when the sky is flushed with the light of dawn. How beautiful is the world when one walks in poverty, with love in one's heart!"

"Your father's heart is broken," said Macdonald gravely. "Is that a daughter's love?"

The Scottish strain in him was shocked by her abandonment of family and home, and that gipsy way of life.

Elsa Windt quoted the Scriptures.

" 'Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My Name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.' "

Macdonald was startled by the words and answered rather roughly.

"Are you quite sure that you have left your father's house for God's sake? Is it not perhaps for the devil's sake?"

"For love's sake," said Elsa, "and the spirit of love which is not found easily in luxury and wealth when many people are near death with hunger."

"That is true," said Hans Ritter, who was the son of a General Field-Marshal, though now he looked like a peasant, or at least dressed as such, though there was something noble in the grace of his long limbs and in the poise of his head. "It is the faith of the *Wandervögel* that only in poverty and simplicity can the German folk find their soul again. It is also part of our creed that Youth must not be baulked in its desire to find truth and liberty because the old folk try to keep them fast bound to old traditions, customs, and fetishes. We must break away, though the wrench hurts—on both sides."

Macdonald looked at him sharply and said, "I have a message for you. From your mother."

The young man sat up with a jerk and showed some emotion. "From my mother? You have seen my dearly beloved mother?"

Macdonald repeated her words, her "dearest love," her promise of forgiveness for a son who repented.

Hans von Lichtendorf, to give him his true name, shook his head and smiled rather sadly.

"I have nothing to repent, no reason to ask forgiveness, at least from my father. I can never go home again while he is alive. Never! That is sad. But I should be a liar to my faith if I pretended to have the least affection and regard for an old man who lives on hatred, who worships no god but Brute Force, who even now would drive German youth to the shambles again in the mad hope of reversing defeat and swamping France with blood and death. It is impossible. I am a rebel against every word he speaks, every thought in his mind. I would rather die in a ditch like a starved dog than surrender my new faith to his old brutality."

He spoke with passion, rising from the wooden bench and leaning on his tall stick.

Macdonald was silent, making figures in the dust of the road with the point of his boot.

"There is something in that," he said at last. "I'm no believer in German reaction. Perhaps peace will happen in Europe, if German youth adopts your gospel of brotherhood and love . . ."

"It is the only way," said Elsa. "But our spirit must cross the frontiers—into France."

"All the same," said Macdonald, "that wandering life is ridiculous. Hardly decent, surely?"

Elsa laughed.

"Why not decent, Mr. Englishman?"

Macdonald did not assert his Scottish blood. He spoke frankly.

"There is human love as well as spiritual love. It needs control, conventional laws. Life without law is anarchy. Is it right for you, Fräulein Windt—or any girl—to wander about with a young man like Hans von Lichtendorf—or any other—like a tramp? That's how I look at it, knowing human nature and its usual ways. . . . It's wrong. It's not good for youth. It's the end of all laws."

Elsa and Hans burst out laughing, she very merrily and he in a rich hearty voice, as though at a great joke.

It was Hans who explained in a simple, careful way, as though to an ignorant but inquiring soul.

"There is no more love-making among the *Wandervögel* than in city streets and closed houses. The atmosphere of the open road is far healthier than the fœtid air of dancing-halls and social gatherings—the night life of Berlin, for instance! We lead a life of self-denial and simplicity of body and soul. Our laws of comradeship are cleaner, stricter, than those of high society. We have self-discipline, and we do not wander aimlessly, without a purpose. Have you seen our agricultural colonies, our handicraft schools, our social camps? It is true that some find their mates among the *Wandervögel*, plighting their troth, and going hand in hand along the roads in utter loyalty to the last ditch. But there is nothing wrong in that. It is the luck of life, and such mating is likely to last longer than those arranged in the marriage markets of the great cities. I am one of those who have found their mates, by the luck of life, and God's goodness."

"And I am another," said Elsa.

She held out her hand, laughingly, and Hans von Lichtendorf clasped it tight and together they stood in the sun beyond the shadow of the poplars, while from the other side of the road came the sound of singing voices like a chorus of humming bees.

Macdonald looked from one to another, doubtfully, and as he afterwards confessed, enviously. That young man and woman looked so happy in their new-found love, in this strange, gipsy-like liberty. They had made life a fairy-tale, and yet he could not believe that it would last and end happily ever afterwards.

"There was another man," said Macdonald, "the Graf von Zedlitz. What will he have to say to it?"

"He can say what he likes," said Hans von Lichtendorf carelessly. "If he says it to me, I will push his teeth down his throat."

"And you a pacifist!" said Elsa.

Hans laughed and said, "I believe in Peace—to men of good will; but I am not a weak man, and that swine is the enemy of the German people—up to the neck in revolutionary plots. The earth will be well rid of him."

"As I am," said Elsa. "His love was for my father's gold."

Macdonald learned from them that they were on their way to a camp outside Cologne, where a group of *Wandervögel* were cultivating market gardens and building their own houses. Hans von Lichtendorf was going to build a little wooden house for himself and Elsa after their marriage in Cologne. They would wander no farther than that.

As all German people know, they did not wander so far. Or at least, their wanderings did not end in that little wooden home which they had built up in their dreams. Macdonald, who had told the first part of this story to Captain Prichard that day in Düsseldorf, when Elsa Windt spoke to the people outside the gates of the public gardens, was the eye-witness of a scene which caused the greatest sensation in Germany at that time—before Germany's financial recovery, and the "Spirit of Locarno," and later history. He received a letter from Elsa addressed to Krupp's Private Hotel in Essen, telling him that she and Hans were to be married in Cologne, in the old Ursuline church, on the following day, and inviting him to the wedding. She wrote hurriedly. There was happiness in all her words.

"It is to be a pretty marriage," she wrote. "Hundreds of 'Wandering Birds' are making their way to Cologne to see our mating. They all love Hans, because of his Siegfried look, and his good nature, and his nobility of soul. Some of them love me a little for my own sake, though none thinks I am quite good enough for Hans—and others are afraid of me because of my father's name. They think I may slip back to the great house in Essen, or to our palace in Berlin, lured by luxury after a little spell of poverty. That will never happen. I am a true convert to the simple life. Better a meal of herbs where love is. . . . There is only one shadow over my joy. My father is unforgiving and very harsh. He calls me a 'street-walker,' and sends me not his blessing but dreadful curses. He does not understand, poor man, and his heart is poisoned by the love of money."

Macdonald was touched by this letter and by that invitation to the wedding. Elsa Windt had, I think, stirred a sense of romance in his Celtic mind.

On the day of the marriage he motored over from Essen, and when he came within sight of the tall spire of Cologne Cathedral—the great "Dom"—he had to slow down because of crowds of *Wandervögel* marching and singing along the roads. They too were going to the wedding

of Hans and Elsa, and those young men and women were garlanded with flowers and had tied sprigs of green stuff to their long sticks. The gathering-place for all the "Wandering Birds," who came down different roads, was in the great place outside the Cathedral, in the Domhof, and there were several hundreds of them who formed up in a hollow square to await the arrival of Hans and Elsa with their bridesmaids and grooms. It was a picturesque and pleasant scene with all those young people in their rustic clothes, with sunburned faces and look of health and joy. Something of the old spirit of Germany in pre-war days had come back again to this young crowd who had escaped from the shadow of war and its aftermath of misery by the faith and courage of youth. Groups of English "Tommies" watched the scene from the edge of the square, grinning in no unfriendly way, enjoying the choruses which were sung by the *Wandervögel* while they waited for the bridal procession.

There were two little processions which, on the last stroke of eleven from the deep-throated bell of the Cathedral, came from opposite sides of the Square. Elsa was in one group, escorted by twenty maids, dressed like herself in white, with wreaths of wild flowers about their braided hair. Elsa's wreath was made of daisies woven into a circlet, and she looked, to Macdonald's eyes, like a fairy princess in a German legend. From the other side of the Square came Hans von Lichtendorf, with a body-guard of twenty young men in the white shirts and short breeches of the *Wandervögel*. The tall Hans was bare-headed, and looked a splendid figure of youth, like a young German knight of olden times.

The two processions met in the midst of the hollow Square, and all the *Wandervögel* cheered and waved their sticks as Hans strode forward and, taking Elsa's outstretched hands, drew her to his breast and kissed her on the forehead.

It was at that moment that Macdonald was aware of a man who had driven a Benz car next to his own, and sat there, at the wheel, watching the scene. Macdonald had only glanced at him, vaguely wondering for a moment where he had seen that face and figure before—a face of Prussian type, young, soldierly, and slashed across the cheek with old duelling cuts.

It was only when suddenly he stood up in the car, on the driving-seat, so that he could look right over the heads of the crowd, that Macdonald remembered him as the Graf von Zedlitz whom he had met once or twice at Otto Windt's great house in Essen, and to whom Elsa had been engaged. "He loved me for my father's gold!" Elsa had said that day when Macdonald had met her with Hans under the poplar tree by the wayside inn.

It seemed now that his love for Elsa had been more passionate than that, more brutal than mercenary. As he stood up on his car, Macdonald could see the man's profile. His face was darkly flushed, and a spasm of rage or anguish passed across it as Hans von Lichtendorf drew Elsa to his arms. Then all the colour ebbed from his face so that he was dead white.

He called out to Hans, as it seemed. Macdonald heard only three words. "Pacifist! . . . Dog! . . . Traitor!"

A moment later three revolver shots, fired rapidly, startled the crowd of *Wandervögel*, and shocked Macdonald with a sudden fear and horror. They were followed by a dreadful chorus of screams and shouts and groans. The hollow square of young men and women broke. They surged together, rushing from all sides towards the spot where Hans and Elsa had met for that salutation of love before their wedding. Suddenly there was a tense silence, as though all the crowd were stricken by some fearful tragedy, and then out of that silence rose a woman's shriek, heartrending, and it was followed by another tumult of lamentation and rage.

Macdonald had not seen the shots fired. Even now he did not realize that they had come from that man who stood on the seat of his car—the Graf von Zedlitz. He was seated again now, and had started up his engine, and was moving away. But he did not move far away. He was surrounded by a raging mob of *Wandervögel*, some of whom leapt on the car. Macdonald could see their sticks rising and falling, and there was the noise of human voices with that ugly note of rage when men cry out for blood. A human creature was being beaten to death.

Macdonald did not see that act of vengeance. He jumped out of his car and pushed his way through the crowd to the place where Hans von Lichtendorf had come to meet his bride. These two lovers lay in the embrace of death. Macdonald looked down upon the body of Hans lying on the cobble-stones with his arms outstretched and one side of his white shirt deeply crimsoned. He had a smile on his face as in the moment when he had drawn Elsa towards him, a smile of great tenderness. She lay there now across his breast, and some of the daisies in her hair were red with his blood, and her own wound had spoilt her pretty frock. Two "Wandering Birds" lay dead, mated in eternity. . . .

They were the first martyrs of that revolt of youth which, in my judgment, is not without danger to the German folk, and yet in its idealism, and its faith in simplicity, and its love of beauty, is a challenge to the gross materialism of a machine-made age, and in Germany a spiritual force which may stem the tide of black reaction.

THE BEATING OF WINGS

There is one simple and natural explanation of the amazing indiscretion of Lady Joan Saville in Budapesth—that dream-city on the Danube—where she scandalized Hungarian society and destroyed her brother's chances of a diplomatic career.

It was, in my opinion, a case of heredity—a call back in her blood to the old spirit of a race, to its primitive instincts, stronger than civilization, more compelling than education, terrible, sometimes, in intensity.

Have you ever studied the migration of birds—that strange impelling impulse which at a certain season of the year bids them leave their nests, their happy breeding-grounds, their plentiful supply of food, to fly for days and nights across sea and desert without food or rest, until many die of starvation? They do not want to go. It has been noticed by naturalists that some of them try to resist the impulse, the strange urgent force within them. It is irresistible. I know of one great scientist who kept a bird as a pet in his own room. It had never known others of its kind, or the wild life. There was no mysterious bird-talk to bid it fly away. It was happy in its cage. But one evening it was restless, shaken by some tumult of spirit, and all through the night in a kind of dazed state its outspread wings vibrated ceaselessly. Its body was confined but its spirit was travelling for thousands of miles on that journey to which it was urged by the instinct of its being.

Something of that kind happened to Joan Saville in Budapesth. The spirit of an ancient race awakened in her, caught her up in its old instincts, called her back.

By a trick of memory I came upon this clue to her nature when I was talking to a young man who was deeply in love with her. That was Archie Gaunt, commanding the British gunboat, *Firefly*, lying below the chain bridge of Buda and representing the Danube Commission of the Allied Powers. It was the night before Joan came to Budapesth.

He mentioned her casually as we sat in the lounge of the Duna Palota—formerly known as the Ritz Hotel.

"Saville's sister is coming this evening. Do you know her at all?"

"I saw her once," I told him. "It was at a country house in Devonshire, four years ago. She was back for her Christmas holidays from a convent school. A pretty kid."

"More than pretty," said young Gaunt, giving himself away.

I recalled her picture.

"A coil of dark hair, and light-brown eyes with a wild-bird look, and a warm colour in her cheeks. Not quite English in her style, I thought."

"Oh, absolutely English!" said Archie Gaunt quickly. "Devonshire blood and stock, as you ought to know by her name."

He spoke with some heat, as though he resented my suggestion that the girl was foreign-looking.

I answered with a smile:

"That's true. The Devonshire Savilles, and all that!"

Then I was struck by the remembrance of an old tale in her family history. I had read it in the memoirs of her great-great-grandfather, the scurrilous old Earl who was George III's Master of Horse.

"Most of our English blood is a bit mixed if you look into it. I seem to remember something about a John Saville who married a Gipsy girl 'over the tongs' as they call it, before he took her to church to make her respectable. She was the mother of the first Earl and a remarkable woman in her way. Boxed the ears of the Prince of Wales—a good sounding whack!—when he made love to her in her own drawing-room."

Captain Archie Gaunt laughed with me at this anecdote, though afterwards he remembered it without laughter.

"Showed an admirable spirit," he said. "Lady Joan has the same kind of pluck—heaps of it—but I hope she won't have to show it in the same way out here."

"Not as far as my ears are concerned!" I agreed.

Both of us had been invited to dine with Saville and his sister that night, and after dressing in my little bug-infested room in a small hotel, I went up to Saville's rather spacious suite in the Duna Palota at a few minutes after half-past eight, for the usual cocktail.

Young Saville—Lord Edward Saville, first Secretary to the British Embassy, to give him his full title for once—was fixing his black tie before a tall gilt-framed mirror in his sitting-room, with more than special care, I thought, though he was always perfectly dressed.

He explained that Joan had arrived an hour before from Vienna and was dressing in her own room.

While he mixed the cocktails I could see that he was excited and glad because of his sister's arrival. He whistled a tune from the opera we had seen the night before—the "Spinning Song" from "The Flying Dutchman"—and smiled at some secret thought which a few moments later he revealed to me.

"God help the young Hungarians!" he said, pouring out some golden liquid into a little glass, and handing it to me with a gracious gesture.

"What's their danger?" I asked.

"Well," he said, glancing at a mirrored image of his lean, clean-shaven face with its dark humorous eyes, "I'm no beauty myself, but I will say my sister Joan is a credit to the family. I'd no idea she'd develop into such a peach! Last time I saw her she was still a lanky schoolgirl, too long in the legs, and on the scraggy side. She'll knock Budapesth all right!"

"You'll have to keep a brotherly eye on her," I told him. "The Hungarian gentry are very susceptible."

"Oh, Joan can look after herself all right," answered Saville lightly. "Besides, there are some decent English fellows here. They'll close round her, I'll bet."

"Among them our gallant sailorman, Archie Gaunt!" I suggested.

Saville smiled.

"He's an old flame. They've hunted together, quarrelled together, danced together, and pummelled each other in pillow fights since nursery days, when Joan was the wildest thing in the West of England, utterly untamed! Archie makes no secret of his hopeless love."

"Hopeless?"

"Too familiar, I'm afraid," said Saville. "Girls like Joan are searching for the Unknown Knight—some romantic dream fellow."

He gave the cocktail-shaker a final jerk and filled two more glasses with the golden liquid.

"Anyhow it's going to be topping having her here," he said quietly. "She and I are great pals. I've felt exiled without her for the last year."

I chaffed him a little.

"In spite of all the Hungarian ladies?"

He begged me, rather anxiously, to be discreet on that subject like a good and loyal friend. It was not his fault that Hungarian ladies were so kind to foreign visitors, and especially, for some reason, to young English diplomats.

It was then that Joan came into the room, and I was able to see for myself that her brother's admiration was not mere family pride.

Saville's schoolgirl sister, as I had last seen her, had disappeared into the past. This was beautiful womanhood. The dark brown hair I had remembered was looped loosely above her ears from which hung two ruby drops. Her large hazel eyes were swept with her dark lashes. She had no need of lip-stick or rouge to heighten the bright colour of her cheeks and lips. She was an English rose in full bloom.

An English rose? Well, somehow, as the image came to me, I rejected it. Not English, whatever Archie Gaunt might say. Her colour was too rich to be quite English. Perhaps the yellow shawl about her white shoulders, falling with a long fringe above a shimmering frock of silver gauze, gave her that foreign untamed look which startled me.

"Some shawl!" said Saville quietly, looking at her with brotherly admiration.

"Venetian," she said gaily. "Do you think it will pass in Budapesth?"

Saville thought it would intoxicate the capital of Hungary.

She touched her lips with the golden liquid and then, putting down the little glass on the rosewood piano, went to the window and pulled the curtain aside, to see the view of the city by night.

"A dream-city!" she cried. "Like fairyland!"

Saville had a window looking across the Danube to the heights of Buda on the other side of the chain bridge. The deserted Palace up there above the Bastion was a black mass in the darkness, but the houses in the narrow streets climbing steeply up the hillside had lighted windows which twinkled like stars, and there were other lights in the Royal gardens and on the bridges, reflected in the broad Danube below. The sky was still faintly blue, and high up on the hill of old Buda the spire of the Coronation Church, where for a thousand years the Kings of Hungary have put on the Iron Crown, seemed to touch the floor of heaven.

Saville, standing by his sister, pointed towards the British Embassy where he worked, on the other side of the river, not far from the Palace, and promised to act as her guide. They chatted in laughing voices while I stood smoking a cigarette and watching them. Lady Joan had her arm about her brother's shoulder.

Presently she drew a deep breath as if excited, and I heard her words, which were spoken gaily, and yet, I thought, with some emotion.

"It's queer! I have an idea that I've been here before—or seen the place in dreams! That river and those lights on the hill!"

"You've seen it on the picture postcards I sent you," said Saville in his matter-of-fact way.

She laughed and tapped him on the shoulder.

"No! Certainly not! It's as though I'd wandered back again after many years. I feel that a great adventure is going to happen to me here, something for which I've been waiting all my life!"

"It's that dinner I've ordered for you downstairs," said Saville. "The chef is devoting all his art to it in honour of your arrival. Where's the Navy?"

The Navy arrived, in the person of Archie Gaunt.

Joan Saville slipped away from the window with a jolly cry of "Hallo, Archie!" and held out both hands to him.

I think that if he had had the pluck of a mouse he would have kissed her cheek then, but he hadn't. The Navy hauled down its flag. That is to say that Archie Gaunt, looking as shy as a schoolboy and blushing vividly, took the girl's hands and bowed over them, and said, "Welcome to our city, dear lady!"

After that we went down to the dining-room of the Duna Palota, and towards the end of the winding staircase, Joan pulled aside the heavy curtain which hung there and stood for a moment to see the picture of the smartest restaurant in Budapesth crowded with Hungarian society and foreign visitors.

In the golden light of many lamps the women's bare necks and arms were milky-white and there was a glitter of diamonds in their hair and about their necks. Their men stood bowing and laughing and chattering before going to the tables beyond the lounge where there was a sparkle of glass and silver. A loud clamour of voices rose above the music of a Hungarian orchestra, playing stridently.

"A strange crowd!" said Saville to his sister. "Some of the prettiest women in Europe, but not all as virtuous as Queen Victoria, poor darlings! Let's show ourselves."

The appearance of Lady Joan Saville certainly caused a sensation as we made our way to our table in an alcove raised above the level of the lounge. Saville, of course, was well known to most of the people. Many of the ladies nodded to him graciously, and he spoke a few words to one or two of them in Hungarian—marvellous fellow, considering the nature of that language!—as he passed. But the eyes of the men were for Joan alone, as she passed with a flickering smile about her lips and a heightened colour. They stared at her with the boldest admiration, and some surprise, I thought, as though they were astonished at this English girl. Some of them whispered together. Even the women turned their heads as she passed, looking her up and down, studying the effect of that yellow shawl of hers.

One of them—a notorious little lady of whom I had been told scandalous things—raised a lorgnette through which she gazed at Joan with wide-open eyes of cornflower-blue. I heard her comment—in German—to the man with whom she was dining—afterwards pointed out to me as an Austrian count.

"She looks like a Gipsy fortune-teller! English, you say? Impossible, my treasure!"

We had another guest at our table. This was young Count Teliki, belonging to one of the noblest families in Hungary, and a very intelligent and attractive young man, I thought. He sat next to Joan—Archie Gaunt being on her other side—and it was evident that he was startled and impressed by Joan's beauty. I saw him lean back in his chair once or twice to glance at her sideways, and his black eyes were lit up with admiration—even with excitement.

He was pleased when she asked him questions about recent history in Hungary, and I overheard him telling her of the Bolshevik régime under Bela Kun when many atrocities had been done to the middle classes and noble families; and then of the Roumanian occupation, which had even been worse, he said. The Roumanians had looted everything they could lay their hands on—the very blankets on the beds. He himself had been robbed of everything, besides losing his estates in Transylvania, which had been handed over to Roumania. For a time he had been reduced to destitution, and was one of those officers who had rallied round Admiral Horthy at Seged before the downfall of Bela Kun and his hordes of ruffians.

"What is the future of Hungary?" asked Joan, in her frank inquiring way.

Count Teliki lowered his voice and spoke with a thrill of passion in his words.

"Hungary will never suffer the injustice of this so-called Peace. Never! The Allies have put millions of our people under alien rule, taken away our forests, our mines, our industries; driven frontier lines across our railways, our waterways; reduced us to degradation. . . . One day there will be a red light in the sky. Every Hungarian worthy of the name will move to rescue his people. We are a fighting race. They have not killed our pride and our courage."

He looked up into her eyes and smiled.

"Why do you tempt me to talk like this? You are English, and in the War you counted me among your enemies."

Joan Saville answered him in words that seemed generous to me.

"The War is over. And to-night I have a sense of being among people I love, as if I belonged to them a little. It is strange, is it not?"

Count Teliki looked at her tenderly.

"Perhaps one day you may come to belong to us. Hungary would be proud of your love."

They were rather daring words, holding a personal hope. I saw a blush deepen the colour of Joan Saville's face. She laughed lightly and turned to Archie Gaunt, who had sat silent and with increasing bad temper, because of Count Teliki's monopoly of Joan. His face brightened when she gave him his innings, for a time.

It was halfway through the dinner that an incident happened which afterwards came back to me as the beginning of a tragedy.

I have already said that a Hungarian orchestra was playing. It was composed of four violins, a 'cello and a piano. The musicians, seated between the lounge and the dining-room, were mostly elderly men with clean-shaven faces and bald heads, but the leader who played the first violin was a young man with perfectly black hair, of which one lock fell over his forehead. I remarked him particularly later in the evening. For an hour or more this orchestra had played the usual light music from Vienna, interspersed with jazz tunes, too loud and over-emphasized, though with a perfect sense of rhythm. But as we were sipping our coffee and liqueurs, the spirit of the music changed.

It was Joan Saville who first noticed it. She broke off in her conversation with Archie Gaunt, and turning suddenly to Count Teliki spoke to him in a startled way.

"What tune is that?"

He listened for a moment and smiled.

"A Gipsy folk-song. Quaint, is it not? And quite Oriental."

"I seem to have heard it before," said Joan. "It has a funny effect—on me."

She laughed, but I noticed that she appeared restless, ill at ease in some way. Her hands went up to her throat and she breathed as though the room had suddenly become too hot.

"Many of these orchestras are played by Gipsy musicians," said Count Teliki. "They begin by playing in village fairs and at country weddings, as they travel about in the nomad way. If they show any special genius they come at last to the big towns, get some musical education, and make a fair amount of money in places like this. But they often go back to the tribe. They're wandering folk. It's in their blood—the *Wandergeist*."

"I should like to study their language," said Saville. "It's older than Sanskrit, I believe. It's remarkable that even the English Gipsies, after five hundred years in the British Isles, still speak the 'Romany,' as they call it, mixed up with thieves' cant and the slang of slum life. It comes from Persia originally."

Count Teliki nodded agreement.

"Yes. One of the oldest tongues in the world. The Gipsies wandered from the East in one of those race-movements which brought the Magyars and the Mongols along the Western roads of Europe. We forget how much we owe to them in knowledge. They were the first metal workers in Europe. As fortune-tellers and soothsayers they still remember, in a dim, broken way, perhaps, some of the secrets of Oriental magic. Among other things they introduced to Europe were playing cards, whether as a blessing or a curse I don't quite know! What do you think, Lady Joan?"

She did not answer him directly. She was staring in a fixed way towards the orchestra, with a curious smile.

"I am listening to the music," she said. "I like its rhythm so much. That quick beat, like the stamping of bare feet. It gets into one's blood."

She tapped out the rhythm on the table with her finger-tips, and her body swayed a little. I noticed that Saville looked at his sister and then at her wine-glass in a quizzical way, with raised eyebrows and a whimsical smile. There was a hint in his look that perhaps the wine had touched her senses.

Perhaps her glance had attracted the attention of the leader of the orchestra—that young man with the black lock of hair over his forehead. He left his place in the orchestra and came among the dinner-tables, still playing a Gipsy dance-tune. It is a habit they have in Hungary and did not surprise the company in the dining-room of the Duna Palota, who were all busy with chatter and laughter at their little tables. The scandalous little lady with the Austrian Count was tickling his neck with a feather from her fan.

Slowly the musician came towards our own table. Whichever way he turned, his eyes were fixed on Joan Saville. There was a look of meaning in them and a smile about his lips. He was a good-looking fellow, broad-shouldered, and graceful in his movements, but of a rustic type. I noticed his hands. They were not delicate like a violinist's, but coarse, as though he had worked in the fields in younger days.

He stood in front of our table and changed his tune to a simple melody, rather haunting in its refrain, and breathing the spirit of the East.

"It's a Gipsy love-song," said Count Teliki, laughing. "He's playing it for you, Lady Joan."

Joan Saville's face flushed deeply until presently the colour ebbed away again and left it white. But she sat there smiling, and I saw that her eyes were held by the Gipsy's.

He finished his tune with a flick of his bow, and then bent low before her.

"He expects a gift," said Count Teliki, and he flung some paper money on the table as a man would throw a bone to a dog. But the musician did not pick it up. He bowed again to Joan Saville, and pointed the tip of his bow to a red rose in her waistband. She unfastened it slowly and held it out to him at arm's length. He took it from her and put it first to his heart and then to his lips.

Saville laughed heartily.

"You've made a conquest, Joan. Your first in Budapesth."

"Not the first!" said Count Teliki.

Archie Gaunt muttered something about "damned impudence."

The leader of the orchestra went back to his seat and the music changed abruptly into jazz again. From his place the young Gipsy kept his eyes on Joan, and smiled at her across his bow. Her rose stuck over his right ear, as office boys carry their pens, as Oriental lovers wear their ladies' flowers.

"What's the matter, Joan?" asked Saville suddenly. He was startled by her whiteness and look of faintness.

"It's nothing," she said. "This hot room, and the excitement of arriving—and the music!"

"Yes, they keep this place too infernally hot," said Saville. "Let's go upstairs to our own rooms."

As we passed the orchestra, the young violinist touched the fringe of Joan's yellow shawl and kissed it. She smiled at him and gave a little tug at her shawl so that it slipped through his fingers. Only Archie Gaunt and I noticed this happen, and Archie stuck out his elbow as he passed so that it knocked the musician in the chest.

I should have thought absolutely nothing of Joan's sudden pallor that evening and the impudent—professional—gallantry of the Gipsy player, if it had not been for other incidents which suggested strange thoughts to me when I linked them together.

It was about a week after Joan's arrival in Budapesth that Archie Gaunt and I were walking with her in the Royal gardens that were cut into a series of terraces below the Palace. We had just been showing her the Coronation Church and the old houses—pre-Turkish, some of them—and Government buildings in the neighbourhood.

"Let's sit down and smoke a cigarette," said Archie Gaunt, glad of any excuse to stay by her side.

We chose a seat looking across the river to the Houses of Parliament and the splendid vista along the embankment. The autumn was pleasant and not too hot. Presently, as we were chatting, a barefoot Gipsy girl with a baby in her arms came up the pathway between the flowering shrubs. She stared at Joan and then stopped and spoke to her in German.

"What does she say?" asked Joan.

"She wants to tell your fortune," said Archie Gaunt, laughing. "Needless to say she wants you to cross her palm with a bit of silver. The same old game! Shall I tell her to pack off?"

"No," said Joan. "I daresay she's hungry, poor thing. And look at that delicious little brown-eyed baby!"

She gave some money to the girl—not silver but that vile paper which passes as money in Central Europe—and with her gay laugh held out her hand for her fortune to be told.

The Gipsy girl held it in her own brown hand and peered at the lines on Joan's transparent skin. Suddenly she gave a cry of astonishment and delight, and relinquishing Joan's hand began to speak excitedly in a strange language which none of us could understand. Then she held out the baby and put its little sun-baked head against Joan's cheek.

"What does she mean?" asked Joan. "She seems excited about something."

Archie Gaunt spoke to the Gipsy girl in German and translated her answer.

"She says that you are a sister of hers! Her people are your people. It is written in your hand that you will dwell again in their tents and wander with them down the dusty roads to the sweet waters of their camps. . . . That's as much as I can make out of her nonsense talk."

Joan laughed, and tickled the sun-baked baby under its chin. It seemed to like this sensation, and chuckled at her.

"I don't think much of her fortune-telling," said Joan, "but her baby is adorable."

Just then a man came up the pathway, followed by an Alsatian wolf-hound. He wore a light-coloured suit and a "Robin Hood" hunting cap with a green feather, and it was not until he paused and then halted in front of Joan, pulling off his cap and standing bare-headed, that I recognized the leader of the orchestra in the Duna Palota.

She spoke to him in French.

"Is that your baby, Mr. Musician?"

He answered in French also, speaking it excellently, as Hungarians find it easy to speak many tongues.

"No, mademoiselle. I have no babies yet. I am a single man. This girl is my cousin, and this is her brat. If they worry you, I will send them away."

He turned round with a scowl at the Gipsy girl, and she shrank from him as though he might strike her.

"She has not worried me," said Joan. "She has been reading my hand, and says that I am her sister, and her people are my people. What does she mean by that?"

"It is true," said the musician. "I knew it when I saw you in the Duna Palota. You have the eyes of our race. We can always tell. And our music speaks to you. It is in your blood. You belong to us, mademoiselle."

"Oh no," said Joan quickly. "I belong to England. I am all English, body and soul and blood."

"To England, perhaps," said the musician smiling. "As belong to Hungary. But your eyes are those of our wandering race, in your blood is the rhythm of our restless life, and in your dreams is the memory of winding roads down which our mothers passed with their caravans on their long way from the East."

"You know what is in my dreams?" asked Joan jestingly—rather too friendly, I thought, with this Gipsy fellow.

"Our dreams are memories of racial instincts," said the man gravely.

Then he bowed and was about to pass on when some idea seemed to strike him.

"Perhaps you and your gentlemen would care to visit my people's camp, one day, mademoiselle? They have come close to Budapesth for the fair next week. I should be enchanted to act as your guide."

"Is it far?" asked Joan.

The man said it was an hour's ride on horseback, or but fifteen minutes in a motor-car. There were three hundred Gipsies encamped on the hills, with their tents and caravans. It was picturesque and amusing.

"One day perhaps we will come," said Joan.

"My people will welcome you," said the man. He pulled off his cap, bowed low, and with a few words to the barefoot girl walked up the path and disappeared behind the flowering shrubs.

"They're dirty dogs, those Gyps," said Archie Gaunt sulkily. "I have been to one of their camps. Nothing but squalling babies, savage dogs, and fleas."

"All the same, I would like to go there," said Joan. "You must take me, Archie. We'll ride out one day. It will be good to have a gallop again, anyhow!"

"There's something in that," said young Gaunt. "I'd love to go riding with you. Do you remember our last hunt together?"

"Impossible to forget!" answered Joan. "I took an awful toss at the last fence."

"And pretended you weren't hurt!" said Gaunt, with a kind of reproach in his voice that was merely a mask for his admiration of her pluck.

Poor Archie Gaunt was not altogether happy now that Joan had come to Budapesth. He was in a fever of jealousy because of the Hungarian gentlemen who began to gather round her, and who persuaded their sisters and friends to invite her to their homes, to the opera, to lunches and dinners, to every kind of social entertainment in a gay little city which had been through all the horrors of war and revolution but showed no trace now of that agony.

Young Gaunt was especially jealous of Count Teliki, who certainly paid particular homage to Joan, and never came to visit her brother Saville without bringing her a bouquet of flowers.

I think Joan was secretly touched by the adoration of this young aristocrat, who had a noble look and very charming manners. At least she was sufficiently gracious to him to give Archie Gaunt a very bad time, although I believe that "the Navy," as we called him jestingly, really had her heart, until it was possessed by another kind of passion, mysterious and overwhelming.

She did not forget her promise to go riding with Gaunt, and it was from him that I heard of their visit to the Gipsy camp.

He came back in high spirits, and said he had had a "topping" time. He had borrowed two excellent horses from the Minister, and Joan had looked wonderful, as usual, when they rode out across the chain bridge and up the winding road to the hills above Buda. Then she had set the

pace and they had had a hard and glorious gallop over a mile of soft turf until they settled down into an easy canter.

By a fluke of chance—at least it looked like that—they met the fellow who played in the orchestra at the Duna Palota. He looked a regular Gipsy, mounted on a long-tailed, shaggy-haired colt, and the fellow certainly knew how to ride, as though born in the saddle. He did all sorts of fancy tricks, dropping his whip and picking it up as he passed at the gallop, standing on his saddle with folded arms, jumping down, and leaping into the saddle again like a circus rider. It seemed to excite Joan and she rode laughingly into the Gipsy camp at such a pace that Gaunt could hardly keep up with her on the second-best horse. She had always been a wonderful rider—utterly unafraid.

There was a great scene in the camp, according to Archie Gaunt's description. All the Gipsies received Joan like a queen, crowding round her and kissing her hands and clothes, and speaking their "gibberish," as Archie called their language. The queer thing was that Joan seemed to understand them, and to be quite at home among them. They led her to a big pavilion-shaped tent, where she sat on a divan covered with a Persian rug, while a number of barefoot women, dressed in bright-coloured shawls and wearing silver bangles, curtsied before her, and the men—all except the fiddler fellow and one very old man who seemed to be the chief of the tribe—crowded at the entrance of the tent. The women brought a silver ewer and basin and poured a little water on Joan's hands and dried them on a napkin of fine linen. Then they brought hot wine, spiced in some way, and spilt a little on the ground before offering it to Joan and Archie Gaunt.

Joan raised her mug of wine high above her head and said in English, "Good luck to the wandering folk, and peace to their camp!" before putting the wine to her lips. They seemed to understand her meaning, which was plain enough, whatever her words, and the Gipsy women clapped their hands while outside the tent the men threw their caps in the air and cheered.

Archie Gaunt began to get a bit bored, he told me, when the leader of the orchestra at the Duna Palota brought his fiddle from another tent to the greensward outside the pavilion, and played wild stuff which set the men and women dancing, clapping hands, and uttering strange, strident cries. It seemed to excite Joan, and to amuse her vastly. She stood in the centre of the dance with laughing eyes, and her hands on her hips, and one foot tapping to the quick rhythm. Suddenly the dance ceased and the fiddler played something slow and soft while he walked round Joan with his eyes smiling into her eyes, and as though enticing her, or mesmerizing her.

Archie Gaunt didn't like it much though he recognized it as the usual "stunt" of Gipsy musicians.

Presently the man ended his tune with a flick of the bow, tucked his fiddle under his arm, and dropped on one knee before Joan, with his lock of black hair falling over his knee. She held out both her hands to him, and he kissed the tips of her fingers.

"Foreign blokes think nothing of that sort of thing," was Archie's comment. "I can't say I hold with it myself, being a John Bull Englishman."

It seems to have been Archie's insistence that made them leave the camp before she really wanted to. In answer to Archie's protest that he was "utterly fed up," she said that it was "tremendous fun" and a "great adventure," and lingered a little, until she took pity on Archie's grumpiness.

They had an escort of horsemen to the outskirts of Buda. Sixty of the Gipsy men mounted their shaggy horses and galloped round Joan and Archie as they rode back.

"The wildest-looking bandits you ever saw," said Archie. "Not bad-looking lads, some of them, if they only combed their hair and shaved themselves. But I will say they know how to ride. Very easy in the saddle. They yelled into their horses' ears and made no end of a row. I wonder Budapesth didn't think the Bolsheviks were invading them again! Fortunately they turned tail at the sight of the first houses. Every man stood in his stirrups, raised his whip, and gave a final shout to Joan. Then they galloped back like a cavalcade of demons."

"Great stuff!" I exclaimed at the end of this narrative. "Vastly picturesque. I wish I'd been there."

"Yes," said Archie Gaunt. "Not unamusing. But it excited Joan too much. When she dismounted she was trembling all over, and her eyes were on fire—like stars!"

It was about two weeks after that ride to the Gipsy camp that Saville spoke to me one night about his sister. We were sitting together in a corner of the lounge of the Duna Palota. The usual crowd were there after dinner, all the "smart set" of Budapesth, with the English Minister and his beautiful wife, a French officer with many decorations, and a German Prince with the little lady who had been so devoted, for a week or two, to the Austrian Count. The orchestra was playing as usual and the young Gipsy who was leading violin looked over his bow with roving, restless eyes.

Joan was out at some dinner-party with Archie Gaunt, and Count Teliki was also absent.

Saville smoked his cigarette silently for a while and then threw it away and spoke to me.

"I'm worried about Joan."

"What's the matter?" I asked. "She seems to be enjoying herself."

"Yes, so I thought, until a week ago. Then I found her crying her eyes out in her bedroom. She doesn't seem to sleep at night. There's something wrong with her."

"Too much excitement," I suggested. "All this gaiety. One can't keep up the social whirligig all the time."

"No," said Saville. "But it's something more than that. Joan's frightened about something. Frightened of herself, perhaps."

He spoke mysteriously, and I noticed that his face looked drawn.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

He glanced at me sideways for a moment, as though wondering how far he could trust my discretion.

"She gets bad dreams—gets scared of what she dreams. Several times she has cried out at night in a kind of terror. Last night I ran into her room and she clung to me and asked me to hold her tight and save her."

"Save her from what?" I asked.

"She doesn't want to tell me. I can't get it out of her. . . . It's nerves of course. Just nerves. But she used to be so normal—so scornful of that sort of thing."

I suggested that he should get a doctor to see her. Probably she wanted a tonic. Budapesth was a trifle relaxing at that time of year.

"I wish to God I hadn't brought her here," said Saville abruptly, and with a kind of passion in his voice.

"It's partly the fault of that ass Archie," he said presently. "He won't leave the girl alone. He's proposed to her twice during the last week."

"Won't she have him?" I asked. "He would make a jolly good husband, if I am any kind of judge."

"I agree," said Saville. "There's nothing wrong with him—and Joan likes him. They've always been the best of pals. But it's no good worrying her into marriage before she's ready."

Then he mentioned Teliki's name.

"That's another complication! Teliki's just mad about her, and makes no secret of it. Needless to say there are strained relations between him and Archie. They're as jealous of each other as two dogs."

I asked him if he thought Joan was at all taken with Count Teliki, and his answer surprised me.

"I think he scares her with his passion. Perhaps that is the cause of her fear."

"He's not alarming," I said. "On the contrary, very chivalrous and charming."

"Girls are strange creatures," said Saville. "You can't make them out. . . . I always thought Joan was different."

That thought seemed to stick in his mind—the thought that he had looked on Joan as a sensible, strong-minded girl and was now disillusioned and bewildered by her.

He changed the subject abruptly and we chatted for some time about the international situation, on which he was rather pessimistic. He seemed to think that Central Europe was boiling up for some new convulsion.

Joan and Archie came back a little before midnight. Joan looked rather pale, I thought, but perfectly well otherwise—in good spirits I mean. We all went up to Saville's sitting-room, and Joan sat down at the piano while the two men and I had some whisky. She played a queer little tune, quite softly. I remembered it as one of those Gipsy love-songs which I had heard on the orchestra downstairs. Presently, when the two men went into the passage to get Archie's overcoat, her fingers slurred the notes and she raised her head and stared at the wall above the piano. There was a mirror hanging there, and sitting as I was on the edge of the table I could see her face and her eyes reflected there. There was a great fear in those brown eyes of hers, a look of animal terror such as I had never seen before in any woman's eyes.

I put my gloves down on the table and went over to her quietly and whispered to her:

"What's the matter, Joan?"

She began to tremble, and a heavy tear splashed on to the keyboard.

"Nothing!" she said. "Nothing! Please do not say anything."

For a moment she caught hold of my hand and held it tight like a frightened child in the dark.

Then as the others came back she relinquished it and sprang up from the piano-stool, hiding her emotion.

"Well," said Archie, "I must tear myself away. Hope I didn't bore you too much, Joan!"

"I'm never bored with you, Archie," said Joan. "I like to have you near me. It gives me a sense of security!"

She spoke so gaily that I found it difficult to believe that only a moment before I had seen fear in her eyes and that tear-splash on the piano.

"That's the kindest thing you've said for some time," said Archie.

She held out her hands to him and then, as he took them, she leaned forward a little and offered her cheek.

Archie was surprised and embarrassed. He blushed vividly but drew her towards him and kissed her cheek lightly.

Saville laughed and said, "My word! You two seem to be getting on!"

I think he was glad to see that kiss between his sister and his friend. It might mean that Joan was "normal" again, after her time of trouble.

"Good night!" said Archie, bustling out to hide his surprise and his joy.

I lingered for a few moments and then walked down the corridor with Joan as far as her bedroom door, after saying good night to Saville.

"Sleep well!" I said.

"Pray for me!" she answered, and then went into her room, flicked up the light, kissed her hand to me, and shut the door.

I don't know why those words worried me. When I went back to my hotel I did not go to bed or to sleep, but paced up and down my room wondering what was the cause of Joan Saville's fear, her obvious neurasthenia, that look of agony and terror I had seen mirrored on the wall. I determined to speak to Saville next day. I should advise him to send Joan back to England, and to fix up her marriage with Archie Gaunt as soon as possible. With Archie she would have that "sense of security" which she desired.

That night I dozed over a book and wakened, rather chilly, a little after day-break. I drew my window curtains aside and looked out across the Danube. It was a beautiful morning with a red flush in the sky above the hills of Buda. The Royal Palace, high above the Bastion, on the other side of the Danube, had shining roofs, and the river was sparkling. There was no traffic about at that hour. Budapesth was still asleep—except for two people riding across the chain bridge. I heard the clatter of their hoofs and watched them to the far end of the bridge, when they disappeared. One of them had a hunting cap with a green feather like Robin Hood. The other was a woman, riding side-saddle. They went at a fair pace. I envied them. How good to be riding to the hills in the light of dawn! . . .

I yawned, undressed, went to bed, and slept for three or four hours. I was awakened by Saville, who burst into my room, with a face of death. It was some time before I could make out the cause of his trouble. He wept in an agony of tears, and then raged about the room. It was a letter which told him everything, a letter from Joan. He let it fall on the floor and I picked it up and read it, and gasped over it.

Joan had gone away with the Gipsy musician "for ever," she said. She was sorry, so very sorry, but something had called to her, something in her blood stronger than herself—irresistible. The Gipsy musician had made her mad, she supposed. It had got into her dreams. Such wild, strange dreams! The Gipsy people claimed her as their own. She must go with them down the roads, from one camp to another, to the journey's end—which was death. She had tried to resist, for her brother's sake, and Archie's. Poor Archie, she would break his heart! She sent her love to him, her comrade's love. But Sacha the Gipsy had played her heart away. She must follow his music, which had put a spell on her. He was her man, her true mate. He had been waiting for her through all time, and she for him. It had all been in her dreams, even in the convent school, this Gipsy man, his music, the stamping of bare feet on dry grass, a wandering race, the call of the winding roads, the sound of running water, the wild, free life. She belonged to it. She had to go. . . .

I have forgotten what else she wrote, the exact words in which she begged for forgiveness, asked Archie to forget her, and Saville to pray for her. She had suffered great agonies of doubt and fear, but she would be happy with this man of hers who loved her. She would never come back to civilization.

"Mad!" cried Saville. "Raving madness! . . . my poor Joan!"

I told him that it was not madness of the usual kind, but a call of the blood—the instinct of race. He did not understand my meaning and stared at me in a tragic baffled way until I reminded him of that great-great-grandmother who had married old John Saville—a Gipsy woman who had married the father of the first Earl "over the tongs" in a tent on the open heath.

"Your sister is a throw-back," I said, rather too frankly perhaps. "That strain of wild blood has taken hold of her, poor girl."

This revelation—for it amounted to that—startled and shocked Saville in a pitiable way. He was even more broken than Archie Gaunt, to whom I told the news when he came into my room very cheerily with an invitation to lunch on the *Firefly*. He wanted me to bring Joan. . . .

He crumpled up completely for a few minutes when he read Joan's letter, which Saville handed to him silently, and I shall never forget the sight of those two men, my best friends, Joan's brother and lover, agonized.

It was Archie Gaunt who pulled himself together first. He sprang up with his hands clenched.

"God in heaven!" he shouted. "Why do we waste time like this? Let's get a move on, and rescue Joan from those lousy bandits. They've hypnotized her, the dirty devils! When I get close to that fiddler fellow I'll smash his brains out!"

Saville jumped at the idea. It was certainly the obvious thing to do, without delay—I mean a journey to the camp on the hills above Buda. I had the secret thought that Joan would not allow herself to be "rescued," but would stay with the people who had called her back. . . .

I noticed that Saville took a small Browning out of the drawer of his dressing-table and slipped it into his pocket.

He had no chance of using it. Though we scoured the country for miles in Saville's car, we could find no trace of the Gipsies. They had shifted their camp some days before and disappeared into the hills, off the track of the motor roads. Even Count Teliki, who put the Hungarian police on the quest, failed to discover the whereabouts of Joan, though we hunted up all the Gipsies in Hungary in untiring pursuit. From what I heard afterwards it appeared that the tribe which Joan had joined crossed the frontier into Czecho-Slovakia, and were found some months later in Prague. Joan was not with them, nor the man they called Sacha. The others lied sturdily and professed blank ignorance of the English girl and their musician.

I have already said that Joan's Gipsy marriage scandalized Hungarian Society and ruined Saville's diplomatic career. The affair could not be hidden, owing to the police search, and caused an enormous sensation. Poor Saville resigned his post and spent many months riding about Central Europe in the vain quest for his sister—haunting fairs and all likely places where Gipsies gathered.

But it was Count Teliki who discovered "Sacha," in the spring of last year.

He was dining, with his sister Stephanie and a small party of friends, in one of the outdoor restaurants of the Prater in Vienna—that district of merry-go-rounds, circuses, booths, travelling shows, and menageries, which make up a "Magic City" where the middle-class Viennese love to spend their evenings. The place was crowded owing to the warm weather, and Teliki with his friends had great difficulty in finding a vacant table among the orange trees in green tubs under a festoon of "fairy" lamps. Teliki's sister and her two girl friends were in a merry mood, thoroughly enjoying the spirit of the crowd, which, after the War and great misery in Vienna, had recovered its gaiety—the old laughing, happy-go-lucky spirit of the Viennese.

Teliki was sad and silent. Something had reminded him of Joan Saville, that English rose, whose beauty had enchanted him in those days at Budapesth. He wondered what brought her presence back so vividly to his mind, quite suddenly, among those plump Viennese girls with their best boys. Then he knew the cause of this reminder. It was a tune that was being played by the orchestra. It was the Gipsy dance which had been played at the Duna Palota that night when he had first seen Joan, and she had turned to him, startled, and said, "What tune is that?"

Count Teliki looked across the crowded tables. The music was coming nearer. One of the musicians had left the orchestra, and was playing his fiddle as he walked among the people. He was coming slowly towards Teliki's table, and his eyes, smiling over his bow, were fixed on Teliki's sister. A lock of black hair fell over his forehead.

Teliki rose from his chair with a sharp cry in his throat, as his sister Stephanie told me. He put his hand on the gimcrack table in front of him and vaulted over it, smashing the glasses as he passed. Then he seized a wooden chair, raised it above his head, and banged it down with a frightful crash. Sacha the Gipsy fell in a huddled heap, his violin broken to bits, his bow dabbled in the blood that streamed from a gash in his forehead. It was all done in a second or two. At all the tables people started up from their chairs with shouts and cries. A dozen men sprang at Count Teliki, who was roughly handled before he was rescued—and arrested—by the Austrian police. The Gipsy, who seemed to be dying, was taken away in an ambulance to the nearest hospital.

It was in the hospital that Joan was found. She came with a little brown-eyed baby in her arms, and she was dressed as a Gipsy in a scarlet shawl, with a coloured handkerchief over her looped hair. Her face had lost some of its beauty, being tanned by hot weather, and her look of youth had gone. But Teliki's sister Stephanie tells me that she had another kind of beauty, that of motherhood, and a strange look of tragedy and suffering.

She fell down on her knees by the bedside of the dying Gipsy, and cried out, "My man! My man!" and then spoke to him in the Gipsy tongue, and held her baby up to his face. The man smiled and stroked her hand, and murmured something. An hour later he was dead.

Count Teliki, after a sensational trial, was punished by a heavy fine. All the sympathy of the court was with him and he was wildly cheered when the verdict was given.

Now Lady Joan is in England with her brown-eyed baby, living with her brother in their old house in Devonshire. I hear that Archie Gaunt has been staying with them, and there is some rumour of a marriage, though I can hardly believe it yet. I hear also that the Gipsy caravans on their way to Dartmoor halt outside the gates of the Savilles' park and that the lady of the house speaks to them in that strange tongue of theirs which came across the world with Eastern tribes.

That is all I know of Joan's story—and what I have told is very strange. But I wonder sometimes what will happen to that little brown-eyed boy now playing in an English manor house. Will he too, one day, hear the call of his blood and be impelled by the instinct of the wandering life, as that bird which all through the night beat its wings with the unforgotten impulse of irresistible flight?

THE SUPERNATURAL LADY

In most events of history involving the lives of men or nations there has been a woman behind the scenes, with some spell over the minds of rulers and leaders, who seem to the masses to be independent, self-reliant, dominant. Sometimes it is the woman behind the throne who dictates the actions of an autocrat. Sometimes it is her subtle powers of charm, or intrigue, which pull the wires of a political crisis or create an atmosphere by which men of action are inspired—or drugged. The women of the salons before the French revolution had this influence over the "intellectuals" of the time. In English history one remembers Nelson's Lady Hamilton, and many others. In modern politics one could name a few but for the laws of libel and common courtesy. . . .

It is this reflection which makes me give some credit to a story by a friend of mine who insists that the fate of Germany was powerfully affected, before the War, by a woman—a young girl even—who was behind the scenes of German society. He calls her "The Supernatural Lady." Her real name was Anna Herz.

He exaggerates, of course. Most story-tellers do, to make their point. Also I am completely sceptical about the supernatural element of his narrative, though I am willing to grant that this young woman did have some mysterious knowledge which put a sinister spell upon the minds of certain high personages in Berlin, and persuaded them that spiritual powers would fight on their side and fulfil the destiny of Germany by world domination.

To me, the interest of the story is its revelation of human credulity, its picture of a certain phase of German social life before the War—typical of other countries in Europe at the time—and the life-story of Anna Herz herself, this adventuress who claimed to be in touch with the spirits of the dead and to foretell the future.

That sort of thing was not confined to Germany. Paris had its Madame Thèbes, to whom French society went in search of secret knowledge behind the veil. In England and America the "smart set" was dabbling with ouija boards, practising automatic writing, attending séances, and playing around with that spookiness which I am bound to confess fills me with loathing. Whether there is any truth in it or not, it seems to sap the intellect of people who fall under its control so that they lose their sense of evidence and in some cases their moral character. Nine cases out of ten there is fraud or vice at the back of it.

Valentine Hunt, the English correspondent in Berlin, admits that Anna Herz was partly a fraud. In fact, he convicted her of certain well-worn tricks and made her confess to them. It was he who tracked down her secret history and discovered its squalor and tragedy. But he believes, and tries to convince me, that apart from all her charlatanism, her tricks as a professional dupe, she had certain mysterious powers, beyond scientific explanation, which enabled her to recall the unknown past and foretell the future. He shakes his head when I suggest mental telepathy, and says: "Partly, perhaps, but that doesn't account for everything. Besides, what *is* mental telepathy? Who can explain it? Isn't it a miraculous power, anyhow?"

It was early in 1914 that Valentine Hunt first heard of Anna Herz, and went to see her at the invitation of a young German officer named Karl von Schwarzkopf. This young fellow was of good social standing as an officer in the cavalry, and the son of a high official in the German Foreign Office. His mother was an English lady, and Karl von Schwarzkopf himself was very pro-English, and—in spite of his cavalry training and caste—hostile to all that military arrogance and ambition which had become a danger to Europe. Not that he bothered much about world politics or national ideals. He lived the gay life, accumulated debts which led to trouble with his father, was devoted to racing, flirted with girls of high degree—sometimes with girls of low degree—and gave bachelor parties at the luxurious rooms in the Kurfurstendam, where wine flowed freely, and where Valentine Hunt heard the gossip and scandal of German high life.

One night, when Hunt turned up for supper there, young Schwarzkopf was entertaining two of his fellow-officers and a young actress named Hilda Lorenz, who was becoming well known in the musical comedy world. She was a slim graceful creature with a mop of spun-gold hair and a pretty face with big eyes. Rather tragic eyes, said Hunt, when she thought nobody was looking at her, though she wore a mask of gaiety. She spoke an amusing slang, and Hunt, who knew German perfectly, detected that she lapsed occasionally into a low-class accent. Young Schwarzkopf flirted with her in a cheery boyish way, and Hunt suspected that the girl had lost her heart to him rather seriously.

It was one of the other men who behaved rather disrespectfully to the girl—some of his jokes were not in good taste—and Hunt took an immediate dislike to him. He was in appearance, though not in manners, a typical German cavalry officer, very tall, with a lean face slashed with old duelling cuts, and a waisted figure. He was the Baron von Holberg, and notorious through a rather unsavoury case which had recently been exposed in the courts. The other man present was Count Harzburg, a good-natured lad with a monocle and a rather charming smile.

Hunt confesses that he drank rather freely of sweet champagne. Perhaps it was this which made him too hot in his argument with Baron von Holberg, who discussed international politics and accused England of trying to thwart the legitimate ambitions of Germany in North Africa and elsewhere.

"We cannot submit for ever to England's dog-in-the-manger policy," said Holberg. "It is becoming intolerable—and very dangerous."

"Dangerous for whom?" said Hunt coldly.

The Baron von Holberg smiled enigmatically.

"England wouldn't like it if the Prussian Guards went for a picnic in the sunny fields of Kent!"

Hunt admits that these words were not spoken seriously. It may have been the chaff of a man who knew him well enough to indulge in a little friendly banter. But Hunt took umbrage and answered sharply:

"The British Fleet doesn't encourage picnic parties. I'm afraid the Prussian Guards would get rather seasick on the way, before they fed the fishes."

"This is a friendly party," said Karl von Schwarzkopf. "Fill up your glasses, gentlemen, and drink to art and beauty—so charmingly represented by Miss Hilda Lorenz!"

The girl laughed and clinked glasses with them, and the Baron von Holberg turned his attention to her with some flattering compliments. When young Schwarzkopf went into an adjoining room to answer the telephone, Holberg tried to kiss the girl's bare arm, but she shrank from him with a laughing protest which did not disguise her annoyance, and appealed to the young man in the monocle—Count Harzburg—to make Holberg behave himself.

"Very difficult," said the boy, with a good-natured smile. "Our distinguished friend has a pagan philosophy of life which is ill-adapted to modern drawing-rooms. He is a satyr. He has goat's feet concealed by those patent-leather shoes."

For a moment Holberg was amused, but then his face clouded.

"I think you go a little too far," he said sullenly. "As an officer I cannot allow such remarks to pass in the presence of an English civilian."

"That's all right," said Hunt. "They don't shock my sensibilities."

"I withdraw them," said Harzburg, rather nervously. "Let it be known publicly that the Baron von Holberg's feet are not cloven in spite of all rumours to the contrary. Your very good health, my dear Baron, and pardon my schoolboy sense of humour."

Perhaps he saw by his friend's sulky look that the supper-party was likely to be spoilt by ugly temper if his own sense of humour were not restrained. He clinked glasses with Holberg, who allowed the frown to disappear from his face.

"I confess," said Holberg, "that when I see a pretty arm I want to kiss it. Does anyone blame me? Surely that's what pretty arms are made for?"

He caught hold of Hilda Lorenz with a grip so ruthless, when she tried to draw away from him, that he left the imprint of his fingers on her bare flesh when she struggled free and sprang up from the table with tears in her eyes.

"This is intolerable," she cried. "Am I without protection here?"

"No," said Hunt.

That phrase about "the sunny fields of Kent" was still rankling in his mind. And this treatment of Hilda Lorenz made him see red. Perhaps also the sweet champagne—he admits it—had gone to his head. He leaned forward in his chair and struck the Baron von Holberg across the mouth with the back of his hand.

For a moment Holberg went very white. A tiny drop of blood appeared on his upper lip where Hunt's ring had cut it. He rose from his chair, clutched at a champagne bottle standing in its silver bucket, and swung it at Hunt's head. Hunt dodged it by a hairbreadth, and it smashed a picture on the wall opposite with a frightful crash. A moment later he found himself fighting at close quarters with Holberg amidst a wreckage of supper-things about his feet which became entangled with the tablecloth. Hilda Lorenz was uttering little screams. Count Harzburg, who had dropped his monocle, was protesting to Holberg and Hunt, and it was then that young Schwarzkopf came back from the telephone. He stood in the doorway of his dining-room with a ludicrous expression of dismay and bewilderment which Hunt saw in a hectic moment and remembered afterwards. In his absence his little party had gone to pieces. Hilda Lorenz was crouching against the wall with a look of terror. Count Harzburg was trying to separate the brawlers. The carpet was strewn with broken glass.

"A sordid little scene!" said Valentine Hunt, when he described this incident. "Not without danger to the life of a foreign correspondent on a pacifist paper. I'm pretty useful with my fists, but it's quite another thing to fight a duel with a German officer with three sword cuts on his right cheek."

It was when young Schwarzkopf and the boy with the monocle had separated the combatants that the Baron von Holberg remembered his honour as a German officer. To be struck by an English civilian was of course only to be settled in one way. He would send his seconds in the course of a day or two. . . . There was a painful silence in the room after the Baron von Holberg had left with cold dignity and a swollen lip.

Valentine Hunt broke it with a laugh, though he had an unpleasant sense of fear at the back of his brain, which was now extremely sober. That duel! Most unpleasant! . . . .

Karl von Schwarzkopf said "*Mein Gott!*" several times in a distressful way. Then he said something else which did not add to Hunt's self-confidence:

"Our friend Holberg is one of the best duellists in Germany. I'm afraid this is rather a serious business. Perhaps somebody would kindly explain how it all happened."

It was Hilda Lorenz who explained. She paid a pretty tribute to the chivalry of Herr Hunt, but it didn't comfort him at all even when she came close to him and clasped his arm and said, "Brave, kind man!" He felt anything but brave.

"All this has spoilt a pleasant evening," said young Harzburg presently, fixing his monocle again, which he had left dangling for some time. "How do you propose cheering us up, my dear Schwarzkopf? I thought you said something about a lady prophet unusually amusing—with special information from the other world."

"Oh, that bosh!" said Schwarzkopf. "No, we had better cut that out. After what has happened I'm in no mood for spirit rapping and darkened rooms. Let's go down the Friedrichstrasse and hear some jazz."

"Anna expects you," said Hilda Lorenz. "She has something special to tell you. Some spirit keeps asking for you."

"A lady spirit, I'll bet!" said Harzburg, grinning through his monocle.

"Colossal humbug!" exclaimed young Schwarzkopf impatiently.

"Amusing, anyhow!" suggested Count Harzburg. "Besides, our English friend here might like to know something about the next world. In view of that approaching duel——"

He looked across at Valentine Hunt with a smile in which there was a hint of pity, perhaps also a challenge to his moral courage. My friend Hunt, hypersensitive on that subject in the presence of German officers, read it as such, and answered with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Let's go, by all means. The next world has no terrors for my blameless conscience."

That was sheer bluff. The idea of that duel made him feel a little sick. He didn't want to die just yet. The prospect was distinctly unpleasing. But he couldn't afford to show the white feather. At all costs he would have to put a good face on it, although he cursed himself as a fool for getting mixed up in this set.

"Well, let's go," said young Schwarzkopf. "We may get a laugh or two, or a false thrill. I've no faith in that sort of thing, and I shall probably get turned out for making ribald remarks."

They took a taxi in the Kurfurstendam, where there was a steady stream of motor-cars on their way to smart restaurants, cabarets, and *Wein Stuben*. Hunt noticed presently that they were driving across the Thiergarten where, in the shadowy twilight of a summer night, Berlin lovers were walking hand in hand. He thought of his own sweetheart in England, and wondered if she would weep very much when she heard of his death. What a fool he had been to come to Berlin and get friendly with the smart set! It had been snobbishness really. It had amused him to talk to his journalistic confrères about the Baron This and the Count That and the Princess So-and-so. He liked to swank about being behind the scenes and knowing the secrets of German high life. He would look pretty silly with a swordpoint under his left rib. Some brother journalist would get a scoop about him, make a sensational half-column. "English journalist mortally wounded by German duellist." Or perhaps they would tuck it away in a paragraph. The English railway strike would crowd it out. . . .

"Where does the lady prophet live?" he asked young Schwarzkopf.

It was at some address in the Dorotheenstrasse, into which they turned.

"I suppose we can smoke?" asked Count Harzburg, fingering a cigar.

"Good heavens, no!" said Hilda Lorenz. "It's all very solemn. Like going to church, only one hears such wonderful things."

"Well, if I get bored I shall go," said the young man.

My friend Hunt has described the scene in which he first met Anna Herz, and he makes a particular point of the fact that it was exactly twenty minutes past ten when they rang the bell of an apartment on the first floor of that house in the Dorotheenstrasse. They were shown in by a neat maidservant, who smiled at Hilda Lorenz, as though she knew her, and took the gentlemen's hats, and then led the three men to a

curtained doorway while Hilda Lorenz retired to a little room on the left of the hall.

On the other side of the curtain was a charming room with Persian rugs on the polished boards and gilt chairs of the Louis Quinze style close against the walls, which were all hung with blue velvet. The room was lit dimly by electric lamps covered with silken shades placed here and there on small tables. There was nothing to suggest "spookiness" or the apparatus of professional mediums. It was like the drawing-room of a society lady arranged for an evening lecture. Looking through the folds of the curtain while they waited for Hilda Lorenz, Hunt saw a company of about twenty people seated on the gilt-back chairs. Most of them were quite silent, but two or three whispered to each other. They were all in evening dress, and the women's bare arms gleamed in the shaded light, while the men's shirt-fronts were more visible than their faces.

"*Gott in Himmel!*" said Count Harzburg, in a whisper. "There is General von Brambach. I didn't know the old man went in for this sort of thing!"

It was after they had waited for three minutes for Hilda Lorenz that the newcomers went through the curtain and took possession of four vacant chairs. Before being seated Harzburg clicked heels in the direction of General von Brambach, who nodded curtly and looked embarrassed for a moment, shifting uneasily in his chair before resuming a rigid attitude. Young Schwarzkopf smiled at two ladies with a twinkle of diamonds in their hair, and raised his eyebrows as much as to say, "You here?" . . . It was evident to Valentine Hunt that this was no shabby-genteel assembly in the room of an ordinary medium earning a poor living out of spiritualistic séances. These people belonged to the smart set of Berlin, even to a circle higher and more respectable than the smart set.

It was five minutes before a man and woman came through a curtained alcove. The man was middle-aged, with a clean-shaven face, and his head close-cropped in the Prussian style so that it looked bald. He was in evening clothes which did not seem to sit well on his broad shoulders, and Hunt noticed that his hands were large and coarse, like a man who has done manual work. The woman—a girl rather—was not unattractive in a queer way. She did not look quite German, having very dark hair drawn over her ears and large luminous eyes in a thin white face with rather high cheekbones. She moved very gracefully, without self-consciousness, and made a slight curtsey to one of the ladies present before taking a seat in front of the curtained alcove and clasping her hands in her lap.

"Anna Herz," whispered Hilda Lorenz. "Isn't she beautiful?"

Hunt didn't see any beauty in her except that grace of movement, but he was interested.

The man who had come into the room with her stood by her side and made a little speech, addressing the company as "Your Highnesses, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen."

"In our last circle," he said, "we had some very interesting manifestations of spirit music which I am sure impressed us all very much and filled our hearts as well as our ears with unearthly harmonies. To-night my sister thinks it may be possible for her to establish contact with some of those spirits who have lately shown an interest in this circle, and have revealed themselves to this company in unmistakable and undeniable ways of soul-power and body-control. The master-mind of Beethoven spoke to us with that spirit-majesty and harmony-compelling utterance which to all our German folk is a message of national inspiration and loyalty-creating emotion."

"*Dass ist wahr*," said General von Brambach in a guttural voice, which made Karl von Schwarzkopf turn slightly and wink at Hunt.

"To-night," said the speaker, "my sister, who is feeling tired after her recent spirit journeys and controls, will surrender herself to any spirit presence who may be seeking earthly communication with the children of this world and perhaps in this room."

He begged for absolute silence and soul receptivity, and spoke other high-sounding phrases which to Hunt seemed like gibberish and had no meaning.

Young Count Harzburg yawned slightly behind his hand, and fixing his monocle, gazed round upon the company with a supercilious smile. Hunt was divided in his attention. The thought of that ridiculous duel was nagging at the back of his mind, though he tried to forget it. So deep was his introspection that he lost all consciousness of the proceedings in the room until he heard a slight *frisson* of excitement pass through the people around him, and saw that the girl, Anna Herz, had gone into a trance-like state under the hypnotic influence, it seemed, of the man by her side, who was passing his hands, those coarse hands of his, over her head, without touching her smooth black hair.

"Silence, if you please," said he in a low voice, and as he spoke all the electric lamps in the room, save one, were suddenly extinguished, though he had not pressed any switch or button. The only light left was the one burning in the curtained alcove which allowed Hunt to see very dimly the faces of the company and the shadowy form of the girl in a trance. He could see that her eyes were still open, and they shone out of her white face like points of fire.

"Is there any spirit who wishes to speak?" asked the man.

No spirit seemed to have the slightest inclination to speak.

Ten minutes passed in a silence of death, broken only by a woman's sigh and the slight restlessness of young Harzburg who shifted in his chair. Suddenly the girl in a trance began to whimper, making queer little moans, and twisting her hands and jerking her head back over the rail of the chair.

"I am not preventing you!" she cried, in a fretful way. "I am an empty shell. Why don't you come in? . . . No, I am *not* struggling against you. . . . You say he is here in this room. Who is he? . . . Well, speak, if you want to. . . . No, I'm not cross—only tired. . . . Very tired."

"Let the spirit speak, my dear," said the man gently. "Do not resist, I beg of you."

"He is here," said the girl. "He has taken possession of me. . . . He speaks."

She put both hands to her throat and suddenly began to laugh in a man's voice, deep and harsh.

"Who is there?" asked the man with the shaven head.

"It is I," said the girl in that same deep voice. "Don't you hear me? . . . Isn't Karl von Schwarzkopf there?"

Hunt heard young Schwarzkopf sit up sharply as his name was spoken.

"Answer," said the girl. "Let me hear his voice again. Are you there, Karl, old boy?"

There was a moment's silence. The man with the shaven head whispered and said: "Is there anyone here of that name?"

"I am here," said Karl von Schwarzkopf, and there was a slight tremor in his voice. Count Harburg gave a faint chuckle but was hushed by a lady on his right.

"What spirit is speaking?" asked the brother, as he called himself, of Anna Herz.

The voice from the girl in the trance laughed harshly and she spoke again.

"It's funny to be a spirit! Rather amusing. I saw my body lying dead; people said, 'He's stone dead.' A policeman was taking notes. An officer stepped up and elbowed the people back, and had a look at the thing they called me. He said, 'I know him. It's the Baron von Holberg.' "

"Lord God!" said Count Harzburg, and was then hushed sternly into silence while the girl spoke again in her deep voice.

"It wasn't, you know! It was only the husk of what I had been. Like old clothes dropped to the floor. The real *me* is still alive, more vital than ever, liberated, exceedingly amused. I suppose I'm in heaven, though I can hardly believe it. The Baron von Holberg in heaven. That's rather a

joke!"

It was twice the name of Holberg had been spoken by Anna Herz. At the first time Hunt had sat up and taken notice. For the life of him he could not prevent a slight sensation of gooseflesh. When he heard the name for the second time he wondered what the game was. It was not much more than half an hour since the Baron von Holberg had spoken about the honour of a German officer in a most unpleasant way.

He was aware that Karl von Schwarzkopf was standing up in his place and speaking angrily.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this woman is a fraud. I really must protest against this—this outrageous nonsense. The Baron von Holberg is a friend of mine. He was dining with me an hour ago. Less than that. Is this meant to be funny or something?"

"Silence, sir!" said General von Brambach sternly.

"Poor old Karl!" said the girl in the trance, and she began to laugh again in that harsh deep voice, until presently her tone changed to a whimper again and a series of sighs and moans.

"The spirit leaves me!" she cried. "He tears at me. Oh, it is painful! This strong young spirit."

"It's all right," said the man with the shaven head. "You are coming back, dear sister. See, you are back again! The spirit has left you."

The girl pressed her hands against her eyes, shuddered, and then stood up straight, and looked around the room with a faint smile. One of the ladies went up to her and stroked her arm and said: "Thank you. A thousand thanks. It was wonderful."

General von Brambach was talking to Schwarzkopf.

"You say Holberg was dining with you this evening?"

"Yes, sir. In my rooms along the Kurfurstendam."

"At what hour?"

"He left at five minutes to ten."

"Do you know his telephone number?"

"*Moabit zwei-und-zwanzig-fünf-und-fünfzig.*"

"I will call him up," said the General.

"*Bitte schön*," said the man with the shaven head.

He led the General through the curtained alcove, and the rest of the company waited expectantly, with an emotion visible in their eyes. Count Harzburg lit a cigarette, and then seeing that no one else was smoking dropped it into a flower vase.

He whispered to Hunt: "I'll bet you a thousand marks Holberg is alive and well."

Hunt did not take the bet.

It was five minutes before the General stepped back through the curtain.

"Well?" asked the lady with the diamond crescent in her hair.

The General stood rigid, his square jowl bulging over his stiff collar, and his eyes expressionless.

"I rang up Baron von Holberg's private telephone number. There was no answer. I next rang up the police headquarters. Baron von Holberg had the misfortune to be killed in a motor accident at five minutes past ten this evening. . . . Since then we have been privileged to speak with him."

He turned and bowed slightly to Anna Herz.

Hunt says at first he had no consciousness of fear because of the news that had come to them through Anna Herz. He was only aware of tremendous relief. So that duel would not have to be fought after all! What extraordinary luck! What an escape! That, quite frankly, was his first immediate thought. It was only when he saw the dead-white face of Karl von Schwarzkopf that he realized the meaning of this séance and the amazing phenomenon that had happened. The spirit of Baron von Holberg had spoken to them. He had announced his own death, and made a joke of it. There was no possible way in which that girl Anna Herz could have known about the accident. Hunt says that he suddenly felt frightened and awed.

The company, apart from young Schwarzkopf, and Harzburg, and Hilda Lorenz, were pressing round the girl, Anna Herz. They were murmuring little cries of "*Wunderbar! Ausserordentlich!*"

Hilda Lorenz was half fainting in her chair, dabbing her lips with a little lace handkerchief. Karl von Schwarzkopf stood staring at the polished floor as though mesmerized. Young Harzburg was swinging his monocle, with a fixed smile about his lips which were very pale.

Well, that was Hunt's first introduction to Anna Herz. To this day he believes that by some inexplicable supernatural means this girl did get news of Holberg's death whether or no it was his spirit that spoke through her. For my part I see all sorts of loopholes for trickery. The Baron von Holberg was killed in a motor accident at 10.5 p. m. Hunt and his party arrived at Anna Herz' apartment at 10.20. Three minutes were wasted while they waited for Hilda Lorenz, who had gone into a little room to the right of the hall, time enough for her to tell Anna Herz that she had been dining with Holberg in Schwarzkopf's rooms and that Schwarzkopf was to be among her audience, as she had expected. It was ten minutes more before she appeared through the curtained alcove. That is to say, it was twenty-eight minutes since Holberg's tragic death. Plenty of time to get a message over the telephone from police headquarters, where this man and woman might have their agents, or from any other source ready to oblige them with the latest sensation of Berlin life which was their stock-in-trade.

Hunt admits the bare possibility of that, but thinks the time too short for direct communication with Anna Herz. His chief argument against my hypothesis is the girl's knowledge of the officer who recognized Holberg when he lay dead—it came out after at the inquest—and her convincing character-study of Holberg's way of speech and manner, of which I can form no opinion.

In fairness to Hunt, however, I must admit that he kept an open mind on the subject for some time, and went to a lot of trouble to hunt up the antecedents of the girl and that alleged brother of hers who turned out to be her tyrant and bully. What made him take all this trouble outside his usual line of enquiry as a foreign correspondent in Berlin was not only the incident with which he had been intimately associated but the gradual revelation that Anna Herz was exercising a mystical influence over the mind of Karl von Schwarzkopf, his best friend in Berlin, and using her pretended powers with the spirit world to stir up a spirit of hatred against England among minds already inflamed by ideas of world power and Germany's destiny in direct conflict with the British Empire.

It was Schwarzkopf's English mother—a most charming lady—who revealed this to Valentine Hunt.

"I am worried about Karl," she said, one day when Hunt was taking tea with her.

"In what way?" he asked guardedly.

She glanced round the drawing-room, where her husband was talking to an old professor and one of his colleagues, and then lowered her voice.

"The boy is haunted by some fear," she said. "He has lost his gaiety and high spirits. The other night I found him weeping in his bedroom, crying his eyes out, poor child. He said something about a war with England, though what he meant I couldn't make out. Surely he can't be so silly as to think that there will ever be a war between Germany and England? It's too preposterous. Unbelievable!"

“There’s a lot of newspaper talk,” said Hunt; “but it doesn’t mean anything. The world hasn’t gone mad.”

He was one of those who believed in the commonsense of people and the progress of civilization beyond the old-fashioned argument of war. It was in the spring of 1914.

Frau von Schwarzkopf asked a question presently which rather startled my friend Hunt.

“Do you know anything about a creature called Anna Herz?”

Hunt didn’t quite know how much he ought to tell, and prevaricated a little.

“Isn’t she a medium or something?”

“Yes,” said the lady; “and I’m afraid she is getting a very strange power over people in Berlin. I hear her name whispered in all sorts of places. She foretold the winning horse in some race the other day. Count Harzburg—you know that boy with a monocle?—made a lot of money by betting on it. What makes me so nervous is that Karl has fallen under her influence. He believes firmly in her supernatural knowledge. I have implored him not to go and see her, but he was there last night again.”

Hunt tried to console the lady by saying that her son was merely interested in the spiritualistic experiments from a scientific point of view, but she shook her head and said: “It’s very unhealthy—and horribly dangerous.”

Hunt was aware of the danger even to his own career. Since that affair of the Baron von Holberg he was becoming so absorbed in his study of Anna Herz that it was beginning to interfere with his work. He had already missed two important items of news, much to the annoyance of his paper, by attending the girl’s séances when he should have been elsewhere. But there was something behind these assemblies in the Dorotheenstrasse which intrigued him to an extraordinary degree. The people who went there belonged to the most exclusive circles of Berlin society—the people who pulled the strings of national politics and were very close to the Court itself. He discovered also that visitors went to the house in the Dorotheenstrasse at other times than on the evenings of those private séances. Women drove up in closed carriages on most days after the luncheon hour. Some of them were heavily veiled as though afraid of being recognized. Distinguished-looking men, some of them known to Hunt as Government officials and officers on the General Staff, came walking up from the direction of the Wilhelmstrasse and dodged into the doorway of the house in which Anna Herz had her flat, after a nervous glance up and down the street.

It was after many enquiries as to the antecedents of the “Supernatural Lady” that Hunt obtained an introduction to a young official in the detective branch at police headquarters, who allowed himself to be questioned, and answered under a strict pledge of confidence.

He took down a big leather-bound book and opened it under the letter H.

“Herz, Anna,” he said with a smile. “Yes, we know all about her. . . . I have your word of honour that you won’t publish anything?”

“Not a word,” said Hunt.

The official passed over the book, and dog-eared the page.

“There you are! Not very edifying.”

Hunt made a note of the report.

> “Herz, Anna. Real name unknown. Formerly called Sophie Edelmann, Marie Strauss, Greta Kauffmann, etc. Born about 1894. Daughter of gipsy woman in Herschell’s Circus, Vienna. Father unknown. At six years of age was in acrobatic troupe of Karl Offenbach, Vienna. Budapest, etc. At twelve years of age appeared in police court at Altstadt, Bavaria, as witness against Hans Mülheim, circus manager, charged with cruelty to children. At fourteen years of age sentenced to six months in children’s penitentiary, Dresden, for fortune-telling. In 1910, danced in Tivoli troupe, Hanover, Düsseldorf, Köln, etc. In 1911, sentenced to six months’ imprisonment for telling fortunes by cards and crystal-gazing in Munich. Came to Berlin 1912 in company with Fritz Mülheim, son of Hans Mülheim, well-known to the police as card-sharper, blackmailer, and dealer in illegal drugs, who was sentenced to various terms of imprisonment 1900, 1902, 1906, 1908, 1911. Pretends to be the brother of Anna Herz, but lives on her earnings as spiritualistic medium, crystal-gazer and fortune-teller.
>
> “*General Note*: This woman seems to be of good moral character apart from fortune-telling, and is probably terrorized by Fritz Mülheim. She has distinguished clintèle in Berlin, and notable names on her list prevent possibility of prosecution. (*See* report of conversation with Director Criminal Prosecution Department.) Seems to possess spiritualistic powers not yet exposed as fraudulent. (*See* special reports by detectives Kranz, Schultz, and Wassermann.) Recommendation by Director of Secret Intelligence, *see* file 10,458, summarized as follows: Constant observation to be kept on 21, Dorotheenstrasse, but no arrest to be made.”

It was this police report which provided Hunt with all the information he needed as to the antecedents of Anna Herz. Yet so far from prejudicing him against her as a woman of low class and squalid history, it had the effect of arousing him to a more intense interest in her personality and spiritual claims.

What struck him most was the curiously favourable view of the police regarding her morality and their acknowledgment that she seemed to possess “spiritualistic powers not yet exposed as fraudulent.” For German detectives to make such an admission was, to say the least of it, remarkable. I think also that his journalistic instincts and sense of drama were stirred by the human story so baldly related in the report and yet so suggestive of romantic tragedy.

“Think of that girl’s life-history!” he said. “What a chance for a novelist! Born in a circus by a gipsy woman, never knowing her own father, beaten and ill-treated behind the scenes while the public were clapping hands and applauding her grace and daring as a child acrobat. Then taught to tell fortunes by the gipsy mother—believing, perhaps, in the truth of it all—and seized by the police when some young fop crosses her palm with a bit of silver for the smile in her big black eyes. So to prison, with vile women, thieves, and gaolbirds. That delicate little girl, supersensitive, hearing spirit-voices, virtuous. Then falling into the hands of a bully and blackguard who brings her to Berlin, teaches her to play the part of a lady, and makes pots of money out of her trances and visions, which he ekes out with the common tricks of the spiritualistic charlatan—those lights that go out, the spirit-music, the ghastly faces, and all the rest of it. What a situation for a sensational novel!”

I admitted the romance of it, but I jeered at him a little for his own credulity.

“You take for granted,” I said, “that she is a virtuous creature with some real supernatural power, misused by that scoundrel Mülheim.”

“I take nothing for granted,” he answered rather snappily.

As a matter of fact, he satisfied himself completely as to the deliberate faking of some spirit-photographs which were exhibited at one of the séances. The fraud was beyond a doubt, because he tracked down a photographer who had actually sold some old portraits of Berlin society people of the early ’nineties to Fritz Mülheim, the alleged brother of Anna Herz. They were the dead relatives of some of the persons present when the plates were exposed, and naturally these persons were enormously impressed by seeing the faces of the departed vaguely but unmistakably apparent.

Hunt told me that he taxed the girl with the evidence of the fraud one afternoon when he called upon her and found her alone. At first she

utterly denied the possibility of trickery, but when he produced copies of the photographs which had been used for the spirit "manifestations" she suddenly broke down and wept, imploring him not to tell her "brother."

"He will kill you," she cried. "Or perhaps he will kill me. He makes me do these things for all the money he gets. I am his slave."

"Why do you call him your brother?" asked Hunt. "He is Fritz Mülheim, the son of the man who used to beat you when you were a child."

Anna Herz lost all her colour at these words. The blood ebbed from her face, and she swayed back as though about to swoon. But she clutched at the mantelpiece and spoke in a frightened whisper.

"How do you know these things? Why do you spy upon me?"

Hunt told her with deliberate brutality that he knew many more things—her prison record for fortune-telling and crystal-gazing, her previous names as Sophie Edelmann, Marie Strauss, Greta Kauffmann.

"You are an impostor!" he said. "All your spiritualistic tricks are like these faked photographs."

"No!" she cried. "Dear God, no! It is only Fritz who cheats and plays tricks. That is when the spirits do not speak through me. Then he thrashes me. The spirits make use of me. I see things that are hidden from other people. In the crystal I see the past and the future, and sometimes I am frightened. It was my mother who taught me all that. . . . Since I was a small child the spirits have spoken to me. It's because I'm a gipsy. . . . And I wish I were dead!"

She flung herself on the sofa and cried with a violence of grief. Hunt was with her for an hour, and during that time she told him the story of her miserable life with Fritz Mülheim, and the horrible brutalities with which he treated her. Yet she dared not leave him lest he should kill her or drive her to a life of vice which she dreaded worse than death.

It was quite plain to me that Hunt's pity for her warped his judgment, and that, in spite of his discoveries of deliberate fraud in the faking of those photographs, he believed in her occult gifts. He cited things she had revealed to him in one of her séances, things known only to himself in this company of Germans—scenes of his early life in an English country house, and one incident which he hated to remember, which was the death of his brother by drowning.

"Mental telepathy," I said again. "She was reading your subconscious mind."

"Is that any explanation?" he asked impatiently. "It's like people who talk of ether and think it explains the riddle of the universe."

My arguments don't matter. What mattered very much was the influence of Anna Herz over young Franz von Schwarzkopf, over many distinguished people in Berlin life, and over one high personage who even now cannot be mentioned by name for very decency's sake. At least I do not propose to name him.

Young Schwarzkopf lost his head over that strange girl. Whether it was due to pity, or fear, or sentimental weakness, I have no means of knowing. Whether the girl fell in love with him simply because of his attentions and chivalry, or whether she was an artful little hussy with designs upon his fortune and name, it is impossible for me to say. Hunt thinks that the sex instinct did not enter into the intimacy between these two, and that it was a case of predestination arranged by mystical laws; anyhow, leaving the jargon of occult philosophy on one side—and I have no patience with it—it was a cause of poignant anxiety and grief to the boy's English mother when she found her son in the coils, as she thought, of a modern Circe, when she saw that he was becoming morbid and hysterical, as it seemed to her, and when he broke off his engagement with a beautiful girl—little Countess Schellenburg—whose marriage with him was to have taken place in August, 1914.

Young Schwarzkopf's reason for breaking this engagement was extraordinary and fantastic.

"This is no time for marrying," he said. "Women will be weeping for their lovers on the field of war; the world will be stricken with madness, and between this time and that I want to understand the meaning of life."

"You ought to see a doctor, my dear," said his mother anxiously.

His answer did not reassure her.

"It's my soul that's sick, mother."

Tears swept into his eyes again, as when she had found him weeping in his room, and he cried out terrible words.

"God is preparing a scourge for the world because of our pride. Mother, is there no way of stopping this frightful thing that is coming? Why should youth be sacrificed, and all the beauty of life? Why should the nations tear at each other like beasts—your people and mine? The spirits say it is to fulfil the destiny of Germany. I say, damn our German destiny if it leads to rivers of blood and world-agony."

"My poor boy," said Frau von Schwarzkopf, who was once Betty Devereux. "My poor demented boy!"

Hunt tells me that it was the spirit of Bismarck from whom came these prophecies of world-war in that curtained salon of the apartment in the Dorotheenstrasse. Hunt was there on several nights when Bismarck announced himself through the lips of Anna Herz, assisted by that scoundrel Fritz Mülheim.

On one night the face of Bismarck floated in a shadowy way about the room, and the company was "scared stiff," said Hunt. On another night the complete figure of Bismarck in full uniform with his *Pickelhaube* helmet stood for a moment in the curtained alcove, immaterial—Hunt said he could see the fold of a curtain through the body—but marvellously visible in a luminous way. It may have been some trick of mirrors cunningly arranged, but it completely deceived the audience. One lady fainted. General von Brambach, who was present and who had known Bismarck well, stood up breathing noisily, and with tears running down his hard old face, saluted. There were about sixty people present, and the drawing-room was abominably over-crowded, so that the atmosphere was stifling with the reek of women's scent and perspiring men. There were several officers present of very high rank, and among them a tall young man with a long nose and pale eyes whom Hunt was astounded to see there. He whispered his name to me, but I do not repeat it.

In her trance Anna Herz spoke with the voice of Bismarck according to the "spirit" who announced himself. It was a deep resonant voice with heavy gutturals. He seems to have talked preposterous stuff, according to Hunt's account, and yet, in the light of what has happened since, it seems like a prophecy of the world-war.

The voice speaking from the lips of Anna Herz announced a red mist approaching the earth. It was the colour of blood, the scarlet blood of the world's youth which would be poured out in tides. It was a necessary sacrifice for the fulfilment of the great plan. It was to be Germany's testing time in the furnace fires of destiny. All the old German gods would arise in the spirit of the people. Their heroic traditions of pagan heroes and Christian saints and warriors would awake from the long sleep of ages. With great leadership the German race would march from victory to victory against innumerable and implacable foes, and the fields of the earth would be strewn with death, and great cities would fall into ruin, and the cries of the dying would reach to the high heavens, and the miracle of man's courage would be revealed marvellously as a proof of its spiritual heritage. There would be the noise of great bombardment across the world, shocking the universe with its enormous vibration. Fire would gush out of the earth, reaching to the wings of flying death. The sky would be crowded with the young eagles screeching for their prey, which was human flesh. The soul of the human race would reel before the vision of this Armageddon. . . . And so on and so on, in a stream of turgid and mystical rhetoric which seems to have impressed Hunt but leaves me cold as I try to remember it all.

The audience—those sixty or seventy men and women of the inmost circle of Berlin life—sat spellbound as these words came from the lips

of that pale-faced girl sitting rigid on a gilt-backed chair with the light of one lamp glamorous about her and the rest of the room in darkness. Now and again Hunt heard a kind of shudder pass through them. A woman next to him half swooned, so that her head drooped upon his shoulder. Young Schwarzkopf, on the other side of him, kept moistening his lips with his tongue. The only man who spoke while Anna Herz was in her trance was the young man with the long nose and pale eyes whose name I keep back from this narrative. He stood up in his place with one hand resting on his hip, and asked a question:

"I would like to ask the spirit of Bismarck whether the glorious destiny of Germany will, after all this sacrifice, be fulfilled?"

The answer came from the lips of Anna Herz, deeply guttural:

"The destiny of a great race is written in the beginning of time."

The tall young man whose pale eyes seemed to glow with a greenish light as he stood there in the gloom of that room asked another question:

"What people or race will be the greatest enemies of our Fatherland?"

The answer came:

"A race in whose veins there is the old strain of German blood, and in whose speech there is the echo of our German forefathers. Not one people, but two peoples."

Someone drew a deep breath. There was the sudden *frou-frou* of women's dresses. Karl von Schwarzkopf, says Hunt, drew the back of his hand across his forehead.

Before Anna Herz awakened from her trance the alleged spirit of Bismarck uttered one word three times, portentously. It was the word "August."

It was then May, 1914, when all the world was at peace, when youth was in the playing fields, when no shadow darkened the sunshine of European life.

That is remarkable, of course. Profoundly sceptical, I can only say that it was a coincidence, like a similar prophecy I heard in England. Or if not a coincidence, then it was perhaps an intelligent anticipation of events already brewing behind the scenes of European politics. I would like to know more about that man Fritz Mülheim, and his relations with other criminals in the underworld of Europe. It is probable that he kept in touch with agents in Russia, Austria-Hungary, and other countries. There were people who knew of forces preparing for the great explosion. It was only the poor ignorant masses of peaceful people everywhere who knew nothing of the agony approaching them, who heard no sound of the rumbling beneath their feet and their little homes.

But I shall never get to know more about Fritz Mülheim. He was shot as a spy in Paris a month after the War started. Whether Anna Herz was rehearsed by him to speak what he told her is also beyond the means of proof: I cannot make up my mind about her sincerity, though I am convinced that the man Mülheim dominated her mind by sheer terror, and made her a party to his charlatanism.

She accepted presents from Karl von Schwarzkopf, extremely expensive presents like a rope of pearls, and a wonderful old crystal of historic value. Hunt thinks also that he gave her large sums of money which she passed on to Fritz Mülheim to keep him quiet and make him complaisant to her friendship with this boy. They were seen about together in restaurants not frequented by his own set, though they were shadowed by the Berlin police, who reported on the subject. They were observed together several times in the woods round the Wannsee an hour or so from Berlin, where they walked hand-in-hand along the lake-side or sat under the trees in remote spots, unconscious of watching eyes. The girl seemed happy in this comradeship. More colour crept into her cheeks. The tragic look left her face. I think it highly probable that she knew what love was for the first time, with a decent, chivalrous young man. But according to Hunt, Karl von Schwarzkopf himself became more morbid and unhappy as the days passed and crept nearer to August. He wandered about the streets of Berlin at night, forsook his old friends, or shut himself up alone in his flat in the Kurfurstendam.

He spoke vague things to Hunt about some pre-natal affinity with Anna Herz. Some love-affair in a previous life, when she was a Persian princess or something of the sort. Ridiculous nonsense, anyhow. But all the time his mind revolted from the nagging thought of the coming conflict in Europe, and being half an Englishman he was stricken with the awful prospect of war between Germany and his mother's people.

Hunt pooh-poohed the remote possibility of such a world tragedy. "Europe is profoundly peaceful," he said. "Germany and England are on the best of terms. All this newspaper controversy makes me sick."

And then the storm burst with the murder of an Archduke on the Austrian frontier, in July, 1914. . . .

It was to Anna Herz that certain people in Berlin went for information as to the outcome of those feverish notes between the Great Powers. Three times that tall young man with the pale eyes and the long nose was known by the police to have visited her room, and each time when he came away there was a strange light in his eyes, as though he saw the destiny of Germany visible and shining beyond the length of the Dorotheenstrasse.

The last time that Hunt saw Anna Herz was not in her own house but in Karl von Schwarzkopf's rooms in the Kurfurstendam. They were having tea together, and Hunt had called on the chance that young Schwarzkopf might have heard something about the international crisis from his father in the Foreign Office. He was desperately anxious. He was also startled and annoyed to find Anna Herz there.

Schwarzkopf was restless and agitated. He kept pacing about the room, while Anna sat back on the sofa watching him with anxious eyes.

"Is there any news?" asked Hunt.

"The worst," said young Schwarzkopf. "Russia is mobilizing. It's the beginning of Hell."

Hunt laughed nervously.

"I refuse to believe it. That war is not going to happen. The common people of the world will revolt."

Schwarzkopf shook his head.

"It's inevitable. It's written. Fate is against us. If we could look into the future."

He stopped and stared at Anna Herz with a queer light in his eyes, rather a mad look, thought Hunt.

"The future!" he said. "You can read it, Anna. What does that crystal say? What do you see there?"

"Don't ask me to look!" she cried. "Not here, my dear. I hate it all so much!"

"Please," he said. "Once more. If we could get some clear vision——"

He pleaded with her, and after a while she yielded.

She took the crystal he had given her, which she wore round her neck on a thin gold chain, and held it in her lap and stared at it intently. Five minutes passed, as it seemed to Hunt, and both he and young Schwarzkopf stood motionless, watching the girl.

Suddenly she leaned closer to the crystal and seemed to see something moving like a picture across its globe of light.

"I see a face," she whispered. "It is yours, Karl! You are lying on the ground, I think. . . . You are staring up at something . . . a star or some point of light. . . . Your face is very white. . . ."

Suddenly she dropped the crystal in her lap, though her eyes still stared at it. Her fingers were crisped as they had held and dropped the

crystal. She raised them to her throat, and gave a piercing scream.

Hunt knew that she had seen the vision of Karl von Schwarzkopf lying dead in war, though then he stood beside her young, handsome, alive. . . .

He was killed in the first week of the War in the attack on Liége. What happened to Anna Herz is unknown. She disappeared from Berlin, and may be living under some other name, in Vienna, or Budapest, or one of her old haunts. Or she may have died, as many women did, of grief, or *ersatz* food. Hunt remembers her as the "Supernatural Lady" who foretold the War, and spoke with the voice of spirits from behind the veil. To me, not believing in that side of the story, there comes the haunting thought that perhaps this woman's spell over the minds of high people in Berlin—among them that tall young man with the pale eyes—may have been one slight, subtle, and sinister cause of the history that left the world in ruin.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

It seemed incredible to a girl who had been typing business letters in a London office and living in a bed-sitting-room somewhere off the Brompton Road—the address doesn't matter—that she should be sitting in the Paris express to Genoa with six hand-bags and an Italian husband on her way to his castle in Italy.

He wasn't much of a husband in actual size, being exactly five-feet-four in his socks, but very nicely made in miniature; and it wasn't much of a castle, he said, being abominably old, and not enormously large, and very much in need of repair after eight hundred years of wear and tear; but judging from a set of photographs which he generally kept in his pocket, it was perched on the top of a high rock looking down upon wild and lovely country—far more picturesque than the view from the bed-sitting-room somewhere off the Brompton Road.

Anyhow, it was all incredible, delightful, astoundingly amusing to Barbara Haddaway, daughter of my old friend Colonel Haddaway, who, after going through the Great War without a scratch, was killed by a taxi-cab in Piccadilly Circus, leaving Barbara to face a hard world alone, with nothing but her pluck, and a few odds and ends.

Barbara's pluck, and an admirable sense of humour, carried her through pretty well, after weeping her eyes out for this dead father. She learned typewriting, took a job in a city office, and established herself in the bed-sitting-room off the Brompton Road, which she made quite attractive by repapering it with her own hands, putting up some of her father's sporting prints, and furnishing with some of the things left over from the sale of their rooms in Knightsbridge.

I took tea with her there sometimes, with some other young friends who were art students and girls of good family like herself, now in millinery shops or dancing schools—the effect of war on English social life; and it was after one of those tea-parties, when I lingered after the others for a private chat, that she told me the startling news about her engagement to an Italian lover.

"He's not much of a man," she said, with a sudden light of laughter in her eyes. "He's so tiny that you mightn't see him if he happened to be here, but he's tremendous as a lover!"

As an old friend of her father's, I demanded explanations. Who was he? What did she know about him? Could he afford to keep her? Was he a gentleman? How had she come to meet him?

It appeared from her candid account that she had met him in a cheap restaurant in Sloane Square, where it was her habit to take her evening meal, to save cooking and the mess of washing up in her own bed-sitting-room. He was an artist—though he didn't sell many of his pictures—and he had first attracted her attention by drawing her secretly on the back of an envelope. Of course she had noticed it at once and thought it rather impudent, except that he looked amusing and intelligent. Quite good-looking, too—like a miniature Mussolini, with a boyish, clean-shaven face, when he happened to have shaved, very dark, bright eyes and rather humorous lips.

They had first got into conversation with each other one evening when the restaurant was full, and when they had had to share the same table. Being poverty-stricken at the end of the week, she had ordered the cheapest thing on the menu—most filling at the price—and it happened to be *macaroni à l'Italienne*. It was not a joke against him. She hadn't even guessed he was Italian. She had an idea he was an Irishman. But when she was eating the stuff with a knife and fork, chopping it up into small bits, he suddenly gave a little groan as though he were suffering pain.

"Is there anything the matter?" she asked, rather alarmed.

He apologized and said there was a great deal the matter. As an Italian he couldn't bear to see her eating macaroni like that—with a knife. She ought to curl it round her fork and then pop it quickly into her beautiful mouth before it had time to wriggle.

After that they had become friends. They sat together rather frequently in the cheap little restaurant. They discussed art, literature, music, life, and he knew a lot about all of them. He showed her some of his sketches and caricatures—some of them were accepted by English newspapers now and then—and they were wonderfully good. He was devoted to music and knew every Italian opera by heart, and sometimes hummed little bits to her over the table in the restaurant with great enthusiasm. They went to the theatre together occasionally, standing in the queues outside the pit doors, when he continued to discuss art and music and life very humorously just to pass the time. Often he talked about Italy, and its blue skies, and its snow-covered peaks, and its hill-top towns, and its singing, laughter-loving peasants, and its olive groves and orange trees, until she just longed to go there, especially when it was raining in the Brompton Road and when there was a fog outside her bed-sitting-room.

Once she said to him, "Why do you stay in England—this filthy old London—when you might be basking under your own blue skies?"

His answer was unsatisfactory, she thought. He said something about liberty—and his love of Shakespeare.

That bit about Shakespeare was one of his jokes. As far as liberty was concerned, it seemed to be a fetish with him. He had an unaccountable dislike of Mussolini and his Fascists, and said he had no use for dictators, benevolent or otherwise, believing in free speech and civil law, such as they had in England.

One evening, in the cheap restaurant in Sloane Square, he had shown her the photographs of an old castle on the top of a high rock, above a deep gorge, with a winding mule path going down and down through olive groves and rocky terraces to the Mediterranean. It was a little old castle with battlements and round towers and loopholes through which the archers used to shoot their cross-bows at enemies who tried to storm this stronghold in mediæval times.

"What a funny old place!" she exclaimed. "Like a fairy-tale castle."

He told her that it was his own particular fairy-tale. He had lived there as a boy and often went back to it in his dreams.

"Any bathrooms?" she asked.

He admitted that bathrooms had not occurred to its original builders or to subsequent occupiers—his ancestors and family. But he thought that bathrooms were vastly overrated, especially by the Americans with their sanitary school of civilization. What was wrong with a wooden tub filled every morning by a brown-eyed peasant woman—his old nurse Lucia—who made the sign of the cross over it?

Barbara agreed that it was good enough.

"What's the name of your dream castle?" she asked, and he told her it was called *il Castello del Drago*—the Castle of the Dragon; and then he spoke a sentence in Italian which he translated for her.

"*La vecchia casa del mio cuore.* The old house of my heart."

After that he sighed deeply, and looked away across the cheap little restaurant, and seemed to stare right through the smutty window-panes with their dirty curtains to that old place perched on a high rock with the blue sky over its turrets. It was a long time—quite a minute—before his spirit came back to London, with a fog in the street outside and the motor-buses grinding across Sloane Square.

"One day," said Barbara, "you must take me to that house of dreams. I'd like to see it."

She was rather amused, and somewhat alarmed, by the sudden flame that leaped into his eyes.

"It would be like paradise to have you there!" he cried. "We would stand hand in hand on the old wall by the little round tower where one gets the best view of the sea a thousand feet below. And every morning the peasants would come and bring you flowers which grow on the rocks. And I would sing old songs to you which were made by one of my ancestors for an Italian princess who was very beautiful, but not nearly as beautiful as you would be with the sun of Italy playing in your hair, and the beauty of Italy shining in your eyes."

"Hadn't you better eat that liver and bacon?" she asked.

It was after that—a week or two afterwards, when they sat late in the restaurant, so that the waiters kept flicking the crumbs off the table as a hint to them to go—that Barbara Haddaway agreed to marry her pocket Italian, whose name she told me was Count Pietro Caffarelli. At least, she agreed that if he stopped kissing her hands before the waiters and uttering flamboyant sentiments about love, she might be kind to him and wear the ring—a queer but rather adorable ring of six little pearls set in twisted gold—which he tried to put on the third finger of her left hand. It was a very old ring which had belonged to the Italian princess—Cecilia Sforza—for whom his ancestor had written so many love lyrics before she agreed to marry him and became the mother of thirteen children.

"Good heavens!" cried Barbara. "I hope history isn't going to be repeated as much as all that!"

She was somewhat alarmed by this statistical reminiscence, but he insisted upon kissing the tips of her fingers again while the waiter added up the bill and grinned behind the menu.

That evening, after dinner, they walked arm in arm up the Thames Embankment, as London lovers often do, because it is rather dark there, and lonely when all the office people have gone home, and beautiful when the stars are reflected in the dark old river, and when the great hotels are like kings' palaces with many windows and lighted casements, and even the advertisement of a Scotsman drinking whisky, flashing out above a black wharf, does not quite destroy the romance of the night. Only on that night they were closed in by a thin cold fog, so that they seemed quite alone in the world with only a few ghosts passing them.

But somehow, said Barbara, they didn't feel cold, and the fog seemed to veil everything with some enchantment, and she was rather glad of it, because nobody could see them when Count Pietro Caffarelli, whom she called Peter, held her tight under Cleopatra's Needle, and stood on tiptoe to kiss her throat and eyes and lips. His love for her was very Italian and amused her a great deal. Even the fog wouldn't restrain him from breaking out into song with his rich, musical voice, which was much too big for such a little man. He sang, he said, because his happiness was so great that he must sing or die.

It was a perfectly ridiculous scene on the Thames Embankment, and rather scandalizing to a policeman, who said: "Move on there, can't you? You'd do much better in a tea-shop where it's nice and warm!"

Count Pietro, whom she called Peter, and sometimes Hop-o'-my-Thumb because of his small size in manhood, was anxious to be married the following Monday at the Italian church in Hatton Garden. But she kept him waiting three weeks more, while she had some clothes made by one of her young friends in a millinery shop. And during that three weeks she had her first quarrel with her future husband. It wasn't quite a quarrel, because she always laughed at him and couldn't possibly be angry with such an ardent and boyish lover. But it was a strong difference of opinion. It was also rather mysterious. It was all about the question as to where they would spend their honeymoon after that little ceremony in the church at Hatton Garden.

Peter said: "We'll have a wonderful time in Paris! I will row you on the lake in the Bois de Boulogne. We'll eat rose-tinted ices in the Pavillon Bleu at St. Cloud. Paris is adorable in May."

Barbara stared at him in amazement, she told me.

"Italy is adorable in May," she answered, though she had never been to Italy. "There is only one place for that little holiday of ours—I hate the word honeymoon—and that's your little old castle on the top of a rock. What's the good of having it if you don't live in it sometimes?"

"There are no bathrooms," said Pietro.

"There's a wooden tub over which your old nurse makes the sign of the cross," said Barbara. "That's good enough for me. Besides, you say your mother is living there. I want to know your mother. I should rather like to think that she wants to know me."

"She's one of God's saints," said Peter with great reverence, "and she is longing to see you and love you. But she will join us in Paris."

Barbara thought that absurd. She had made up her mind to stay in the Castello del Drago.

"I sha'n't leave my bed-sitting-room in the Brompton Road," she said, "unless I go to the house of your heart. That's the place for me. What's the good of marrying an Italian Count, however small, unless he takes me to his castle, however old?"

Beads of perspiration stood on his brow. He seemed very much perturbed. He made strange and silly excuses as though for some reason he disliked the idea, as though it frightened him a little.

"It's so far off," he said. "A terrible journey!"

"Only three hours from Genoa," replied Barbara calmly.

"It's quite insanitary. You might get typhoid or something."

"I'll risk it," she asserted.

"It's so isolated," he explained. "Not a town for miles. Just an old ruin on a rock, far away from the gay world. You would get very tired of it, *bellissima*."

"I thought you loved me!" she said, with a challenge in her voice.

He kissed her hands. He knelt down as though he wanted to kiss her feet—it was in Kensington Gardens under the trees by the Round Pond—but she rumpled his hair and pulled him up, and begged him to behave like a little Englishman, a very little Englishman.

Several times he tried to shirk that question of the old castle. When she returned to the subject some days later he became quite pale and had a look of tragedy in his eyes. Then one day he yielded suddenly, and told her that he had taken their tickets to Genoa, and had arranged for a motor-car to meet them there for the long drive into the mountains. His mother was hardly able to contain herself for joy. His old nurse Lucia was already praying God for a good journey.

"You see," said Barbara. "Now everybody's pleased!"

"Six weeks of paradise!" he said, as though all the time he had longed for this honeymoon in his old house, though he had conjured up a hundred reasons against it.

So there she was at last in the *wagon-lit* from Paris to Genoa, with six hand-bags and an Italian husband, and a sense of the incredible having happened because she was a married woman and released forever from typing business letters in a London office and living in a bed-sitting-room off the Brompton Road.

Peter, this husband of hers, was rather funny sometimes when he didn't mean to be. He fell abruptly from heights of joy and extravagant hilarity to depths of moodiness and silence, which he tried to hide. Several times she was conscious of those little strange silences when he sat holding her hand and thinking very deeply of something which he kept concealed from her.

"Anything worrying you, manikin?" she asked.

"How can anything worry me when I have the most beautiful wife in the world?"

It was an untruthful answer, for she wasn't the most beautiful wife in the world—she was always aware of a rather uncertain nose—and certainly when he sat quiet like that for odd quarters of an hour there was some ridiculous worry nagging at his mind. It didn't last longer than that as a rule. After a quick sigh, he would laugh and start singing again, and try to put his arms about her, utterly careless of the *wagon-lit* attendant, or of decent English spinsters on their way to the Riviera and inquisitive, as they passed down the corridor, of this newly married couple.

When the train approached the Italian frontier, Barbara noticed that Peter became restless. He seemed anxious about the customs examination, although there was nothing contraband in the baggage, and asked the attendant more than once whether the passport examination took a long time.

"A mere formality," said the attendant, shrugging his shoulders. "On a tourist train like this they don't trouble much."

But for some reason there was a little trouble about Peter's passport at the frontier. He was called into the corridor by an Italian officer of the Carabinieri, who questioned him suspiciously and kept looking at his passport photograph and then at Peter, who shrugged his shoulders and gesticulated and laughed nervously and argued in rapid Italian.

"What's the matter?" asked Barbara, coming out into the corridor.

"*Niente, niente!*" he said impatiently.

The Italian officer stared at her curiously and asked another question of Peter. He was obviously surprised that Peter possessed an English wife. Perhaps he didn't believe it, which Barbara thought very insolent of him.

Then, at last, after all this whirlwind of words, the incident closed. The officer handed back the passport and departed, rather sulkily, and Peter, who was very pale, came back into his *wagon-lit* and laughed, and spoke in English again, which was a great relief to Barbara.

"These people talk too much!" he grumbled. "And Italy under Mussolini is suspicious of its own countrymen. Give me England for liberty!"

"All that conversation has rumpled your hair," said Barbara. "It would be nice of you if you went and brushed it."

He obeyed her command meekly, and forgot the passport which lay carelessly on the seat. She picked it up to put in her hand-bag, and then remembered that he had never shown her his passport photograph. That was curious, now she came to think of it, because they had laughed so much at hers, which made her most unbeautiful.

But this photograph of his was not at all like him. In fact, it was the photograph of some young man who was certainly not Peter. And the name was different. It was not made out to Count Pietro Caffarelli but to Count Antonio Albani. No wonder the Italian officer had become rather suspicious. Peter, with his usual artistic temperament, had come away with a friend's passport.

She jeered at him when he came back with neatly brushed hair.

"Well, you're a first-class traveller! What do you mean by having somebody else's passport?"

He seemed startled by her question, and much embarrassed. His face flushed deeply, and he looked at her with anxious eyes in which there was something not quite frank.

"It was a stupid accident!" he explained. "At the last moment I picked up Albani's passport. We had been talking about this journey, and I suppose I was rather excited. Extraordinarily stupid of me. It might have held us up altogether. Fortunately young Albani is not unlike me."

"The officer seemed to see the little difference!" said Barbara. "It would have been very awkward for us if he had turned us out."

Peter laughed and said: "These people are all very stupid. I took the risk."

Barbara was silent for a moment. "Then you knew beforehand?"

It was just a second before he answered. "Yes. I noticed it when I handed my passport to the attendant. It gave me rather a shock."

"You might have told me!" said Barbara reproachfully. "I thought we were properly married—I mean, no secrets between us—from now onwards."

"I didn't want to worry you, *carissima*," he pleaded. "The first day of our honeymoon! Let's forget all the worries of life. Look at the sky of Italy—at last!—without a cloud in it. Our happiness must be like that—cloudless, without a shadow."

She was not quite satisfied. It was the lack of frankness in his eyes which made her uneasy. She must teach him to be utterly truthful with her. Otherwise . . .

He put his arms about her and stood looking out of the window at the passing landscape with snow-capped mountains far away, like white clouds in that blue sky.

"Italy again!" he cried. "Oh, my little English wife! How I have suffered sometimes in that English exile! Your grey skies, your dreadful fogs, your months without sun! Already I feel a boy again. I want to sing and laugh and shout." He spoke some verses in Italian and said: "That's from old Dante, who knew the suffering of exile. I must teach you my beautiful language—the language of poets and lovers and singing hearts!"

He forgot that passport incident and made Barbara forget by a tenderness and passion that were not to be resisted on the first day of a honeymoon.

At Genoa—a big bustling city with wide streets and rather splendid buildings beyond the busy port—a motor-car was waiting for them outside the station yard, in charge of a young chauffeur wonderfully good-looking, thought Barbara, who saw everything through a mirage of happiness. Peter recognized the car and the man and hurried to them, followed by the porters and the bags. He spoke in Italian to the young man, who pulled off his cap and then kissed Peter's hand with a look of adoration.

Peter seemed nervous, shy of this public demonstration. Perhaps his exile in England, or Barbara's company, had made him shirk Italian effusiveness. He looked round nervously, but the crowd surging out of the railway station paid no heed to them. A few Carabinieri lounged in the station yard, smoking cigarettes, and at some distance from them two young men in black tasselled caps, with black shirts under their tunics, scrutinized the passing crowd of travellers.

"Look!" said Barbara. "Fascisti, aren't they, Peter? Mussolini's Black Shirts."

He glanced over his shoulder at them and nodded. Then he introduced her to the chauffeur, as though to a friend or brother.

"This is Giuseppe, *carissima*. We were brought up as boys together. I believe he would die for me, if need be."

"Well, I hope he won't have to!" said Barbara lightly, amused by the Italian exaggeration, and she gave her hand to the good-looking boy, who said something very humbly in his own tongue.

"For the time being, anyhow," said Peter, "our lives are in his keeping. It needs much nerve to drive a car up our mountain roads."

Barbara thought it needed a lot of nerve to be driven up those mountain roads. Several times she had to close her eyes when that boy driver swung round hairpin turns which led up and up in spiral curves until the sea was far below them and the rocks dropped away precipitously into deep gorges, three inches away from their left side wheels. Once she clung to Peter's hand, believing that her last minute had

come, but he only laughed and said:

"Do not be frightened. Giuseppe is almost as good a driver as myself!"

"I *am* frightened," said Barbara. "I was never so scared in my life—but all the same it's wonderful, and I'm rather glad I married you. What are those trees down there, so dark and green, and why have they built little terraces up the mountainsides, and how long will it be before we get the first glimpse of your fairy-tale castle?"

The trees down there, so dark and green, were olives, and they had built little terraces up the mountainsides, banked up with stones, with infinite labour, through many centuries, to get some patches of flat earth in which the peasants could grow their vines and their vegetables, and make grass plots to feed their sheep and goats. And they would not get their first glimpse of the old *castello* for another hour at least.

"Good heavens!" cried Barbara. "Do you live in heaven? It must be as high as that if we go on climbing all the time."

It wasn't quite as high as heaven. Those spiral curves winding round the gorges wasted a lot of time. For miles they went in the opposite direction to their previous travelling, and then swung round the head of another ravine and came back again, seeing the road they had climbed winding below them like a white tape tied into loops between the rocks and olive trees.

Now and then they passed groups of peasants, trudging up behind pack-mules, and Barbara gazed at their brown faces and dark eyes, and liked the look of her husband's folk. The countryside belonged to them. They were part of its beauty, baked by its sun, covered with its white dust, primitive as these old rocks far above the roar and squalor of modern civilization. For three thousand years or more people like this had trudged barefoot up these mule tracks, while history hardly reached them. So Barbara thought, with a sudden disbelief that less than two days had passed since she had walked down the Brompton Road after leaving her bed-sitting-room for the last time and handing its key to her harassed landlady.

Suddenly Peter grabbed her arm and called out, "*Ecco! Il piccolo castello!*"

There, away on the top of a sharp ridge, perched like an eagle's nest, stood Peter's little old castle, as she had seen it in his photographs, with its battlements sharply edged against the blue sky—now, in the evening of this day, touched by the tips of a great crimson feather rising from a pool of gold in the west—and two little towers on either side.

"It's ridiculous!" said Barbara, with a catch in her throat. "I don't believe it! It's too good to be true!"

Certainly it was better than a bed-sitting-room off the Brompton Road, though not much of a castle when one saw it close, as once I saw it after Barbara's honeymoon. A part of it had fallen into ruin. One of the small towers was badly cracked as it had been left after a siege, centuries before, when the Genoese or someone had fired guns at it—their old-fashioned artillery—at close range. Still, it was habitable and inhabited, and there was even a flower garden on the southern side within the walls, and other flowers grew in its crannies and up the sharp-edged rocks which formed its base and seemed a part of it.

There was an old archway on the side of approach, closed by a great wooden door clamped with iron bars and studded with heavy nails. The young chauffeur who had driven with such skill and nerve up the mountain roads sprang down from the car and tugged at a rope which set a bell clanging and a dog barking.

"Hop-o'-my-Thumb," said Barbara, holding Peter's hand again, "it's just like a fairy-tale. But I hope there's no giant inside, or hungry witch, or any evil spell."

He raised her hand to his lips. "There's only love inside. We'll keep the door shut against the wickedness of the outer world."

The door swung open, revealing a paved courtyard, and a group of men and women. They were Peter's servants, or rather his mother's servants, not much different from the peasants they had seen trudging up the mule tracks. They came crowding up, kissing Peter's hands, laughing and curtsying to Barbara as though she were a princess. One old woman flung her arms round Peter's neck, kissing him on both cheeks, sobbing and laughing at the same time. It was old Lucia, who had been his nurse.

And Peter was delighted to see them all, it seemed. Tears streamed from his eyes. He kissed them all, young and old, embraced one or two of the old men and patted their backs with great emotion, laughed, shouted, laughed again, and was, thought Barbara, more Italian than she had ever seen him. He forgot all his English, even when he turned and put his arms about her and drew her forward, as though presenting her to all these rustics.

They raised a cheer, shrill from the women, hoarse and deep-throated from the men, and Barbara felt like a princess coming home with her lord and master, but laughed a little inside herself because her lord and master was Peter and a miniature man whom she called Hop-o'-my-Thumb in private conversation.

With a touch of dignity, as though conscious for the first time of his position as count of this little old *castello*, he took her hand and led her into the house through a low doorway and said, "My mother is waiting for us."

She waited for them in a low-ceilinged room at one end of which was a monstrous fireplace carved with the arms of Peter's family. The floor was very old and polished. The walls were hung with threadbare tapestries and portraits of Peter's ancestors in frames which had lost their ancient gilt. Candles were burning from iron brackets, and in this dim, soft light, with one hand clasping a tall, carved chair, stood a little old lady with grey hair, dressed in black, very delicate looking, with dark eyes in a white transparent face.

As Peter came in, hand-in-hand with Barbara, she gave a cry in which Barbara thought she heard the very spirit of motherhood.

"*Pietro! Figlio mio!*"

Peter released Barbara's hand and flung his arms round his mother's neck, and then went down on both knees with his head against her waist, and spoke to her with a kind of passion of love, in that soft, quick Italian which Barbara could not understand. For another moment she was distressed at all this emotionalism, so un-English, so exaggerated, in a way so ridiculous. That scene in the courtyard! This greeting with his mother! These tears and speeches! It was almost as though Peter had never expected to see any of them again, or as though they had never expected to see him again, like a man who had come from the dead.

And, in a way, it was rather extraordinary that Peter, who loved all these people so much, should have left them to live in a poor way in England as an unsuccessful artist. Stranger still that he should have suggested Paris for his honeymoon, inventing a dozen different reasons for not coming to this house on the top of the world. Peter was certainly a most extraordinary boy. She would have to find out more about him when he was able to talk of other things than love. Love was very nice, but it was rather a good thing for a wife to know something about her husband's private life—the inner life of his mind. How little he had told her, after all, in spite of their talks about art and music!

Barbara told me afterwards that some such thoughts as these came to her when she stood for the first time in Peter's old home, watching the greeting of mother and son. She felt alone, she said, a little frightened at being so English among these foreigners, whose language she couldn't understand. Perhaps she had been rather rash. . . .

These ideas did not last. They fell back into her sub-consciousness when Peter's mother took her hands and drew her close and in very broken English expressed her joy in meeting Peter's wife.

"It is lonely here," she said. "This castle is not like one of your English homes." (I do not attempt to give her accent and broken English.)

"But Pietro will make you happy. He is a very good boy."

During those weeks of their honeymoon Peter did his best to make her happy, and she was happy—with just that undercurrent of doubt which rather worried her, though she tried to put it out of her mind. But she was happy because Peter loved her with a passion which had no touch of insincerity, with a humility and devotion which did not change, with a worshipful reverence which was chivalrous and clean.

She was happy in this hill-top nest, looking down upon a world of beauty. It was a beauty of atmosphere, colour, light. Every morning she went to the casement window with a sense of ecstasy because of another day more beautiful almost than the one before, with the white rocks below glistening in the sunlight, and distant peaks, higher than their own, and snow-capped, marvellously clear and shining under the pale blue sky, and below, far away, the Mediterranean, unbelievably blue.

Lizards with jewelled eyes played on the walls below her window. Flowers grew in the chinks of the walls and scented the morning air. It was a singing world, and life was musical about her. From the valleys came the tinkle of mule bells and the laughter of brown-eyed boys minding goats and sheep. Peasant girls were singing in a village somewhere down below. A shepherd lad was playing on some rustic pipe, like the young god Pan. Grasshoppers were chirruping in myriads, so that there was this continuous tinkle of silvery sound. It was different in the Brompton Road, with the motor-buses passing!

Barbara laughed aloud sometimes at the thought of this difference, and Peter liked to hear her laugh.

"You are happy here?" he asked, again and again.

"Wonderfully amused!" she said. "Italy is good."

She was keen to learn Italian, and for hours she sat with Peter on a stone seat below the battlements where they could look through a gap in the wall at the world below, while very patiently, and with sudden bursts of laughter at idiotic sentences in an Italian conversation book, he taught her in his mother tongue.

"Have you seen the boots of my uncle's wife?"

"No, but I have seen the shirt of my sister's husband."

At such phrases they laughed until the tears came into their eyes, and yet, in spite of laughter, Barbara made such rapid progress that she could even follow some of Peter's conversation with his mother or with old Lucia, his former nurse, or with Giuseppe, the chauffeur who was also the gardener and the handy man, and waited at table and bullied the other servants, and then in his spare time played the guitar and sang little songs as all these people sang because, Barbara supposed, they couldn't help it.

Every morning Giuseppe came to her, shyly, with a bunch of wild flowers which he had gathered from the rocks, and often came again with a basket full of the tiny oranges—*mandarini*, he called them—which grew on the trees on the southern slope of the castle garden. . . . It was a good life for Barbara from the Brompton Road!

And yet there seemed a shadow somewhere, in that blue sky. She was aware of it, faintly and uncertainly, after the first few days, and then—quite surely. For some reason or other Pietro and his mother were anxious about something—even afraid. Often she saw the old Contessa look at her son with some fear in her eyes. Sometimes she came upon them talking, talking in low voices. Peter was trying to reassure his mother about something, and yet was not quite reassured himself. Always when she came upon them talking like that, they broke off in a guilty way, as though afraid she might understand.

Other things, most trivial in themselves, began to worry her. Why was the great gate always closed so carefully? It was never open for more than a minute or two, to let in some peasants climbing up the hill with meat or milk or vegetables. Directly they had gone, Giuseppe shut the gate and fastened the long iron bar across it.

Barbara spoke to Peter about it. "Why is that gate always shut? You're not expecting a siege or anything like that, I suppose?"

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "It's the custom, *carissima*."

One night, when they were at dinner in the long room hung with tapestries, there was the clang of the big bell in the courtyard. Peter was in the middle of some story about his life in London, and telling it humorously to make his mother laugh. But at that sound of the bell he stopped abruptly and sat there listening intently. His mother cried out, "Who's that?" in Italian, and rose from her chair, and then sank back again, clasping its carved arms so tightly that the veins of her delicate hands seemed tied in knots.

Giuseppe was waiting at the table. He was handing some potatoes to Barbara. But he too, at the sound of that bell, stood listening with a strange intensity. . . .

After all, it was nothing. A letter for Barbara from one of her girl friends in London, brought up from the village by the postmistress, who wanted two *lira* for extra postage.

Peter laughed. His mother unclasped her hands from the carved chair. Giuseppe passed the potatoes. But why had they looked so alarmed because the bell rang?

Barbara asked Peter this question, and he denied this alarm.

"We were only wondering who it could be at this time of night. Up here one doesn't expect uninvited guests or stray visitors. . . . Where was I in that story of mine?"

But Barbara was certain that there was fear in this house. Fear of what?

Peter was not quite frank with her. Not quite truthful. She noticed that he never went outside the castle walls, not even when she told him that he would get fat if he did not take some walking exercise, and tempted him to climb the rocks with her or explore the villages in the valleys below.

"I hate to leave my mother," he said. "She hasn't seen me for such a long time that she can't bear me out of sight."

Barbara understood this perfectly, but, in that case, why didn't Peter come for motor drives with them? He always had some excuse for staying at home—a sketch to finish, a book to read, a busy hour with his mother's accounts.

One night the dog barked. It was old Carlo, with whom she had made great friends—a most jovial dog who understood her Italian perfectly. She was asleep when he began barking and growling in the courtyard, and for a few moments she was only dimly aware that Peter was standing by the casement window in his pyjamas. She saw him move away quickly to an old bureau in a corner of the room. When he came back to the window through which the moonlight was streaming, she saw the gleam of something in his hand.

She raised herself in the bed, an old four-poster with silken curtains.

"Peter!" she called. "What's the matter? Why are you playing about with that revolver?"

He turned quickly, and she could hear the sharp indrawing of his breath.

"It's nothing," he said quietly. "Old Carlo was barking. I thought someone might be trying to get in. Some drunken peasant."

She laughed at him for these fantastic fears.

"You'll catch your death of cold!"

"One moment, *carissima*," he said.

He went to the door of the bedroom and opened it, and went out in the corridor, where a lantern burned dimly. He was away such a long time that she became anxious and, slipping out of bed, put on her dressing-gown. She went to the door and listened.

At the end of the corridor Peter was talking to someone in a low voice. It was Giuseppe, the young chauffeur and handy man. She could see his face by the light in the iron bracket. He was fully dressed, and some metal thing gleamed in his right hand.

"*È niente, signor*," said Giuseppe. "It is nothing," but his voice trembled.

Carlo had ceased barking in the courtyard below.

Peter came back along the passage, and Barbara waited for him just inside the bedroom door. He seemed startled to see her standing there, and reproved her for risking a bad cold in a draughty old house. She was silent, while in a furtive way he put his revolver into the bureau again.

"Peter!" she said sharply.

"What, *carissima*?"

She spoke with an emotion which surprised herself. "Peter, tell me, why are you afraid?"

"Afraid?" he asked. "Afraid of what?" He laughed nervously, and tried to be humorous. "Do I look like a coward? I'm not very big, but I'm wonderfully brave!"

"What is all this fear in this house?" asked Barbara. "I feel it all the time. It is in your mother's eyes. It lies like a shadow over all this life here. Even the servants are afraid. Why do you never come out of this place? Why does Giuseppe stay awake at night with his clothes on and a pistol in his hand, outside our door? Peter, I want to know. You've got to tell me. I'm your wife."

He laughed loudly, but his laughter did not ring true. "It's nothing. You imagine all that. Of course we have to be a little careful in this isolated place. My mother is getting old and rather nervous."

"It is more than that," said Barbara. "Answer my questions, Peter."

He answered her questions. "I don't go out because I'm lazy. Giuseppe stays outside our door at night because it's an old custom of the house—a body-guard for the lord and master. In olden times I daresay it was necessary."

He was lying to her. She knew that he was lying.

For the first time since their marriage she refused his kisses when he tried to put his arms about her, when he implored her not to let the faintest shadow spoil the joy and beauty of their honeymoon. For the first time since their marriage she was very angry, because he was deceiving her.

Barbara has told me all that. And she has told me of what happened at midday a week later. She was sitting with Peter on a stone seat on the grass-grown walk below the battlements, from which she could see over the shining countryside below, with the white winding road leading up to the castle. Peter's mother, the old Contessa, was reclining in a deck chair with her hands folded and her eyes fixed on her son's face. Peter was reading some Italian poetry and translating it sentence by sentence. Barbara was not listening very intently though she liked to hear his voice. She was watching how some bird was hovering in the warm air above one of the terraced plots of earth. It was a hawk, she supposed, waiting to "stoop" to some field-mouse. Poor little beast. And she was watching how the blue sky was quivering in the heat of the midday sun, and how puffs of white dust rose from the mule tracks where peasants were trudging up or down with their burdens of country produce. The grasshoppers were chirruping as usual, with their tinkling, silver chorus. The olive trees were dark against the white rocks. It was all wonderfully beautiful, dream-like and slumberous. Intensely peaceful. The spirit of peace dwelt in those valleys and on this hill-top.

She saw a motor-car driving up the spiral road. The sun glinted on its polished metal. Presently, as it swung round a hairpin bend to a higher level, she knew that it was Peter's car, driven by Giuseppe, who had gone down to Genoa early in the morning to fetch a parcel which had been held up by the Customs—some summer frocks she had ordered from London.

"There's Giuseppe back again!" she cried. "Driving furiously! The poor boy wants his luncheon."

Peter dropped his book and glanced over the battlements of his funny little castle.

"He's driving like a lunatic," he said in an anxious voice.

He rose from his chair and leaned over the wall staring at his car, which was lurching from side to side of the narrow road, with a deep gorge on one side dropping sheer to the valley. There was a cloud of white dust behind the car, and presently a second cloud of dust appeared round the hairpin bend, behind another car—a kind of open lorry crowded with little black figures who were men.

"Oh, Peter!" cried Barbara. "What is happening? Look!"

Something very queer was happening along that winding road where peace had dwelt.

There was a sudden flash from the open lorry racing behind Giuseppe's car, followed instantly by a sharp report which seemed to shatter against the rocks and scared the pigeons from the castle walls. It was followed by another flash and another report, and something happened to Giuseppe's car, and to Giuseppe. He seemed to crumple up over his wheel, to lose control. The car lurched, slithered to the edge of the gorge, and then toppled over sideways and disappeared.

Barbara gave a little scream and shut her eyes.

"Oh, Peter! Oh, Peter!"

When she opened her eyes again Peter's face was as white as death. His mother was struggling out of her chair, with a look of terror. She cried out to her son and said something which sounded like "*Madre di Cristo*."

Peter turned to Barbara with a curious smile in which was a poignant tenderness and infinite regret.

"My dearest wife," he said, in a broken voice, "I'm afraid this is the end of our honeymoon. It has been very joyous, marvellously good, and worth the risk."

Barbara stared at him. That shadow which she had always felt faintly was over her now, and very cold under the blue sky above her.

"What risk?" she asked. "Peter! What does it mean? Why have they killed Giuseppe? That poor boy!"

He turned for a moment to look over the wall again. The open lorry was on the higher bend of the road now, not half a mile away from the closed gate which led into his courtyard. The men inside were plainly visible. They wore black caps with swinging tassels.

"Those men," said Peter, in a strangely quiet voice, "have come to fetch me. They are Fascisti from Genoa. They have killed Giuseppe because he wanted to warn me."

"Warn you of what?" asked Barbara. "Why have they come to fetch you?"

She faltered towards him and put her arms about him. Peter—her little Hop-o'-my-Thumb—her baby Mussolini!

"I ought to have told you," he said. "I didn't want to worry you and spoil our honeymoon. I ought not to have brought you here, but my heart ached to show you this old place—and you wanted to come!"

Barbara spoke almost fiercely to him, because of her fear. "For God's sake, tell me now!"

He spoke with a kind of tragic irony.

"It's very simple," he said. "These things happen in Italy where free speech is dangerous. It's not like England! You know how fond I am of

talking, *carissima*? One night three years ago I talked too much, in a restaurant down there in Genoa. I was very young and foolish. Far too talkative in times of passion and idiotic politics. There was a young man there with some of his companions. He didn't like the things I said, about liberty and free speech and the dangers of dictatorship. He happened to be the leader of the local Fascisti, and my friends and I were liberals, rather hostile at that time to Mussolini and his crowd. That restaurant became a wreck before the fight was over—a ruin of splintered glass and broken chairs, with a lot of blood on the clean tablecloths.

"In the struggle I had the bad luck to kill one of those who disagreed with me. He fired at me three times before I hit him over the head with a marble figure which I seized for self-defence. It was a figure of Cupid, the little god of love! That was why I went to England—in a hurry—to earn my living as an artist. You see, *carissima*, that young man I killed—in self-defence—was rather important in a political way. He was one of Mussolini's favourite lieutenants, and his funeral was three miles long through Genoa. I watched it from a baker's shop, disguised as a Franciscan friar, and I knew that my funeral would follow it, not so grandly, unless I could escape. I escaped for a time. Now they have caught me."

Peter told his story with a smile about his lips, but it was the smile of a man who speaks from the scaffold before the rope is round his neck. His voice broke when he spoke again.

"If they take me now, *carissima*, I shall never see you again. Not in this pleasant and lovely world which men spoil by their foolishness."

He turned, and the smile left his lips and he gave a cry of anguish before leaning against the wall with one hand over his face to hide its agony.

Peter's mother was clasping her son's arm, beseeching him in a torrent of words which Barbara could not understand, though their meaning was easy to guess. She was imploring him to escape while there was yet time.

There was not much time. Up from the courtyard came a sudden clamour of excited servants. Some of the women were wailing, and there was a noise of crashing blows against the wooden door in the great archway. An old woman—it was Lucia, who had been Peter's nurse—came running up the stone steps to the castle wall. Almost breathless, she screamed out one word, twice:

"Fascisti! Fascisti!"

She fell on her knees on the flagged path and clasped Peter round the knees and wept in a kind of frenzy.

He pushed her off roughly and walked away a few paces with his head bent, as though thinking desperately.

Then he turned and came back to where Barbara stood, stunned by this thunderbolt from the blue sky, terror-stricken and perplexed.

Surely it was all unreal. This fear was all imaginary. Why should the Fascisti take her Peter away? She had been enthusiastic about Mussolini and these Fascisti. They had saved Italy from anarchy. They had restored law and order. They had given a new soul to the nation. She had argued with Peter about it many times, surprised at his lack of enthusiasm, his dislike of dictatorship, his belief in the English system of liberty and free speech. They would not be cruel to him.

Peter spoke to her. "I had better give myself up. I haven't a dog's chance of escape. In the old days I might have made a fight for it. My ancestors——"

He glanced over the castle walls for a moment, with a fleeting smile, as though thinking of old fights and sieges around this stronghold.

Some of the outdoor servants stood below him on the stone steps and one of them, an elderly peasant, asked a question which he answered by a phrase in Italian which Barbara understood.

"Open the gate!"

The man looked sullen, and the others burst out into a torrent of words as though persuading their master that they would defend him to the death.

Peter repeated his command. "Open the gate!"

There was the sound of heavy crashes and splintering wood in that old doorway down there.

And then, three minutes later, or perhaps longer, or less—Barbara could never tell—there was a rush of men in black shirts and black caps up the stone steps where Peter stood with his arms about his wife.

They tore him from her, and there was blood on his face, though he made no struggle, when a young man, who seemed to be their officer, threatened his men with a revolver and bade them handle him without brutality. It was this young man who spoke to Barbara, quite politely, in Italian. She caught the meaning of his question, the word "*Contessa*."

She answered in English, "I am Peter's wife," and for the first time wept.

The trial of Count Pietro Caffarelli took place in Rome. I was there with Barbara when he was sentenced to imprisonment for life, and down in the cells when he was allowed to embrace her for the last time. . . .

Perhaps not for the last time. Barbara has had an interview with Mussolini, who, I think, was touched with her simplicity, her passionate plea for mercy, her English beauty, her courage. There is hope of a pardon when public passion has died down. But it was a pitiful end to a honeymoon in Italy, a tragic home-coming to the bed-sitting-room off the Brompton Road, where I last saw her typing, typing until Peter may come back again.

THE FORTUNATE FACE

I

It was at high mass on Sunday morning in the little church of St. Pierre that Marguerite Durand saw for the first time the face of Bertrand Mollard, and felt her heart give a leap. It was the face of youth, careless, smiling, splendid, among all those tired, ugly and sad old people who were saying their prayers, unhappy with life and afraid of death. It was a face which afterwards became famous in France and other countries, where women fell in love with its portrait without seeing the living original, and schoolgirls kept its reproduction on postcards in their desks or under their pillows; millions of people in every city and village of France crowded into the cinemas because of that face on the screen, so debonair, so gallant, so ideal as a reminder of all the youth that had fallen in the Great War. That was afterwards. When Marguerite Durand looked upon it for the first time she could only guess that it was the face of Bertrand Mollard, the son of the innkeeper who kept *Le Véritable Coucou* in the village of Beaumarais.

Last night at supper her brother François, the *curé* of St. Pierre, had said something about the young man.

"Old Mollard tells me that his son is coming back from Paris. A young scamp, according to his father! Always in debt, sponging on his relatives, never earning an honest franc. Now he's become entangled with some low-class girl and old Mollard wants me to talk it out with him. As if he will give any heed to the words of a village *curé*. As if anybody does, except the old women who plague the life out of me, poor souls!"

Marguerite had been curiously interested in this bit of village gossip. Before going to sleep that night after saying her prayers on the cold polished boards below her little white bed she had caught herself thinking about the son of old Mollard the innkeeper, coming back from Paris in disgrace. There were many temptations in Paris for young men. . . .

Paris! How she longed to go there again and explore its great throbbing life, its wonderful shops, its beauty and glory, away from this little village with its old people and petty interests. There were young people in Paris—youth and gaiety and life after all the misery and death of war-time. In Beaumarais she was alone with her own youth, except for peasant girls. One day she would grow old—a thin, flat-chested old spinster—like Mademoiselle Bourdin or Mademoiselle Guyot, dressing in shabby black, with black woollen gloves. She would have sad, tired eyes like them, and no interest in life except the church services, and the village gossip, and admiration of a young *curé*—her brother.

That was a terrible thought to a girl of twenty—to grow old without ever knowing the great adventure of life! Youth never came to Beaumarais. So many young men had been killed in the War. There were not even any girls of her own age and class with whom she could laugh and exchange ideas. There was Monsieur de Beaumarais up at the château. He was charming of course, and very kind to her. A widower and a *mutilé de guerre*—with only one arm after the Battle of Verdun, and a stiff leg; one of the heroes of France and a very noble gentleman. But not young. Not fresh or gay or romantic like the heroes of novels which she read in bed and hid from her brother, who did not approve of such literature and was very austere and spiritual—a saint—now that he was a priest after serving as a soldier in the War. The War had been sad for youth in France. . . .

Old Mollard's son was a "young scamp," her brother said. Always in debt, and now entangled with a low-class girl. She wondered if he were good looking. There would be many temptations in Paris for good-looking boys. There was a lot of wickedness, certainly, in a great city like Paris. God was forgotten. . . .

Marguerite Durand asked God to forgive her for these distractions of thought. She said another little prayer and fell asleep and dreamed of a beautiful young man like D'Artagnan in "The Three Musketeers," who bent over her and kissed her on the lips.

It was perhaps partly because of that shocking little dream, which made her blush for shame in the morning, that Marguerite's heart gave a leap when she saw the face of Bertrand Mollard in church. He turned round deliberately as he stood halfway up the church, next to his father and mother, and stared at her with inquisitive, bold smiling eyes. She was playing the harmonium as usual at the high mass on Sunday morning. The choir of village boys—sons of peasant farmers—in red cassocks, led by Doctor Monod, were singing flat, in shrill, country voices, and out of time as well as out of tune.

She had seen Bertrand Mollard walk into the church with his back turned to her, tall, with an easy swing of the body, self-assured. He sat in his rush-bottomed chair with his legs crossed, in an irreverent, careless attitude. When he stood up in a leisurely way, after all the others had risen for the Gospel, he tapped his foot on the stone floor, with a kind of dance-step rhythm, until his mother put her hand on his sleeve. Marguerite had watched all that, wondering why her breath came so fast, trying to keep her eyes away from that tall young figure, while her fingers played the old familiar notes. But her eyes met his when he turned and stared at her. She answered his smile, which was irresistible. Then she blushed very deeply, and after that became quite pale, and did not dare to look at him again.

He was terribly good looking, this son of old Mollard the innkeeper. He had the face of heroic youth as she had dreamed of it, so clear-cut, with such a look of vitality and charm and gallantry and boyhood. He had a little moustache on his upper lip, hardly grown. There was a roguish look in his black eyes. He was like young D'Artagnan, in "The Three Musketeers," as, she had imagined him. . . .

It was stupid that she could not control her emotion and slurred the notes of the harmonium. Doctor Monod drew his breath sharply, as though the false notes hurt his sensitive ear. Some of the choir-boys giggled. Even her brother, standing at the altar with his face turned again to give his blessing, looked startled for a moment at the excruciating noise she made.

"*Pardon!*" she said under her breath to Doctor Monod.

As usual the congregation lingered outside the church porch, to exchange Sunday greetings and to have a word or two with their young *curé*, who made a habit of coming out to them after he had unrobed in the sacristy.

"*Bonjour, madame!*"

"*Bonjour, mademoiselle!*"

"*Il fait beau temps, n'est-ce-pas?*"

Marguerite waited for her brother. She helped him put his vestments in the cupboard of the sacristy. He was absent-minded, as he always was after mass, as though his spirit still lingered about the altar. She saw his lips move in prayer. Then he turned to her and smiled.

"You played false notes, Marguerite! Wouldn't your little fingers march—this morning?"

"I missed my place," she said. "I can't think how I could have been so stupid!" She turned her face away to hide the shyness of her eyes.

"Madame Doumergue wanted a word with me," said her brother. "I mustn't keep the old dame waiting in this east wind."

He sighed while his thin lips twisted into a smile. It was one of the penalties of priesthood—this affectionate persecution by elderly females. Sometimes he complained to his sister that it was "worse than war." That was one of the jokes they had together.

"I will go and prepare your breakfast, François. Don't be long."

But he would not let her go in advance, saying he would never escape from the old ladies if she did not defend him. So it was that Marguerite's timid eyes again encountered the bold gaze of Bertrand Mollard, the innkeeper's son, outside the church in the sunlight of that May morning.

He saw her and looked into her eyes again before she had the presence of mind to avoid his gaze and talk to Mademoiselle Guyot.

She said, "How is your cold, dear mademoiselle?" But all the time she was thinking, "He is wonderfully good looking! He cannot be more than twenty-two. He looks like a French knight in the Middle Ages. At last there is a young man in Beaumarais!"

She saw her brother make his escape from Madame Doumergue. Monsieur Mollard, the innkeeper, took him on one side, speaking earnestly. Both of them glanced across at the young man, who was lighting a cigarette. Old Mollard looked angrily at his son. Marguerite's brother shook his head and smiled and made a little gesture with his hands. Marguerite heard his words:

"It is very difficult! . . . One must be tolerant with youth. . . . I was a soldier before I became a priest, Monsieur Mollard."

The innkeeper used coarse peasant words. "That boy of mine is a *saligaud*, a *cabotin*. He goes about with the little sluts of Paris—actress girls—and *grues*. He wants to be an actor, if you please!"

The *curé* raised his hands as though to say "Heaven forbid!"

"Yes!" said the innkeeper angrily. "He has had an offer to act for some cinema company. Was it for such a dirty game that I have spent so much money on his education and paid all his debts? *'Cré nom!*—begging your pardon, *Monsieur le Curé*—it is intolerable. It is breaking his poor mother's heart. It is worse than when our poor Jean was killed at Notre Dame de Lorette in the first year of the War. He died for the honour of France. That was good. Bertrand will only bring disgrace to us."

"Let me have a word with him," said the *curé* gently. "In the trenches I was a comrade of young men."

The innkeeper called out like a sergeant on parade: "Bertrand!"

The young man seemed to hesitate. Marguerite, watching him over the black bonnet of Madame Doumergue, saw him look sulky for a moment, then shrug his shoulders and throw his cigarette away. He came across the grass among the old graves with a careless swagger, smiling a little, with his head up. His good looks seemed to soften people's eyes as they watched him answer his father's call.

Bertrand Mollard came to a halt before Marguerite's brother and saluted ceremoniously. "*Bonjour, Monsieur le Curé!*"

Marguerite's brother held out his hand. "*Bonjour*, Bertrand Mollard. Your father has been a good friend of mine since I came here as *curé*. Welcome back to Beaumarais."

Bertrand laughed and shrugged his shoulders again. "It is not so gay as Paris, *Monsieur le Curé*!"

"That is truth," said the priest. "Not so gay as old 'Paname.' But more virtuous, perhaps! A little village of France, full of brave souls. In the trenches we used to dream of places like this—the homes of our boyhood—the old farm—*maman*! You remember, perhaps? You were in the fighting line?"

"*Chasseurs à pied, Monsieur le Curé.* On the Somme, in Champagne in the last year of the War, when I was old enough. Eighteen and a bit."

"You had some luck," said the *curé* of Beaumarais. "As an older man I was there from the beginning. Lieutenant of artillery. I got my packet at Verdun."

He laughed at the old memories of terror and death from which he had been saved for other service. It was easy to laugh now, except in moments of dreadful remembrance.

"*Mon lieutenant!*" said Bertrand, and he saluted again, not the priest but the soldier who had lived through Verdun.

The priest put his hand on the young man's shoulder in a comradely way. "Come round to my presbytery one evening. A smoke and a yarn and a glass of good red wine. *Qu'est-ce-que tu dis, mon copain?*"

The young man, Bertrand, did not receive this invitation with enthusiasm. No doubt he suspected that the "yarn" would develop into priestly advice and an echo of his father's anger at his careless life in Paris. What was the good? What did this *curé* know of life in Paris? Then his eyes roved again towards Marguerite Durand, the priest's sister, young like himself, and pretty.

"With pleasure, *Monsieur le Curé*," he said good-naturedly—"one evening, perhaps."

Marguerite heard the words—the half promise—and hoped that she would be at home when this young man came round to her brother's presbytery. It would be miserable if it happened to be on the evening of the choir practice.

II

Bertrand Mollard, the innkeeper's son, did not come round to the presbytery on Monday or Tuesday evening, following that Sunday when Marguerite had seen him in church. On the Wednesday evening there was the choir practice in the school-room, and all through this hour, when Doctor Monod beat time for the choir-boys, Marguerite kept wondering whether the handsome young man had gone round to her brother's house.

But no, when Marguerite went home after the choir practice she found her brother reading his breviary as usual. The only visitor had been old Pierre Martin, who had brought round a crucifix which he had mended in his spare time. It was disappointing that youth had not come knocking at the door.

On the next evening she went up to the château with her brother to have dinner with Monsieur de Beaumarais and his mother. That was a regular thing. Every Thursday evening she and her brother dined at the château and the programme was always the same. The dinner was very frugal—onion soup, *sauté de veau*, spinach, Gruyère cheese, coffee and a glass of cherry brandy afterwards in the salon. Madame de Beaumarais, in her widow's cap, talked politics with François, Marguerite's brother, and denounced England and the United States for their selfishness and materialism, which had made them forget the sacred rights and sacrifice of France. François, more tolerant, for the sake of argument found excuses for them though he agreed in general.

Monsieur de Beaumarais, with his one arm, had his meat cut up by Marguerite—she loved to do this little service for him—and was very polite and friendly and chivalrous. Sometimes he told amusing stories of the War—never the tragic stories which he must have seen—and Marguerite and he had little jokes together which sometimes annoyed his mother because they interrupted her arguments with François. Marguerite was very fond of that middle-aged widower who had lost an arm at Verdun, and who looked very ill and sad sometimes when he was not making his little jokes with her. His hair was grey and his face was lean and lined and leathery, but he had a distinguished look and kind, smiling eyes.

He was a shy man, absurdly afraid of his mother, who still treated him as a boy and rebuked him for lack of dignity when he laughed too much at table with Marguerite, as when he made a rabbit with his napkin, or chaffed the old servant who waited on them. He was a great reader of old books, and fond of music.

Always after dinner he asked Marguerite to play the piano and stood at her side turning over the pages of Bach, whose music he loved best though his mother objected to it as German. Then Mademoiselle Bourdin and Mademoiselle Guyot came in and the cherry brandy was handed round and there was a game of cards between the four ladies while Monsieur de Beaumarais played chess with Marguerite's brother. Mademoiselle Guyot always quarrelled with her partner, and cheated flagrantly.

That was the programme up at the château, with its polished boards, its old portraits on the faded wall-paper, its Louis-Quinze furniture with tarnished gilt and threadbare chair covers of green silk. Pleasant evenings, familiar and friendly, but not thrilling or romantic to a girl like Marguerite.

Sometimes when she looked at the two old maids and at Madame de Beaumarais in her widow's cap, a sense of wasted youth desolated her. She was young and pretty. The gilt-framed mirror in this salon told her so. Why should she have to spend all her days with querulous old age?

On the evening after that Sunday when the innkeeper's son had come to Beaumarais from Paris, Marguerite was aware of something unusual in the behaviour of these friends. She could not quite make it out. It was not that anything startling was said or done, but they looked at her differently somehow, spoke with a kind of tenderness which surprised and, in a way, frightened her. It was almost as though she had been ill or as if she were sickening for some disease! It was the first time, for instance, that Madame de Beaumarais called her "Marguerite" and even "*ma chère*," instead of "Mademoiselle" to show the social distinction between them.

She felt quite flustered at this new sign of affection. What did it mean? It was not even her birthday, or anything special like that. She noticed, too, that Monsieur de Beaumarais seemed shy and ill at ease, and glanced at her several times in a furtive kind of way though he avoided her eyes. There was some secret between his mother and François. While she was playing a melody by Chopin the old lady whispered volubly to her brother and he seemed surprised, and once turned in his chair to look at Marguerite with a kind of joy and pride in his eyes which she caught over her music-book. She smiled back but there was a little wonderment in her mind.

She called out to her host reproachfully: "You do not turn over for me, Monsieur de Beaumarais!"

He rose instantly and strode over the polished boards with his stiff soldierly tread.

"Forgive me," he said, "I'm so clumsy with this one arm of mine. . . . That is exquisite, that little piece you are playing."

When ten o'clock was struck by the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece—the gilt had worn off the two angels since it told the time before the French Revolution—the *curé* of Beaumarais beckoned to his sister and said, "Bed-time, and I have my office to say."

She said good night as usual, thanking Madame de Beaumarais for a "charming evening." But she was embarrassed—overwhelmed even—when the old lady took her hands, drew her closer, and kissed her on the forehead. It was the first time she had ever been kissed by this distinguished old lady, so cold and haughty as a rule.

In the hall Monsieur de Beaumarais helped her on with her cloak. "It is a fine starlight night," he said, opening the front door and looking down the grass-grown avenue to the iron gates beyond.

Marguerite held out her hand. "*Bonsoir, Monsieur de Beaumarais. Merci, mille fois!*"

He took her hand and held it longer than usual. Then he stooped a little and she felt his lips on her finger-tips.

"I hope you have not been too bored," he said. "You do not find us too dull in this old château?"

"It is always charming here," she answered, but her voice trembled a little. Certainly something had happened; something with regard to herself. It was extraordinary, this new behaviour of Monsieur de Beaumarais and his mother.

Marguerite was silent until they were back again in the presbytery, where the old maid, Marthe, was waiting up for them. The old woman grumbled because they were late and then went to bed with shuffling feet up the polished stairs.

Marguerite shut the door of the little parlour and stood with her back to it and spoke to her brother. "François, you are hiding something from me! What has happened?"

For a moment the priest did not answer. He was seated in a wooden armchair, undoing his boots. Then suddenly he stood up, holding one boot absent-mindedly. There was a tender and smiling light in his eyes.

"My dear little sister! My best comrade! It is true that something has happened, something that is a great honour to both of us, and a pledge of happiness for you. Monsieur de Beaumarais is very much in love with you. He wants you to be his wife. *Madame la Comtesse de Beaumarais!* How fine that sounds! His mother spoke to me to-night. With your consent, Monsieur de Beaumarais will call to-morrow and ask for your answer." The priest dropped the boot on the floor and strode forward to put his arms about his sister and kiss her on the cheek. "It is

splendid—this news! I am very proud and glad for your sake, Marguerite.”

Marguerite had remained still and quiet, a wave of colour ebbing into her face and then leaving her pale.

Monsieur de Beaumarais! He was very noble and kind. She loved and admired him. They laughed at little jokes together, though he was always shy. But he was so old and tired! A man of fifty! A widower!

In a vision she saw herself as Madame la Comtesse de Beaumarais in the old château up there, with its faded tapestries and its tarnished gilt. She would be there for ever among those old people, growing older, until she faded and became like them, having missed the adventure of life, its gaiety, its romance, its youth.

It was only a second or two during which she thought all that. Then a flood of tears came into her eyes and she leaned her head on her brother’s shoulder and said, “Oh, François!” and wept a little before slipping away from him and going up to her room.

Her brother was not surprised by her emotion and her tears. Naturally, he thought, she was overcome by this wonderful news, this great happiness. He knelt down at his *prie-Dieu* under the crucifix that had been mended by old Pierre Martin, and thanked God for the blessing that had come to his sister and himself.

He was happy next day when Monsieur de Beaumarais called and spent half an hour alone with Marguerite, and afterwards opened the door and called to him.

“*Monsieur le Curé!*”

The priest went into the room from the kitchen and Monsieur de Beaumarais spoke to him, with a thrill of gladness in his voice.

“Your sister—Marguerite—has consented to become my wife. She will take me, in spite of my empty sleeve and my ugly old face. She is very generous!”

He had lost his shyness for a while and turned and put his arm around Marguerite, who was very pale, though she smiled and did not shrink from him.

It was in the evening that young Bertrand Mollard, the innkeeper’s son, came round for his chat with the village *curé*.

III

It was the face of Bertrand Mollard that came into Marguerite's dreams at night, distressing her. She wished this good-looking boy—so astonishingly handsome—had not come to the village at this time with his lure of youth, when she wanted to forget her foolish and romantic fancies and all the difference in years between herself and Monsieur de Beaumarais, who was to be her husband, and whom she now called Charles.

On the night when François had first told her of the offer to be made her, she had suffered an agony of doubt and distress. She was so young—so young!—and she would be doomed to dullness all her life, without gaiety or the charm of youth. But she had seen that she must accept this offer. She would be wicked and ungrateful to reject the love of a good and noble man, so kind and chivalrous. For her brother's sake it would be the best thing if she went to live up at the château, close to him, so that their comradeship would not be broken. He was so proud to think that she would be Madame la Comtesse! How could she make all these people unhappy after their kindness to her?

The face of Bertrand Mollard, the innkeeper's son, came into her dreams that night.

She had accepted Monsieur de Beaumarais when he had spoken shyly and gravely to her, taking her hand with the one hand left to him, asking her whether she could endure a middle-aged husband, mangled in the War, and a dull life with old fogies who loved her. His chivalry, his tenderness, his loneliness had filled her with pity and affection.

"You will help me to grow young again!" he had said. "We will be good comrades, and laugh together at the same little jokes."

He had taken a ring out of his pocket—an old ring worn once by his great-great-grandmother, a lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette—and put it on the third finger of her right hand, and kissed it when it had fastened her to him for life. It was tight and hurt her at first, though she did not complain. All that day, and afterwards, it reminded her of the promise she had made.

She was in her room, staring at that ring on her hand, when Bertrand Mollard called on her brother. She heard his knock at the door downstairs, a lively rat-tat-tat unlike the heavy "dab" of the usual visitors, and his voice asking old Marthe whether *Monsieur le Curé* was at home. He was shown into the parlour, where his footsteps were heavy on the polished boards, and almost immediately her brother went to him with a cheery greeting before the door was shut. She heard their voices talking, talking, for an hour or more before the door opened again and she heard her brother telling old Marie to bring in a bottle of *vin rouge* with two glasses. Then he called to her.

"Marguerite!"

He had to call three times before she answered him. Some strange timidity kept her rooted to the floor of her bedroom—a sense of danger even.

"Marguerite! *Ma sœur!*"

At her brother's third call she answered and went downstairs to the parlour, where Marthe was bringing in the wine. Bertrand Mollard was standing there with her brother in an easy attitude, with his back to the stove. As she came in he smiled at her.

The priest poured out a glass of wine and held it as he introduced his sister.

"This is Monsieur Mollard's son Bertrand, Marguerite. We have been having a good talk. Heart to heart, like two old soldiers."

Bertrand Mollard took Marguerite's hand and held it a second longer than he need have done.

"I saw you in church," he said, with a look of homage in his dark eyes. "I'm afraid I looked round to see who was playing the harmonium so prettily."

"That's a charming compliment, Marguerite," said her brother in his cheery way. "Well, if young men are enticed to church by your music I am sure our dear Lord will be delighted. Bertrand has confessed that he doesn't go to Mass in Paris very often. I've been 'ragging' him about it, as a comrade as well as a priest. Not fair to God to forget Him utterly after the War, eh?" He put his arm about the young man in a brotherly way. "This rascal didn't get a scratch in the War. He owes something to God, *n'est-ce-pas*? Almost a miracle!"

Bertrand Mollard laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "Luck, *Monsieur le Curé*. Some fellows had luck. Some didn't. I can't flatter myself that I was saved for any special purpose. Anyhow, I've not come across it in Paris unless it's that offer to play as a cinema actor!"

"Why not?" asked the priest. "Perhaps you will play good parts, elevating, teaching nobility and faith, appealing to what is best in the spirit of the people. The cinema could be a great power for good. Perhaps it is your purpose in life to reform it and ennoble it."

Bertrand Mollard laughed lightly. "It is a charming idea, *Monsieur le Curé*. Perhaps you will persuade my father, who is very much against it. It seems to me an excellent chance, and suits me better than studying law."

"I will say a little word," said the priest. "Meanwhile—*à votre santé, mon vieux*!"

He raised his glass to the young man. But before drinking, Bertrand Mollard turned to Marguerite and smiled at her over his wine-glass.

"*À votre santé, mademoiselle!*"

She thanked him, and avoided his laughing eyes. He looked a splendid figure of youth as he stood there with the raised glass. The glow of the sunset touched his right cheek while he stood sideways to the window, and revealed the fine, strong line of his profile with the little moustache on the upper lip.

"Bertrand has promised me to come in sometimes and play a game of chess," said the priest. "I shall be lonely now that you will be going up to the château more often."

Marguerite blushed at this reminder of her engagement with Charles de Beaumarais. The little ring on her finger pressed tight.

For a moment the young man, Bertrand Mollard, looked puzzled—a little inquisitive—at this allusion to the château. But his next words were to say that he must be leaving. He had stayed too late on his first visit. He would be charmed to have a game of chess now and then, while he stayed in Beaumarais.

Marguerite went to the door with him, and after saying good night he stood in the porch for a moment and spoke to her again.

"It is dull here in Beaumarais, is it not, mademoiselle? I mean for young people like ourselves. *Rien à faire!*"

"It must seem so after Paris," said Marguerite.

"Yes! There is only one place in the world in which to live—Paris!" He spoke the name of Paris as if it held all joy and laughter and life. "There is hardly a lamp in this old village," he said, looking down the little street with its thatched cottages where only one light gleamed—outside his father's inn, *Le Véritable Coucou*.

"One gets used to it," said Marguerite.

"I'm bored with it already," he answered. "Nobody but old fogies! Not a single young person at all attractive—except you, mademoiselle!"

He said good night again with his hat in his hand, and then strode away.

IV

Twice a week, and once three times, Bertrand Mollard came round to play chess with François between nine and ten in the evenings, to take a glass of red wine, and to talk about the War, Paris and—sometimes—religion.

"He has good inclinations," said François. "It is true that he has been living in a loose set and has been careless of religion, poor boy, but he listens very patiently when I talk to him about his immortal soul now and then. Just a word or two, as a priest, though not too much to scare him away. We are good comrades!"

But Marguerite knew that he came to the presbytery not to play chess, or drink a glass of red wine, or talk about the War, Paris or religion, but to get a glimpse of her, to squeeze her hand, to exchange a few whispered words, to invite her to meet him in the woods beyond the village.

It was two weeks before she went into the woods with him. She knew that it would be dangerous to go, and prayed for strength to resist his invitation. The first time he asked her was on the doorstep of the presbytery after his third visit, when she had come back from the château just in time to see him—though not deliberately. It was because Madame de Beaumarais went to bed at ten o'clock.

He said: "Don't you ever go for a walk in the woods? They are charming just now, with primroses in the wet leaves. Let us stroll there to-morrow?"

She shook her head. "I have to go up to the château."

He seemed puzzled by that. "Why are you always going up to that old château? Don't you get bored with that old woman up there?"

For a moment she was silent, and she felt the beating of her heart.

"I have to go," she said. "You see, I am going to marry Monsieur de Beaumarais."

He stared at her with surprise, and then laughed quietly. "That one-armed fellow? Why, he's old enough to be your father! It's ridiculous!"

"He is a very noble gentleman," she answered loyally. "He lost his arm in the War."

"He's too old for you, all the same," said Bertrand. "You belong to my generation. You're younger than I am. Anyhow, let's walk in the woods to-morrow. Why not?"

She shook her head, laughing a little at his insistence. "I am going out driving with Madame de Beaumarais."

He uttered a swear word under his breath, and then said: "Well, good night, mademoiselle. Perhaps another day."

He was like a sulky child because she would not go walking in the woods with him. He didn't guess that she wanted to go, that there was a tug at her heart to walk hand in hand with him among the primroses, through the little glades with their fresh leaves where birds were singing and mating. Boy and girl together, it would be a pleasant walk in the springtime of life.

Up at the château it was a little dull. Charles was devoted and kind, but very serious. He kissed her on the cheek every evening, but with a rather cold courtesy. Because of "the proprieties," ever present in the mind of Madame de Beaumarais, they were seldom alone, and Marguerite was glad of that. The old lady sat with them, went out driving with them. Indeed, Marguerite was more with her future mother-in-law than with her future husband. The old lady took her upstairs into her own sitting-room and exhibited treasures of old lace and linen and sat making fine embroidery for Marguerite's wedding, while she talked of her dear Charles and his splendid character and his first wife who had died during the War, poor lady, and of the great honours which would come to Marguerite by marriage with a noble family.

"I want you to realize, my dear," said the old lady, "that I am making a sacrifice of some of my pride—even of my principles—in giving my consent to your marriage with my dear son. Your father was only a lawyer in a small provincial town. A man of the people, *n'est-ce pas*? Still, times have changed, and I could not find it in my heart to quarrel with Charles for choosing a virtuous young woman of humble origin instead of one of his own caste. In these republican times the old aristocracy of France cannot be rigid. We must yield a little to the spirit of the age. In any case, my dear, I could not wish for a more attractive young creature."

"You are very kind," said Marguerite meekly, for the hundredth time, and she did not resent this condescension. She was even awed a little by the thought that she was about to enter a family which belonged to the history of France.

Charles smiled at his mother's pride and old-fashioned notions. Several times when he was alone with Marguerite for a brief half-hour he expressed the hope that his mother was not fatiguing her by such conversations.

"I don't care two *sous* for all that old tradition," he said. "I am proud and happy because you love me a little. I will try to make you happy, little Marguerite, if you can put up with a middle-aged widower whose eyes are gladdened by your beauty."

"I am only a foolish girl," she told him. "You will have to make allowance for my youth and ignorance and lack of dignity."

"I don't want dignity," he said, laughing gaily. "My mother has enough for all of us."

That night when she went back to the presbytery, Bertrand was finishing his game of chess with her brother.

He sprang up when she came in, and with a gay laugh cried: "Beaten again! *Monsieur le Curé* is invincible. He would have made a great general."

"Not I!" said the priest. "In the War they wanted to put me on the staff, but I preferred to stay in the front line with my adorable *poilus*."

He went out himself to fetch a bottle of red wine, not troubling to call his old servant, of whose querulous temper he was very much afraid.

Bertrand and Marguerite were left alone.

"How is it up at the château?" asked the young man, smiling at her in a quizzical way.

"The same as ever," said Marguerite, answering his smile. "Mademoiselle Bourdin and Mademoiselle Guyot come to play cards. You wouldn't find it exciting, I think."

"Not me!" he answered bluntly. "I detest old women. Anyhow, I shouldn't get an invitation. They're much too grand for the son of old Mollard of *Le Véritable Coucou*!"

"How long are you staying in the village?" asked Marguerite.

"Another two weeks or so before I become a film actor. My father consents at last, thanks to your brother. Then for Paris again and a little life."

"You find it gay in Paris?" asked Marguerite.

He laughed and smoothed his little black moustache. "It's always amusing. The little restaurants. The good company. Free speech. Laughter. Bohemian ways. The wine of youth. Much more amusing than Beaumarais!"

"Yes," said Marguerite, "that's possible." She laughed at the contrast between Paris and Beaumarais.

"Why don't you come?" asked Bertrand. "Paris would welcome you. Paris has an eye for youth and beauty."

"That's kind of Paris," said Marguerite, with a little glint of merriment in her eyes.

But while she spoke she had a queer little pain in her heart. She would like to go to Paris and dine in those little restaurants he spoke about, with a gay company of youth, and listen to their laughter. That was impossible. In a few weeks she would be Madame la Comtesse de

Beaumarais, with an elderly husband.

"We haven't had that walk yet, mademoiselle," said Bertrand Mollard. "Why not to-morrow? I would tell you about Paris. In case I die of ennui. Will you not favour me with your company a little?"

"It would not be discreet," said Marguerite kindly. "If people saw us walking together they would talk. You know how it is in the country—in a village like Beaumarais."

"It is idiotic—that!" said Bertrand impatiently. "In Paris one walks with whom one likes, and there is nothing said."

It was then that the priest came back with his bottle of wine.

So it happened several times, these brief conversations with Bertrand Mollard after evenings at the château; until one night when he whispered to her on the doorstep before saying good night, and repeated his plea that she should go for a walk in the woods with him, she yielded at last, with sudden surrender.

"I will come to-morrow. For half an hour. At midday."

"That is excellent!" he said. "A thousand thanks, mademoiselle! I will be where the four paths cross. You know the spot?"

She felt guilty when she went into the woods next day. She hadn't told her brother or her future husband that she was going for a walk with the innkeeper's son. That was a sign—a proof—that it was not quite right. She repented of her promise. She had been foolish to promise. And yet Bertrand would be so disappointed if she broke her word. And after all, perhaps it was not very wicked, or even at all wicked, looked at with common sense. To go for half an hour's walk with a good-looking boy—just for once in her life. . . . Why not? What real harm?

He was there at the crossroads where the four paths met, waiting for her eagerly. The sunlight streamed through the young beech-trees, aslant their straight trunks, and made lace-work patterns through the leaves on the sandy paths. Bertrand held his hat in his hand. Standing there in a patch of sunlight, he looked like a hero of romance.

He came striding forward and took her hand.

He talked volubly, to give her time to recover from her shyness. Presently she forgot that, and they laughed together as they plucked primroses—a great bunch of them—growing at the side of the wet ditches. Bertrand slipped once and plunged his foot into the brown peaty water at the bottom of the ditch. He made a joke of it and laughed heartily, though his boots were wet through.

Presently they sat down on a dry bank, and Bertrand lighted a cigarette and talked of his life in Paris. He had rooms in the Montparnasse quarter, near the Luxembourg Gardens. They were not magnificent; there were only two chairs with four good legs apiece, but it was his little kingdom. Perfect liberty there! He had got into debt a little—but not much. His father could well afford to increase his allowance. One spent a bit on entertaining one's friends at cafés and restaurants, and now and again at the theatre. One could not live in Paris like an anchorite.

Marguerite asked a timid question. "The girls in Paris—aren't they rather immoral?"

He laughed at her. "Not worse than country girls. I suppose you've heard that story about my being entangled with a bad woman? My father has been spreading it all over the village. Shouted it out in the churchyard for all the village to know. Isn't that so?"

"Is it true?" asked Marguerite, blushing in spite of herself.

Bertrand Mollard flicked the ash off his cigarette. "One has one's little affairs, mademoiselle. Not serious. This one was with Suzanne Meunier—very beautiful but rather a vixen. I've done with her. There's nothing between us. She was too greedy; utterly selfish. And a temper that was almost frightening. I finished with her when she started smashing the plates in a restaurant at Montmartre, just because I wouldn't buy her a box of chocolates. It was jealousy, really. She thought I was making eyes at a little girl called Yvonne Massenet."

"And were you?" asked Marguerite anxiously. She was rather distressed by these revelations of life in Paris.

"I have to be amiable," said Bertrand Mollard. "One can't go around like a Capuchin monk, with one's eyes on the ground. I like good company, plenty of fun, laughter with all the boys and girls. Why not, mademoiselle?"

She couldn't find any reason against it, except his good looks and his bold eyes. They were dangerous eyes, she thought, and yet very charming and merry; dangerous because they were charming. Any girl's head might be turned if that boy smiled at her. God had given him a beautiful face.

"I've not found the girl I could love in Paris," he said presently. "That is strange, because there are many pretty girls in Paris."

"Yes, it is strange," she urged. "It is hard to believe, monsieur!"

He looked at her curiously and smiled a little. "Love comes to one in unexpected places," he said; "suddenly, when one is off one's guard. One sees a girl, and instantly one knows."

"Knows what?" asked Marguerite, lowering her lashes so that he couldn't look into her eyes.

"Knows that one has met one's fate. The one woman in life. The woman without whom there can be no happiness or peace. The other half of one's heart. Don't you agree?"

"It is what one reads in books," said Marguerite. "But life is not as one reads it in books, I find."

She told him that she must be going back. Her brother would be coming home to *déjeuner*. He would be alarmed if she were not there in time.

Bertrand Mollard rose reluctantly from the grassy bank. "It is a shame to go so soon. This has been a happy half-hour."

"A good remembrance," said Marguerite.

She thought that when she was married and living in the old château she would always remember this half-hour in the woods. It would be like a fairy-story. She would think of herself and Bertrand as boy and girl in an enchanted glade.

They walked back silently to where the four paths met. There was no other living soul in the wood. A rabbit scuttled across the path, and Marguerite laughed at it.

"Perhaps we had better say good-bye here," she said. "I will go back alone to the village." Something broke in her voice as she held out her hand.

It was then that Bertrand Mollard drew her close to him and spoke those words which changed all her life.

"Not good-bye," he said, "*c'est idiot, ça!* I love you, Marguerite. Since the first time I saw you in church—you are the one woman in the world for me. . . . *Je t'aime!*"

He caught hold of her roughly, and held her tight, and kissed her on the lips.

She was frightened. She cried out in the quiet wood and a blackbird fled out of the undergrowth with a startled note.

"No, no—Bertrand! I am not free. You mustn't love me! I am promised to Monsieur de Beaumarais."

He still held her in his arms and laughed into her eyes.

"That is all rubbish. That withered stick has no right to you. Old men like that don't stand in the way of youth. Not between you and me, Marguerite! You love me. I have seen it in your eyes. We loved each other at first sight. Is that not true? If you tell me you don't love me, I will let you go. Say! No, you cannot say it. I can see the love in your eyes. You let me kiss your lips. Your dear, sweet lips."

He kissed her again, with the passion of youth.

"It is wicked!" she cried. "I am a wicked girl!"

"Do you love me?" he asked, laughing again.

"I love you," she said. "Because you are young, Bertrand. Because your eyes make my heart leap. Oh, my dear love, what shall I do? I am promised to Monsieur de Beaumarais. It is near my wedding-day!"

"That is true," he said. "Our wedding-day is near! We shall be in Paris together before two weeks go by, in those rooms of mine by Montparnasse, near the Luxembourg Gardens. Paris will like to see our love! Paris is kind to young lovers."

It seemed a joke to him, but when later Marguerite slipped back to the presbytery in time for *déjeuner*, she looked white and ill because of her emotion. How could she tell her brother of this love that had come to her—this young love? What should she say to Monsieur de Beaumarais, whom she had called Charles? How could she ever face the anger, the cold fury, of his mother, who would hate her for breaking her troth with a noble family for the son of an innkeeper?

"You are looking pale, my dear," said François, who had come in hungry from his morning round in the village. "You eat nothing at all. This excitement is bad for you. I shall be happy when the wedding has taken place and you have settled down in the old château."

She did not tell him that the wedding would not take place. Not that wedding. Her courage failed her then.

It was in the evening that she told her brother, after dinner, up at the château again. She could not bear to keep silent any longer. It was deceitful and cowardly not to let everybody know that she could never be the wife of Charles de Beaumarais because she had found another lover—young and passionate and gay. It had been frightful during dinner at the château to keep her secret; to pretend that she belonged to them. Madame Doumergue had come to dinner. She had given Marguerite her felicitations, kissed her on both cheeks, said, "What a lucky young lady! How proud we shall be of our little comtesse!"

Charles had taken his fiancée by the hand and led her in to dinner as though they were already man and wife. He had looked at her tenderly and, like François, had said, "You are looking pale, dear heart."

Madame de Beaumarais was gracious and kind. She patted Marguerite on the hand and said: "We shall have to put some roses into those cheeks. After the honeymoon you will look more blooming. The Côte d'Or will be enchanting at that time. Bright sun, blue skies, the scent of mimosa. . . ."

It had been arranged that the honeymoon should be at Beaulieu near Monte Carlo.

What deceit this was, what hypocrisy! Marguerite thought. If only she had the courage to cry out: "It is all a mistake. I can never be the Comtesse de Beaumarais. My lover is down at *Le Véritable Coucou*! He is Bertrand Mollard, the innkeeper's son."

But courage failed her again. She pleaded a headache as an excuse for leaving early. Charles wanted to walk with her to the presbytery, in spite of his stiff leg and the old wound that hurt, but she said, "No, it isn't worth while. Just down the drive and across the road!"

At the hall door he put his arm about her and drew her close and kissed her on the forehead more tenderly than he had ever done.

"I am anxious about you, little Marguerite! You look unwell. You ought not to have that villainous headache."

"It is nothing," she said.

She slipped from his arms as Madame de Beaumarais came into the hall on her way to the salon with Madame Doumergue.

"*Bonsoir, ma petite! Dormez bien!*" cried the old lady whom she had regarded as her future mother-in-law not without fear.

"*Bonsoir, madame. Mille mercis!*"

François was arranging his chess things in the parlour, expecting Bertrand. When the door opened he was searching for the white queen in the box among the pawns and called out cheerily, thinking it was the boy who had come:

"*A la bonne heure, camarade!*"

"It is I," said Marguerite in a quiet voice, closing the door behind her.

The young priest looked up at his sister, startled. "You are back soon. Is anything the matter, my dear?"

"Yes," she said; "yes! Oh, François, how can I tell you?" She burst into tears, leaning with her back to the door, and her hands up to her face.

"Marguerite! Tell me! What has happened?" The priest sprang up from his chair, upsetting all the chess pieces he had arranged so carefully. "*Qu'est-ce-qu'il y a? Ma petite Marguerite! Ma chère petite camarade!*"

"I can never marry Monsieur de Beaumarais," she sobbed. "It is impossible."

The young priest was stupefied. "Not marry Monsieur de Beaumarais! It is impossible, you say? Marguerite—pour *l'amour de Dieu*—what is wrong?"

"Something has happened," she said. "It is Bertrand Mollard. We love one another."

"Bertrand! The son of an innkeeper! That boy who has lost his faith and morals!" The priest was shaken by a kind of fear for this little sister of his—for her honour and happiness. "Marguerite!" he cried. "Your plighted word—your virtue—that noble gentleman who loves you so much!"

He was incoherent. He repeated the words "our honour—our honour, Marguerite," as though his own good faith were involved in her broken promise.

"I love Bertrand," said Marguerite, as though nothing mattered but that.

There was a knock at the door. It was old Marthe, who opened it and brought in Bertrand. For a moment he stood in the doorway of the little parlour looking from Marguerite to her brother with a sign of embarrassment. Then he laughed nervously, and went over to Marguerite and took her hand.

"I see you have told *Monsieur le Curé*—your brother. He is not too much annoyed, I hope?"

Marguerite wept a little on her lover's shoulder.

The young priest was very pale. He didn't look at Bertrand Mollard but stared at the chess-board with its disordered pieces, as though studying a problem there. Then he raised his head and glanced at Bertrand for the first time since he had entered the room. The stern wrath in his eyes changed to a more gentle look at the sight of that handsome boy holding Marguerite's hand. He was typical of that splendid youth of France which this priest, as a soldier, had seen scythed down in war, mangled, blinded, gassed, swept by high-explosives, massacred by machine-gun fire. One of those saved from the furnace. This boy had been through all that. Now he was in love with Marguerite.

It was impossible to be angry with him, to forget the passion and ecstasy of youth. It was easy to understand that Marguerite, so young, so childish, should prefer that good-looking boy to Monsieur de Beaumarais with his one arm and his stiff leg.

"My children," he said, "I am very much distressed with you. Bertrand, you have taken advantage of my hospitality. This little sister of mine—didn't you know that she was engaged to Monsieur de Beaumarais up at the château? What are you going to do about that? How are we going to explain matters up there?" It was characteristic of him that he identified himself with their cause. He said "we," not "you."

Bertrand Mollard answered, with the faint sign of a smile about his lips, with a return of his old confidence and self-assurance. “It is regrettable, that engagement! I am a little sorry for those old fogies up at the château. But you see, *Monsieur le Curé*, it was inevitable that I should fall in love with your sister. That goes without saying, *n’est-ce-pas*?”

“Perhaps,” said the priest. He smiled faintly. “It was not so inevitable that she should fall in love with you. It did not occur to me.”

His eyes glanced at the boy again, at his handsome face, and his smile twinkled behind the gravity of his eyes.

“I was a fool,” he said. “It was not beyond probability. You’re an attractive-looking scamp.”

Bertrand Mollard laughed. “A thousand thanks, *Monsieur le Curé*! Then we may count on your consent—your good nature? That is excellent!”

“It is a tragedy,” said the priest; “that poor man up at the château. How are we going to tell him? I for one have not the courage. I would rather go over the top again, at two in the morning, with a German barrage ahead. Madame de Beaumarais——”

At the mere thought of that old lady, and what she would say when the revelation was made to her, the priest’s face paled again, and he wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

At that moment there was another knock at the door, and when Marthe went to open it, there was the sound of a man’s voice speaking clearly.

“Has Mademoiselle Marguerite retired to bed? I am a little anxious about her health. A word, perhaps, with *Monsieur le Curé*——”

In the parlour it was Marguerite’s face which revealed the identity of the visitor. A wave of colour flamed in her cheeks. She slipped away from Bertrand Mollard and took refuge behind her brother.

“Come in, monsieur! *Monsieur le Curé* will be enchanted to see you. Our dear mademoiselle is not yet in bed.”

It was old Marthe, cackling graciously to the great man from the château, the lord of this little village in France, the aristocrat for whom, like all good republicans, she had profound respect.

“Just a moment,” said Monsieur de Beaumarais.

His heavy tread, with one leg trailing, sounded in the passage. The *curé* and Marguerite and Bertrand Mollard waited for him silently, with extreme nervousness. Even Bertrand twisted his little moustache with less than his usual self-assurance.

Their silence, something in their faces, their look of distress, startled the tall, courteous man who stepped into the parlour.

“Pardon me,” he said. “This is an ill-timed visit. I was alarmed about Marguerite. She looked so ill at dinner to-night.”

The silence lasted for a moment until the priest broke it. “Pray be seated, Monsieur le Comte.”

“No, no,” said Monsieur de Beaumarais. “I merely came to inquire. You gave me a fright, Marguerite. I hope that wicked headache has gone?”

She did not answer, but lowered her eyes in which tears had welled up. She had a great pity for this man who loved her so tenderly.

“Monsieur de Beaumarais,” said the priest gravely, “we have something to tell you. I am ashamed—it is very difficult to tell you—I must implore your forgiveness on behalf of this boy here.”

“Please explain,” said Monsieur de Beaumarais. He looked alarmed. His dark eyes went from Marguerite to Bertrand Mollard. “Who is this young man?” he asked good-humouredly, though a little line deepened between his eyebrows.

“It is Bertrand Mollard. The son of Monsieur Mollard of *Le Véritable Coucou*.”

The priest spoke timidly, with deep embarrassment. Bertrand raised his hand with a military salute.

“Yes,” said Monsieur de Beaumarais, “I remember. I have seen him in church. You say I have something to—forgive?” He looked puzzled. There was a hint of distress in his eyes.

“Monsieur,” said the young priest in a broken voice, “it is incredible, but it has to be told. My little sister—Marguerite—and this boy—Bertrand—have found out that they love one another. Love, monsieur, is unreasonable. It is beyond argument. It is very lawless. The passion of youth, monsieur—I speak as one soldier to another—is like high explosives. A touch—a bang!—and there are two hearts—fused. Like a flash of lightning! One has to be very tolerant with youth. Those boys and girls, monsieur, with their ignorance of life and nature, their mating instincts, their affinities! Poor little ones! Dear children of Jesus Christ! Monsieur, it is terrible, what I have to tell you. My little sister wishes to break her pledge to you. She wishes to relinquish the honour of being your wife. This boy has stolen her away from you. The robber eyes of youth, monsieur! They can only ask for your pardon, your chivalry, your noble charity.”

So he burst out, in a flood of broken sentences, looking pleadingly at Monsieur de Beaumarais, who stood very still, quite silent, with an empty sleeve pinned to his breast, and his stiff leg a little apart from the other. His face changed colour. A look of sadness passed into his eyes. Once he put his right hand up to his heart as though he had a sudden pain there. Then he smiled, though his eyes remained sad.

“It is all very natural,” he said. “I am an old fogey, broken in the War. A widower, and too old and withered for Marguerite. It was selfish of me to expect her love.” He went over to her and took her hand and raised it to his lips. “I have nothing to forgive,” he said simply. “Only a great deal to regret, my dear.”

V

François Durand, *curé* of Beaumarais, married his sister to Bertrand Mollard in the church of St. Pierre on a morning in June. There were only a few peasants in the church, and old Mollard and his wife; no one from the château, where Madame de Beaumarais was not so forgiving as her son.

The *curé* was aware of his sister's happiness with this boy lover of hers, this handsome young husband. He was indeed a little frightened by her happiness, the radiance that lighted up her face and transformed it. Before her marriage she went singing about the house, laughed at little secret jokes, became surprisingly beautiful. As the good comrade of his sister, the *curé* was glad to see this change in her. But at the back of his mind was a fear. So wonderful a happiness might be easily hurt and broken. And he was not sure of Bertrand Mollard; not sure of his loyalty, or his honesty, or his good sense.

He knew things about the boy which he could not tell to Marguerite, because they had been told to him as a priest by the boy himself, before those games of chess. He had led a careless life in Paris. He had confessed lightly enough, without shame, to love-affairs with young women of low class. He had been seriously entangled with a girl called Suzanne Meunier, who had scared him by her jealousy and rage when she discovered that the boy was amused elsewhere. As a priest, the *curé* of Beaumarais made allowance for youth. As a comrade of young men, he was tolerant and understanding of their temptations and follies. But he was troubled about Marguerite. There were times when he was conscience-stricken that he had consented to this adventure of marriage with a young man who was not a good Catholic, and not steady or serious in his views of life. Marguerite was so innocent, so exquisite, so spiritual.

Before the night of the wedding he spoke to Bertrand privately, and so sternly that Bertrand was startled and distressed.

"I have given my little sister's heart into your keeping. It is a great sacrifice on my part—the greatest I could give to God. If ever you betray her love and faith in you the vengeance of God will smite you. 'He that shall scandalize one of these, my little ones, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea.' They are the words of our dear Lord, and I repeat them to you, Bertrand, with all the solemnity of my heart and soul."

"I love her," said Bertrand; "that is good enough."

"There was a time when you thought you loved a girl called Suzanne Meunier."

Bertrand Mollard flushed, and then answered angrily, "I told you that tale in confidence. You have no right to mention that name."

"As a priest, I have a right to remind you of the sacred trust that will come to you to-morrow." The sternness of his voice broke. He put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Bertrand—*mon camarade*—be kind and faithful to little Marguerite!"

"She will be happy with me," said Bertrand good-humouredly again. "We love each other. Have no fears! In Paris she will be as happy as a bird."

"Paris!" said the priest, and he was afraid again. He had known Paris in war-time, as a soldier. There were memories to be blotted out—the memories of comrades who had plunged into the wickedness of old "Paname" as they called it, grabbing at life and love before death should catch them, up there in the trenches.

Marguerite had no fear of Paris. It called to her joyously. To her it was the city of love and laughter—the gay city of youth. It would be her paradise.

But yet she wept after the wedding, and clung to her brother before leaving him. He would be so sad without her; so lonely. It was selfish of her to be so happy.

"Pray for me!" she whispered, kissing him again and again. "Pray for me, dear brother!"

"For your happiness, my dear," he said bravely.

The priest went back to his lonely presbytery. Only old Marthe was left to bully him. She spoke to him now.

"Marriage! It is a holy sacrament, no doubt, *Monsieur le Curé*. But, thanks be to God, I have escaped its perils!"

He laughed and then went into his little parlour and closed the door; and knelt down to say his first prayers for Marguerite's married life. She needed them.

VI

Marguerite was supremely happy as the wife of Bertrand Mollard in the days of their poverty. They were very poor for the first year, but made a game of it. It was a good game, with love as the happy joke which enabled them to laugh at adverse luck and small privations. Bertrand was paid only a miserable wage for his first part in a film drama. It was hardly enough to pay for their little room in Montparnasse, and the food they needed.

Marguerite was a good housekeeper. She made a franc go further than most young wives in Paris. The old *concierge* downstairs told her that, and it was true, because she rose early in the morning while Bertrand still lay asleep—he was no good at early rising—and tripped off to the markets alone, with a basket over her arm, to bargain for cheese and butter and vegetables at the lowest price.

Yes, it went very well with Marguerite in those early days of married life. Paris was all that she had imagined, so friendly to her, so full of life, so quick to laugh, so crowded with youth. All that she had dreamed came true. On Saturdays and Sundays she went walking hand in hand with Bertrand in the Bois de Boulogne, and in lonely glades where they escaped from the crowd, even from the old *bonnes* with their groups of children. Bertrand kissed her, or lay with his head on her lap while her fingers played with his hair. He was her lover still as well as her husband, glad to be alone with her, easily pleased by any touch of endearment.

Sometimes he grumbled because of his poverty. It was abominable, having to wear his shirts until the cuffs were frayed.

"I will mend them, Bertrand. I am a good needle-woman, you must admit."

Sometimes they quarrelled—not seriously—because he wanted to get into debt so they might go to the theatre more often, or invite more friends to dinner now and then.

"No," said Marguerite. "Let us pay for what we have. I am not afraid of poverty—how happy we are!—but the smallest debt fills me with terror."

"Pooh!" said Bertrand. "One can always forget it. In any case the old man can pay. What are fathers for? It's their privilege."

She slapped his hand and called him a wicked one.

"I hate poverty," said Bertrand. "That shabby frock of yours—*ciel!*—it may be good enough for Beaumarais, but it's ridiculous in Paris. I want to see you in the latest fashion. We look like two provincials walking among all these smart folk. A poverty-stricken student and his little lady-love!"

"That's what we are," said Marguerite calmly and happily.

But it wasn't for long. Not for more than a year. It was at the end of that year that Bertrand's face became famous in the cinemas of Paris. It was in a film drama called "A Soldier of France."

In spite of his miserable salary the producer had given him a big part, had seen the beauty of that young man's face, and had made the most of it in a close-up. It was reproduced on the hoardings in Paris. Marguerite saw her husband's face smiling at her, looking very noble and splendid, in the tube stations, on the scaffolding of new shops, wherever there was an advertising space.

"*Un Soldat de France.*"

"My lover!" she thought proudly. "My beautiful Bertrand!"

Other girls looked at his face on the hoardings with admiration. "*Un joli garçon, ça!*"

A "pretty boy" whose good looks and roguish smile lured them to the cinemas after the shops were shut.

In every part of France, in every small village—even in Beaumarais—the face of Bertrand Mollard as "A Soldier of France" became familiar and famous. It was the face of youth, gallant and gay—the ideal type of all that youth which had fallen in the Great War. That, undoubtedly, was the secret of its spell over the imagination of all classes.

It was then that Marguerite's days of poverty came to an end. Bertrand could ask anything for his next part. Managers besieged him with offers, competed against each other. He signed a contract which gave him a fantastic salary. Frightening! Yes, frightening to Marguerite, who had been so happy in their two little rooms in Montparnasse, stinting and scraping so that Bertrand should have enough to eat, mending his frayed cuffs, setting out for the markets before breakfast to save a few sous.

Now it was all different. Bertrand took a handsome apartment in the Avenue Victor Hugo, and furnished it as though he were an American millionaire. He loved spending this money that had come to him through his fortunate face. Marguerite remonstrated with him, implored him not to be so extravagant, begged him to let her save some of his money.

"We were so happy in our poverty," she said many times. "Don't let's live in a grand way, Bertrand. Let's remain simple. All this grandeur will choke our love."

He laughed at her. It seemed to him a great joke that she should be afraid of success. It didn't alarm him! He had a genius for spending money. It was a joy to him to spend royally—the son of the innkeeper of *Le Véritable Coucou*!—to entertain all his poverty-stricken friends, and above all to buy beautiful frocks and presents for Marguerite. "My face is my fortune!" he said. "It's an inexhaustible source of wealth. As long as I can smile and show my teeth I can get any money I want."

She could refuse nothing that he asked her, not even those smart frocks which she disliked secretly, because they seemed immodest and flaunting and not suitable to her character and spirit. She was not meant to be a fashionable young woman, a *mondaine*. God still kept a place in her heart, though He was being crowded out by this life in Paris, now that Bertrand was rich. Sometimes she was conscience-stricken and sorrowful because she seemed to be forgetting her religion.

It was hard to remember in the smart restaurants and dancing-rooms to which Bertrand took her after his day's work in the film studio. Often now it was three or four in the morning before they went home to bed. She was so tired!—so tired!—though she tried to keep merry and pretend that she had enjoyed herself, for Bertrand's sake, who was always most lively after midnight and sang on his way back in the automobile—a coupé—which he had bought out of his wonderful earnings. It was in the mornings that he was tired and sluggish and fretful, and sometimes even a little unkind.

This gay life and all his hard work at the studio were bad for his nerves. She noticed that he became moody at times and irritable. They began to have little quarrels over trivial things, though he always kissed her when he saw the tears in her eyes.

One cause of quarrel was the company he kept. She did not like some of his friends. They were so worldly and cynical, those young men and women. Some of them spoke in a way which made Marguerite blush sometimes, and at other times shiver, because of their vicious views of life. There was one girl to whom she took a particular dislike. She had known Bertrand before he came back to Beaumarais, that time when he had fallen in love with Marguerite. Her name was Suzanne Meunier. She was a dancer at Olympia and very beautiful.

Marguerite acknowledged her beauty, the grace of her body, the vivacity of her dark eyes. Bertrand had been embarrassed when they met one night in a restaurant called Ciro's. He said: "Do you see that girl with the black eyes—with that French officer over there? It's Suzanne

Meunier, the dancer. I used to know her. I'm not keen on resuming the acquaintance."

But Suzanne Meunier smiled at him and presently came over to their table.

"*C'est toi, Bertrand, mon vieux. Comment ça va?*"

She desired to be introduced to Bertrand's wife, and was charming in her compliments. But Marguerite thought they were spoiled by the peculiar way she laughed and looked at Bertrand. There was something malicious in that laughter, and something not nice in the expression of her eyes. It made Marguerite feel uneasy and annoyed.

After the first few moments of embarrassment and reserve, Bertrand became friendly to the girl. He asked after old friends, and laughed a great deal at Suzanne's answers.

"Let us join tables," said Suzanne. "My little officer will be delighted to know you."

"I am rather tired," said Marguerite. "I think perhaps we might go home early to-night, Bertrand. Don't forget you have to be down at the studio early to-morrow."

But Bertrand said, "It's early yet," and took Marguerite to Suzanne's table, where the French officer rose and bowed to them. It was late before Marguerite and her husband arrived home. And in the coupé they had one of their little quarrels which were so regrettable.

"What do you find so attractive about that girl, Bertrand?" asked Marguerite. "I don't like her."

"She's amusing," said Bertrand, smiling to himself. "We used to be good friends."

"I wish you hadn't talked to her so much—so intimately. You kept whispering to her while I had to talk to that officer, who is not a good man, I think."

Bertrand spoke rather hotly. "Oh, you're too virtuous, Marguerite! I'm getting a little tired of your nun-like views of life. In the world one has to be tolerant. Live and let live. You're no longer living in a presbytery with a village *curé*!"

"Sometimes," said Marguerite, "I wish I were. When you speak like that."

"Oh, you can always go back!" answered Bertrand angrily.

She burst into tears at the hardness of his speech, and this time he did not try to comfort her, or kiss her hands to make amends.

Success was spoiling him. Marguerite saw the touch of vanity which poisoned his old simplicity, his boyishness of heart. It was inevitable, and she tried to make allowances, though she was hurt by these signs of self-conceit, this love of advertisement, this eager acceptance of public adulation. She noticed with a sinking heart because it seemed to take him away from her—why should she share her lover with the world?—that he liked to be recognized in public. His eyes lighted up, his good humour was restored, he threw out his chest a little, when people turned and whispered as he came into a restaurant.

Sometimes they applauded him, and he bowed with smiling acknowledgments; once a lady—not a mere *cocotte* of the boulevards—took a flower from her corsage and threw it towards him as he sat at table. He picked it up and touched his lips with it and put it in his buttonhole.

Little notes were sent round to him, addressed to the cinemas where his film was showing, or to the film studio where he was playing another part. They were all from women who wished to have the joy of meeting him. They had fallen in love with his pretty face, as they were bold enough to say.

Marguerite was shocked when she found these letters in his jacket pockets or tossed carelessly on his dressing-table.

"These women have no shame!" she cried. "They ought to be whipped."

Bertrand shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "Poor darlings! I like their homage. It makes life seem friendly. Some of them are women of high society. One of them is a comtesse!"

He forgot that Marguerite would have been a comtesse if she had not married the son of a village innkeeper. Nor did she remind him. She stared at him with a kind of fear.

"How do you know, Bertrand? Did you answer her letter?"

"I went to tea with her," he said, without embarrassment. "She's a pretty little thing—the Comtesse de Plumoison—and quite amusing."

His answer was like a dagger in her heart. She waited tea for him so often now, without his coming. He always pleaded that he was kept so busy at the studio. But he had time to take tea with this little countess, and found her amusing.

More amusing than his wife, it seemed.

She did not reproach him. She was too hurt for that—too deeply wounded. It was from that time that they began to drift apart a little, and that Marguerite began to feel very lonely.

More and more he plunged into the gay society of Paris, and perhaps it was her fault that he went alone so often. She pleaded headaches, and after a word or two of commiseration or "Hadn't you better come, *p'tite femme*?" he went away without her to evening receptions, to the race-course on Sunday, to night clubs and dances.

She knew he met Suzanne Meunier in those places. At first he made no secret of it and said, "I met Suzanne last night," or "Suzanne looked very smart at the races yesterday."

Afterwards he did not mention her name, and she hoped that he had dropped this vile woman—yes, she was vile, thought Marguerite. But she was disillusioned about that when she saw him driving with Suzanne up the Champs Élysées. He was in this woman's car—a bright yellow limousine—which was brought to a standstill by a block in traffic. Marguerite happened to be standing on the kerbstone waiting to cross. She had been walking alone waiting for the time when Bertrand would be back on a Saturday afternoon. He had said something about "rush work" at the studio. He might not be back till six o'clock.

Now it was four o'clock and she saw Bertrand with that woman. Suzanne had her hat in her lap. Her face was turned towards Bertrand with a look of adoration, though he did not return it, but seemed to be moody and sulky. It was the expression of Suzanne's face, of her eyes, which made Marguerite feel sick and cold—that and this sight of Bertrand who had deceived her about his work.

She felt faint and giddy, so faint that she raised her hand to a passing taxi and stumbled inside when it came to a halt by her side.

"*Quelle direction, mademoiselle?*" asked the driver.

She gave an address at random. "*L'église St. Roch.*"

The man seemed surprised that she wanted to go to church on a sunny afternoon—this pretty lady with the pale face and sad eyes. But it was quiet and dark in the church of St. Roch, in the rue St. Honoré. She sat there on a cane chair, with her head bowed. Presently she slipped down on her knees and prayed for pity. Was her married life broken already? Was Bertrand unfaithful to her after only a year of marriage? Had he tired of her so soon? She felt the hot tears on her hands.

Outside in the rue St. Honoré the shop lamps were being lighted. The pavement was shining like liquid gold. It was the witching hour in Paris as twilight comes with its mysterious beauty hiding all squalor. At one time Marguerite loved this hour when she and Bertrand, arm in arm, had gone shopping with a few francs to spend. Now he was rich, and happiness had gone from them.

She passed a hoarding on which were big placards. His face looked down upon her as "A Soldier of France"—the face which had seemed

to her the handsomest in the world, the ideal of youth. Now she hated to see it there on the public hoardings. It was its beauty which had spoiled her life and taken him away from her. It belonged to the women of Paris and the shopgirls of France, not to Marguerite his wife. It was Suzanne Meunier who had it close to her in her yellow limousine. It was a pretty little comtesse who invited it to tea. The face of youth, to be seen in the cinemas where little sluts fell in love with it. . . .

VII

There were times even now when Bertrand was kind and loving, when his kisses seemed to be a renewal of loyalty and love. He was, perhaps, conscience-stricken at times. Her beauty had a lure for him. Her sadness rebuked him.

"I love you," he said at these times. "My little wife, I adore you! Those other women who make a fuss over me—I care nothing for them!"

But he was displeased when sometimes she wept in his arms, or when—once or twice—he found her on her knees, praying for the soul behind his handsome face.

"Why do you pray such a lot?" he asked once, quite roughly, when he caught her like this at her prayers, one night when he came home late. His face was flushed. He was a little drunk. "It is like being married to a nun!" he complained fretfully.

Curiously, it was when Bertrand ceased to mention the name of Suzanne Meunier that Marguerite became most afraid of that woman who seemed to have some sinister attraction for her husband.

Into Marguerite's unhappy and suspicious mind there crept the thought that Bertrand did not talk of this woman any longer because of a guilty shame. She tried to put the thought away from her, to kill that suspicion which nagged at her, but it came back again and again. Once when he sat on the floor by her side with his head against her lap she dared to ask the question which she was always asking herself.

"Bertrand, do you ever see Suzanne Meunier now?"

He started, and she saw his face flush deeply. But he answered in a cool voice. "No. Why do you ask?"

"I wanted to know," said Marguerite in a low voice. "I thought perhaps——"

He shifted his position, and laughed uneasily. "You needn't worry! We've quarrelled. I've done with her for good. A dreadful creature—like a tigress!"

It was dreadful that she could not be quite sure that he was not lying to her. It was not the first time that he had been untruthful. But something seemed to reassure her now. By the tone of his voice she believed him this time. She had a sense of thankfulness, and put the tips of her fingers through his hair and bent down and kissed his head, glad that he could not see the tears in her eyes. They might be happy again if he had quarrelled with Suzanne Meunier and was getting tired of other women who gave him the adoration of their weak and vicious love.

That evening he stayed at home, and she played the piano to him while he lay back on the sofa with his eyes shut; shut—except once or twice when she caught him looking at her with a kind of pity and regret, as though sorry for having neglected her of late.

But the next morning when he went to the studio he said casually: "I shall be back late again. I have to dine out with some business friends. Rather a bore, but in my profession——"

"Is it necessary?" she asked. "Couldn't we have a little dinner together again—just you and me, together, as in the old days?"

"Impossible to-night," he answered, and turned away from her.

It was in the evening of that day that Marguerite answered the bell of her apartment—she had let her maids go out and was alone. It was Suzanne Meunier who stood in the passage. In spite of her rouged cheeks and painted lips she looked pale beneath that false colour, and the smile with which she greeted Marguerite seemed to hide some distress or anger.

"Bertrand is out, I suppose?" she asked.

Marguerite nodded, and only her lips moved to say "Yes." The woman filled her with a sense of sickness. She was beautiful, yes, with a lovely grace of body, but there was something animal in her whole personality—"like a tigress," as Bertrand had described her.

"I want to talk to you," she said. "I have something to tell you, Marguerite. About your faithful husband!"

For a moment Marguerite was silent, while a wave of colour swept into her face.

"I do not wish to hear it," she answered. "From the tone of your voice I know that it is nothing good or kind."

Suzanne Meunier gave a little shrill laugh. "No, not kind! The truth about men—and life—is generally unkind, is it not? I see, *par exemple*, that marriage with Bertrand is not so happy as you once thought it might be, in your simple innocence. You are looking ill and worried, my dear. You are beginning to find him out. The monkey that hides behind that pretty face of his, eh?"

Marguerite tried to close the door in Suzanne Meunier's face, but she held it open with a strong arm, elegant in its long white glove.

"I do not wish to listen to any abuse of Bertrand," said Marguerite proudly and angrily.

"Oh," said Suzanne, with a little shrug of the shoulders, "I haven't come here to abuse him. I shall do that to his face when next I meet him in a public place. I shall call him some choice names, and I don't care who hears them! Before I was a dancer I was a factory girl at Lyons. We were well educated in the *argot* of abuse! But I thought you might like to hear how your husband is deceiving you. That pretty boy with the angel face! A friendly warning, my dear!"

"I do not wish to hear. I refuse to listen," said Marguerite. She was white with anger, trembling with a sense of suffocation. This vile woman! This vicious creature!

"Bertrand was my lover before he was yours," said Suzanne. "And afterwards, if you'll allow me to be frank." Her black eyes smiled at Marguerite's pale prettiness shamelessly.

"You are abominable!" said Marguerite in a kind of whisper.

Suzanne laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "It is because I loved him that I feel a little sorry for you, now that he is unfaithful to you. It hurts, does it not? We women like to keep our lovers and our husbands. Jealousy remains, even if we despise them. Oh yes, I'll be quite frank. It's because I'm jealous of Bertrand's women—even of you, my dear!—that I come to tell you a few things."

"Go away!" said Marguerite. "Go away!"

With nervous strength she pushed the door in the woman's face, weakened the strength of that arm in the long white glove. The door was nearly shut, but not quite. Suzanne put the point of her shoe across the step, like some beggar woman trying to sell her wares.

She laughed through the narrow space in the doorway. "You do not wish to hear? That is foolish! Bertrand is the lover of Madame de Plumoison. Remember that name! He is dining with her to-night in the Taverne Royale. After that he will go to her house, my dear. He will be home late again, with lies on his lips and a faint aroma of Madame de Plumoison! Those pretty boys, eh? Those faithful husbands! Tell Bertrand that when he 'chucked' me"—she used a French slang-word invented by the *poilus* in time of war—"he made the biggest mistake of his life. I am going to make him sorry for himself. Very, very sorry! I'm not ladylike when I get annoyed. Well, *au revoir, chère Marguerite*! Now you can shut that door if you like—I've told you!"

Marguerite shut the door, and went back to her drawing-room and sat down on the sofa, feeling cold and sick. "Madame de Plumoison—Madame la Comtesse de Plumoison." It was the name of the woman who had written to him once. Bertrand had said that he went to tea with her. He had never mentioned her name since. Perhaps it was all a lie of Suzanne Meunier's. She was jealous—angry—because Bertrand disliked her. She had come to break Marguerite's heart, as one way of revenge. Yes, it was all a lie! Bertrand was dining with business friends. He had told

her so, and she believed him. . . .

For an hour Marguerite sat quite motionless on the sofa. Then the maids came back, and one of them lighted the drawing-room lamp and said, with a sidelong glance at Marguerite's pale face, "*Madame désire quelque chose? Du thé, madame?*"

No, Marguerite did not want any tea.

Half an hour later there was another ring at the bell and for a moment Marguerite hoped that it was Bertrand back early after all. They would have that little dinner together, in a quiet restaurant. Thank God. Thank God!

She heard a man's voice in the hall. Not Bertrand's. The maid came in with a card. "A gentleman wishes to see you, madame."

On the card was the name of the Comte de Beaumarais, to whom once she had been engaged—was it a hundred years ago, or only one?

She had a sense of pleasure, almost of joy, at seeing that name on the card. This man had been a kind friend. Loyal. He belonged to her old life, to dear little Beaumarais. He was her brother's comrade and would bring many messages.

"I shall be glad to see Monsieur de Beaumarais," she told the maid.

When he came in—this tall man with an empty sleeve pinned to his breast, and a stiff leg—Marguerite went forward to him with both hands outstretched.

"How kind of you to come! How good to see you again!"

He raised her right hand to his lips very tenderly. "I am in Paris on business. I go back to Beaumarais to-night. I could not resist the temptation of calling on you."

He looked at her with his shy, smiling eyes. Then, perhaps, he saw some sadness in her face, because his smile changed for a moment to a look of surprise, and pity, though he hid it quickly.

"I was hoping that your husband and you would do me the honour of dining with me somewhere. My train does not leave until eleven o'clock. It would be very pleasant——"

"Bertrand will not be home this evening," said Marguerite. She blushed a little as though giving away her secret, and added quickly, "It is a business affair with some friends in the film world."

"Ah!" said Monsieur de Beaumarais. "He has made a wonderful success! He is the most famous young man in France! I see his face on all the hoardings. Many congratulations, *chère madam*!"

He did not know the dreadful irony of his words. Bertrand's fame had wrecked Marguerite's happiness and ruined Bertrand himself. "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" But Marguerite accepted the congratulations with a smile. For Bertrand's sake—for her own pride's sake—she must camouflage her unhappiness.

She asked a score of questions about her brother François. Was he well? Was he happy? Did old Marthe look after him properly?

"He is a saint," said Monsieur de Beaumarais, smiling. "Old Marthe treats him like a child, and he has very little comfort in his presbytery. But he makes no complaint. As long as you are happy he will even suffer the sacrifice of never seeing you."

For a moment Marguerite's eyes were wet with tears. An enormous regret came to her that she was so far away from this brother of hers—her best comrade. But she blinked her tears away and smiled. She must not let Monsieur de Beaumarais guess that she was not perfectly happy.

"I shall be coming back for a holiday," she said. "Bertrand and I will go to Beaumarais. It is time!"

"That will be charming," said Monsieur de Beaumarais.

Presently he made a shy, almost hesitating, suggestion.

"As your husband is away this evening, would it be possible—would he mind—if you were to have a little dinner with me somewhere? An old fogey like myself——" He laughed, as though there could be no scandal in his regard, because of his age.

"Bertrand will not mind, and I shall be delighted," said Marguerite, and she spoke sincerely. There were a thousand things she wanted to hear about her brother, and Beaumarais.

"That is good," said Monsieur de Beaumarais. "Where shall we dine? Some quiet little place, perhaps. You know Paris better than I do, I am sure."

Marguerite was silent for a moment. Some voice seemed to speak in her brain. She heard the name of a restaurant spoken clearly. She repeated it casually, as a chance suggestion, though something seemed to make her heart beat queerly.

"The Taverne Royale, perhaps?"

"Excellent!" said Monsieur de Beaumarais.

Perhaps it was the Devil who put the name into her head. Or perhaps it was the sinister suggestion of Suzanne Meunier which had dropped a little poison in her mind, the subtle poison of suspicion.

VIII

It was half way through dinner before she saw her husband—Bertrand. He came in with a lady whose cloak he carried. She was a pretty, fair-haired little lady with laughing eyes, and she had her hand on Bertrand's sleeve and chattered vivaciously, conscious, it seemed, of the notice attracted by Bertrand's appearance in the restaurant. As he passed to his table the head waiter bowed to him obsequiously, and all eyes followed him with admiration, touched with a little amusement. It was the boy with the most famous face in France—the hero of every cinema audience, the unknown sweetheart of every French shop-girl. They recognized him instantly.

Monsieur de Beaumarais was sitting opposite Marguerite, with his back to the passage between the tables. He did not see this entrance of Bertrand Mollard. He was telling Marguerite about her brother François—his charity and devotion to all the village folk—and about the old friends who still missed her very much—Madame Doumergue, the two old maids, Mesdemoiselles Guyot and Bourdin.

Suddenly he stopped talking and looked uneasily at Marguerite.

"You look unwell, Marguerite. Am I tiring you with all this chatter?"

"It is nothing," said Marguerite; "a slight headache. Tell me about your dear mother. She has forgiven me?"

Looking over his shoulder, she could see Bertrand with the fair-haired lady. They were in a little corner of the restaurant, secluded from the other tables but visible from hers. Bertrand was smiling. He turned to say something to the lady. She laughed, and tapped his cheek with her forefinger. He took her hand and held it in his on the table while he studied the wine list.

Monsieur de Beaumarais was saying that his mother had aged rather in the past twelve months. Her sight was failing a little. She could no longer do her fine embroidery. She was——He broke off his sentence and looked at Marguerite again.

"I fear you are feeling faint. You look so white, my dear! Is it the heat of this restaurant?"

"Yes," she said, "yes. I feel rather faint. Let us go, if you do not mind."

She rose from the table and Monsieur de Beaumarais spoke a word to the waiter, who was surprised and annoyed.

"Take my arm," said Monsieur de Beaumarais anxiously.

She swayed a little and then recovered herself and put her hand on his arm. Her lips tightened. She had a proud look as she passed down the restaurant with Monsieur de Beaumarais. There was nothing left but pride to resent this insult, this infidelity by the man who was her husband. He had lied to her! He had lied! Suzanne Meunier had told the truth about the Comtesse de Plumoison. Bertrand had betrayed his wife's love, after a year of married life. One little year—with all her devotion, her worship of him, her tolerance, her prayers.

She was conscious that he saw her as she passed. She saw him start and half rise from the table. But she looked straight ahead with that proud expression and tightened lips. She was too proud to betray her mortal wound in this public restaurant.

Not outside. All her pride broke down then. In the dark little street behind the Palais Royal she heard herself weeping and tried to check the weakness which revealed her agony to this friend of hers.

He was startled and alarmed. "Marguerite! My dear child! What has happened? What is wrong?"

She leaned against a lamp-post in an abandonment of grief, with both her hands hiding her face and trying to stop the flood of tears.

"My dear!" said Monsieur de Beaumarais. "My dear little Marguerite! How can I help you?" He hailed a passing taxi and helped her into it. "Shall I take you home?" he asked.

She cried, "No! No! I have no home. I will never go back."

"We will drive round a little," said Monsieur de Beaumarais, to the astonished chauffeur. "Towards the Étoile—anywhere!"

It was in that taxi-cab that Marguerite told him something of what had happened. Enough to let him guess the rest.

"I will never go back to him," she said. "Never! It is too much. It is beyond forgiveness."

"But, my dear," said Monsieur de Beaumarais, with increasing perplexity, "where will you go? Have you any friends in Paris? Any nice people with whom you could stay for a while?"

"No," she said. "They are Bertrand's friends. They would only laugh at me. They would say, 'What did you expect? Is not marriage like that?' "

Monsieur de Beaumarais was silent. He was filled with pity for this broken-hearted girl whom he had hoped to make his wife—a year ago. Only a year ago!

"How can I help you?" he asked.

She answered his question as though suddenly an inspiration had come to her. "I will go back to Beaumarais—to my dear brother. What time does your train go, monsieur?"

It was at eleven o'clock that the train started, and Monsieur de Beaumarais did not travel alone. In the opposite corner of his carriage Marguerite sat with her eyes closed and a line of pain about her lips. Before leaving Paris she had written a letter to Bertrand and sent it by a messenger. It was an eternal farewell. At Lyons she fell asleep, and Monsieur de Beaumarais put his overcoat over her, very gently.

IX

In the presbytery with her brother Marguerite seemed to slip back to her old life. Nothing had altered—except herself. François was grief-stricken at this smashing of her married life. He blamed himself bitterly for consenting to her marriage with a boy who had confessed his own follies and weakness. He was angry to the point of violence with this boy who had broken Marguerite's heart. But he checked himself and after a few days, and many prayers, ceased to mention Bertrand's name. It was Marguerite who implored him to do so.

"Help me to forget!" she said.

But it was impossible to forget. Her brother's tenderness, the pity in his eyes, even his jokes and laughter by which he tried to make her cheerful were all reminders of the pain that agonized her. She wept at night and could not sleep. Sometimes she cried out for Bertrand and was ready to forgive him everything if he would love her again. That was at night—that weakness. In the morning she repeated the vow she had taken, "I'll never go back to him. It is beyond forgiveness."

Two letters came from him, passionate, self-excusing, confessing his weakness, contrite. She burned them in her bedroom stove.

In Beaumarais her old friends were distressed and unhappy about her. They went out of their way to show their sympathy, but were very delicate in their silence, not referring by even a word to the infidelity of her husband.

Bertrand's mother and father called their son dreadful names, but they reproached her for leaving him. "Men are like that," said Madame Mollard. "One must be blind to their infidelities."

They made her angry.

She played the organ again in church. Now and again she went up to the château to make a fourth at bridge with Madame de Beaumarais and the old ladies. Twice a week Monsieur de Beaumarais came to the presbytery to play chess with François and discuss the political situation. Always he was very tender and pitiful to Marguerite. The weeks slipped by. Many hours were spent by Marguerite kneeling before the altar in the little church. She found a little comfort in prayer. The wound did not hurt so much, except at night, when often her agony was intolerable.

She saw her husband's name in the papers sometimes. He was playing in a new film drama. He was present at society functions. He was photographed at the race-meetings.

But it was François who saw her husband's name in the paper one morning before she had come down to breakfast. There was a portrait of him, and big head-lines. The young priest read the head-lines and then the text with consternation. He cried out "*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" as though stricken by pity or horror, and then hid the paper behind the horse-hair couch.

Marguerite asked for it when she came down to breakfast. "Any news this morning, François? Where is *Le Matin*?"

"It seems to have been mislaid," said the priest. "I must have put it down somewhere."

She searched about for it, and found it crumpled up behind the couch. "It is here!" she cried with a smile. "How careless of you, François!"

"Marguerite," he cried, "do not look at it! There is dreadful news in it."

She was startled by his cry of fear, and turned quite white, holding the paper in her hands.

"What is it?" she asked. "Is Bertrand dead?"

Her eyes looked down at the paper in her hands. She saw the portrait of her husband, and the big head-lines.

"François!" she cried.

"It is terrible," said the priest.

Underneath the big head-lines there was a column of type. Yet the story could have been told in a briefer way. It was one of those crimes of passion not rare in France. A woman named Suzanne Meunier—a dancer at Olympia—had thrown vitriol at Bertrand Mollard, the famous film star. She was known to the police of Paris. Her mad act had severely injured the unfortunate young man. The handsomest face in France had been spoiled by the corrosive acid. He was in danger of blindness. It would be a severe blow to all his admirers, who would never see him in a new rôle.

The beauty of Bertrand Mollard would never be seen again on the cinema screen, except in his old parts. He would be quickly forgotten by the appearance of new stars in the movie world. His face, which had been so good to see—the ideal face of youth—was not a pretty sight. Its scars were so terrible where the acid had bitten deep that people would turn their heads away, with pity and pain in their eyes, when they saw it in public places.

In the hospital the day after the tragedy, Bertrand had moaned at the sight of Marguerite, and turned away with his face to the wall.

She went down on her knees by his side and put her arms about him, and cried, "My dear, my dear husband!" and held him tight while he wept in convulsions of grief, in an agony which seemed as though it would never pass. His face was all in bandages, and he could only see out of one eye, burnt about the rims. In that one eye she could see the terror of his soul—its depths of despair.

Few of his gay friends came to visit him. "It is too painful," they thought. None of his adoring women surrounded the bedside of this boy with a livid face, tragic to see, when at last its bandages were taken off. Marguerite had him to herself now. She had no rivals in his love.

He hated seeing her for a time. He told her roughly to go away and not to come near him. He was a hideous object anyhow, he said.

"No!" she cried. "A few scars make no difference. You are still splendid to me, Bertrand."

It was weeks before he lost his despair and became a little reconciled. After that he craved to see her, and lay gazing at her while she stroked his hand.

"I was a beast to you," he said once. "How can you forgive me?"

At another time he said, "I must get back my courage—the courage of the trenches!"

It was when his scars were less livid, when his agony of self-pity had passed, that he had the courage to ask her to bring him a hand-glass.

"I may as well have a squint at myself," he said, using a French slang phrase. "Am I quite disgusting?"

She said, "In three months no one will notice. I do not notice it now. To me you are still my beautiful Bertrand."

He smiled and said, "Bring me the mirror. I learned a little pluck in war-time. Fellows with their heads blown off—it's not as bad as that."

It was three days more before she brought him the mirror, and she held her breath and prayed for pity when he first saw himself.

He looked for a second or two, and then dropped the glass upon the bedclothes, and lay still, with a deathly pallor.

"You see," said Marguerite, with a brave cheerfulness, "it is not so bad, Bertrand! In a little while you will be good-looking again."

His lips trembled for a moment, but then he raised himself in bed and cried in a voice of agony, "Marguerite!"

She put her arms about him and wept behind his shoulder, stifling her sobs.

Presently he laughed a little, with a kind of bravado.

"This face of mine!" he said—"my fortunate face! If that woman hadn't spoiled it like this I shouldn't have had you back again. *Quelle*

chance!"

"What luck!" he said, with a rather splendid gallantry—the courage of the trenches!—and then he raised his hands and pulled down Marguerite's head and kissed her wet eyes with pity and passion.

THE SCHOOL OF COURAGE

I

Millions of people are going to see "The School of Courage," which is advertised as one of the greatest film dramas ever produced. I don't know about that, although it is certainly a work of art—with a big idea in it. It holds the emotion of the spectators so that they sit tense for something like two hours, and shed a tear or two—hurried business men and frivolous flappers!—before the lights go up. It makes them "feel good" for five minutes or so, until they get into the crush of Broadway again or the tangled traffic of Piccadilly. It's a plea for human brotherhood, pity, tolerance, peace—so quickly forgotten in the hurly-burly of life!

It's my privilege to see more than the ordinary spectators. I see behind the scenes, as it were, the private life of the film actors, the strange adventure of this production. That too, in a way, was "The School of Courage." It needed pluck. Men and women made a real sacrifice for the sake of this film. One of the prettiest girls in the world—as she seems to me!—risked her health for it, poor child, and the producer went through hell in the course of it. . . . All that sounds rather hair-raising, but I don't want to be sensational—merely to tell for the first time the story lying behind that "movie" which is now famous on both sides of the world.

It happened in Berlin—strange as it may seem to people who imagine that the scenes were actually produced in the cities through which the story passes. All those wonderful pictures of the Kremlin in Moscow, the burning port of Smyrna, the refugee haunts of Constantinople, the night life in Budapesth, Vienna, Paris, were done in the great Zeppelin shed outside Berlin, under the direction of Gilbert Harshe, ex-soldier, idealist, temporary slave-driver (for art's sake), and my good friend.

It was in the Adlon Hotel at the corner of Unter den Linden that I saw Harshe for the first time since the War. I was surprised to see him there, remembering a conversation I had had with him one day in war-time when he was commanding an air-squadron behind Havrincourt Château—its ruins—overlooking Cambrai in 1917.

"If ever the war ends," he said, "or if I get through, which isn't likely, I'll kill any German who has the face to show himself in England. I'll cut his throat over a tea-table, or bash him in a public restaurant. There's no forgiveness in me for all this bloody mess of things."

So he had spoken, and I could see the passion in his eyes and the twitch of his nerves. Men of artistic temperament—and he was a landscape painter before joining up—were too sensitive for this modern way of war, with its infernal shell-fire and enormous nerve-strain. Not that Harshe and others of his kind showed the white feather. They were as brave as most—but suffered more.

Well, there was Gilbert Harshe, of all men, sitting in the Adlon Hotel, Berlin, and not looking as if he wanted to murder any Germans.

It was at tea-time, and the Adlon Hotel was filled as usual, at that hour, with the New Rich. Not pleasant-looking people, some of them. Murder might have been justified for lack of beauty! Some of those bald-headed fellows were the vultures of the financial world who had grown fat on the swindle of paper money, which had ruined whole classes of their own folk. That period had passed. Germany had gone back to the gold mark—pretty scarce among the common people—and Berlin was the dearest city in Europe.

Here in the Adlon was every sign of wealth. The tables in the great lounges between the marble pillars were crowded with men feeding their little painted ladies. These women were expensively dressed. Some of them wore wonderful furs. Their fingers were crammed with diamonds, as the fat fingers of a man sitting near me, ogling a girl with him.

I was a little disgusted by this scene of luxury, and remarked as much to the man by my side, though I could not expect him to take my view. It was young Hermann Winter, the son of the Steel King of Germany, whose enormous fortune is based on slave-paid labour. But the young man rather agreed with me, not having the same philosophy as his father, upon whose money he lived expensively with amiable cynicism and sometimes, I thought, a prick of conscience.

He looked round the room with an ironical smile before he answered me.

"No, these people don't seem stricken with poverty! Bandits in a small way, like my honoured father in a big way. But you mustn't take your idea of Germany from this kind of crowd."

He suggested that in England one might see the same sort of thing, in spite of all the unemployed, and I admitted the truth of that.

"I'd like to take you to a place called the 'Nacht Asyl,' " he said. "A night shelter for the homeless. Something of a contrast to this kind of thing! . . . The other side of the picture."

I agreed to go with him one night, and then, glancing round the room, saw Gilbert Harshe.

He was sitting by the window which looks out to the garden, with two ladies and a young man. For the moment he was paying no attention to his company, but sat with a frown making a tuck in his forehead, staring into his tea-cup as though reading his luck there.

Hermann Winter seemed excited by one of the ladies at Gilbert Harshe's tea-table. He half rose from his chair, with an eager look in his eyes, and then whispered to me in that excellent English which he had learnt at Oxford before the War:

"Do you see that lovely lady like a Madonna? Isn't she wonderful?"

I told him that I saw two lovely ladies, one fair with a golden plait twisted round her head, the other dark, with big eyes and an Irish smile.

"The fair one," said young Winter. "I know her. I've been looking for her everywhere. We used to be good friends."

She saw him looking at her, and nodded to him with a sudden flush rising to her fair skin. He half rose again and answered her nod with a bow. I was trying to catch the eye of my friend Gilbert Harshe, but he was still staring into his tea-cup, unconscious of the pretty ladies at his table.

"You wouldn't guess where I used to meet that charming lady—so like a fair Madonna! It was in a night cabaret down the Friedrichstrasse. She used to sing German folk-songs charmingly. I rather pitied her."

I told him that I pitied any woman in a night cabaret down the Friedrichstrasse, and he agreed.

"Frightful—except for the hardened ones. Once a young swine got drunk and tried to kiss her. I intervened, and she was rather grateful. That's how I came to know her. . . . Then she disappeared and I feared the worst. There's something about her——"

He seemed to think that he had given himself away too much and broke off shyly with a heightened colour.

I told him that I knew the man that was with her and asked him to excuse me while I had a word with this friend of mine.

"Don't say anything about the cabaret," said young Winter nervously. "It wasn't a nice place!"

I went across to Gilbert Harshe, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Have you forgotten old friends?"

He started, and stared at me, and the tuck in his forehead smoothed out.

"By all that's wonderful! My dear old man!"

We grasped hands and laughed, as men do who remember old adventures.

"What are you doing in Berlin?" I asked.

Harshe smiled at his two pretty ladies, as though my question held a joke, and they smiled back at him.

"Not idling."

Then he introduced me to the girl with the black eyes and the Irish mouth.

"Miss Rosaline Brook, famous on both sides of the world."

Famous? Yes. I had heard the name, and seen pictures of that pretty face. Oh, Lord, yes, the little American film star, "boosted" in all the papers!

"Delighted to meet you," said Miss Rosaline, as if she meant it, though I could see no reason why.

Harshe turned to the other lady, young Winter's "fair Madonna," whom he had known in the night life of Berlin. I met the gaze of two blue eyes, and was startled by the real beauty of her face, and more by the sweetness and purity of its expression. Hardly Madonna-like, yet delicate as a portrait by Greuze, and with a touch of sadness lurking in the line of the lips, in spite of her smile, I thought.

Harshe spoke her name with a kind of chivalrous homage.

"Miss Hilda Freudenberg . . . one of my heroines!"

The lady gave me her hand and blushed at this compliment, and laughed a little.

"One of your pupils," she said to Harshe, in a slightly foreign accent.

There was another introduction to a good-looking English boy between the two ladies.

Harshe put his hand on his shoulder, affectionately.

"Robin Dale. . . . Almost too pretty to live but once a jolly good scout in my old squadron and now on his way to make an actor, though God knows he tries my patience!"

The boy answered cheerfully and without respect.

"Don't worry, old bean! My face is my fortune, and all the ladies love me on the screen!"

I explained that I had a friend with me, and asked permission to bring him to that table. Hermann Winter, the son of the rich old man.

For some reason Harshe seemed startled by that name. Then he smiled in a mysterious way and said, "Bring him over. I like historical coincidences. They make life amusing."

I did not get his meaning then, but beckoned to Hermann Winter, who came over and bowed stiffly like a German officer before dropping into that easy English style which he had picked up at Oxford.

He greeted Hilda Freudenberg, his "fair Madonna," as though they were old friends, but with great respect beyond the usual "*gnädiges Fräulein*," kissing her hand as though she were a princess. But I noticed that when he drew his chair next to hers she seemed to shrink from him a little and did not encourage him in conversation.

It was the good-looking boy, Robin Dale, who kept the table lively. He made us all roar with laughter by his execrable German, and by the ridiculous tomfoolery which he carried on with the German waiters, who were not quite sure whether they ought to be amused or insulted. They decided to be amused.

But it was the beautiful Rosaline Brook who was most amused. It was clear that she regarded Robin Dale as her Court Jester. She treated him with an air of smiling disdain, as an elder sister might behave to a small and obstreperous boy, but I could see that she liked his company and his sense of humour. Once I was surprised to see that she suddenly drooped in her chair and went fast asleep for a few moments. She woke up with a start and a look of inquiry.

"What was that last joke of yours, Robin? I'm afraid I missed its priceless wit. Only four hours' sleep last night!"

Robin Dale answered with sham indignation.

"Yes, we're slave-driven! That producer of ours is Harshe by name and harsh by nature. We'll all be dead before the last shot."

Harshe looked at the boy and girl with a kind of amused anxiety.

"You two children ought to go to bed early when you do get a chance—instead of plunging into the night life of Berlin. Don't forget we start for the studio at eight o'clock to-morrow. I'm shooting that big scene in Moscow."

The English boy held up his hands in mock horror.

"Eight o'clock! That means shaving at seven. It can't be done. It's worse than war!"

Rosaline Brook patted his hand.

"Courage, little one! Remember your bull-dog breed."

It was all a mystery to me at that time. I couldn't guess what Gilbert Harshe was doing in Berlin with an American "movie" star, a girl from a night cabaret in the Friedrichstrasse, looking like a princess, and an English boy who had been an airman and was now an actor. I learned more about it that evening when Harshe and I were alone together.

II

We sat talking in the Esplanade Hotel—one of the palaces built by Stinnes—where Harshe had joined me for dinner. The orchestra was playing, but the room was almost empty on that Sunday evening, and only a few Germans were entertaining their friends, expensively.

I reminded Harshe of the oath of hatred he had sworn to all Germans after the War, and he flushed a little and laughed awkwardly.

"Yes, I felt like that then! Towards the end something changed in me. I came to see, or thought I did, that there were deeper causes for the War than German aggression. Something wrong with civilization in Europe—all sorts of damned stupidity! Anyhow, I enlarged my sympathy when I wandered about after the show in ex-enemy countries—Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Germany, Russia."

He repeated the word Russia, and said, "My God!" as though that were the worst he had seen.

"What difference did it make to your point of view?" I asked.

He puffed at his cigar before he answered, as though thinking out the reasons for his change of mind.

"I saw the misery of the common folk. The real victims, and not responsible. It knocked out hate. It made me want to do something to stop another spasm of the same sort."

He smiled at some link in his chain of thought.

"Funny you should have introduced me to young Hermann Winter!"

He explained his amusement at that encounter.

"My squadron had orders to bomb a certain château thirty miles behind St. Quentin. We were to take our large-size bombs and drop 'em low—at thirty feet. Our intelligence crowd had information that old man Winter was staying with the Army General. It was to be his funeral in the little old château."

"Why did we covet his blood particularly?" I asked, and Harshe was surprised at my forgetfulness.

"We had a grudge against him. He made all the big guns that used to blow us to bits. . . . Anyhow, it wasn't his funeral that night. It might have been mine. I was laid out for three months with a shrapnel bullet in the lung."

I expressed my regret that he had not made Hermann Winter an orphan. The boy was a better type than his father—and not so efficient.

"I expect the old man is getting busy with his plans for the next war," I said, half seriously.

Harshe shook his head.

"There's not going to be a next war—not for a long time. Not while the common folk of the world remember their losses in the last, and the price they are paying now. I'm helping them to remember. That's what's making me keen on my job."

I asked him how his job was going to help in that way, and he coloured up and answered with a hint of emotion.

"I'm rubbing in the peace idea. It's the bug in my brain—my purpose in life. This film drama of mine is going to tear off the veil which hides the cruelty of war's victims."

He laughed with sudden self-consciousness, as though he had spoken on too high a level.

"Not that I haven't selfish reasons for wanting to get this job done. If I don't pull it through I shall be pretty hard hit—financially. And others will go down with my failure—the fellows who put up the capital because they believe in me."

Over coffee and liqueurs he told me the idea of his film drama, "The School of Courage." He had worked it out while wandering round Europe and Asia Minor with Quaker soup-kitchens. He had seen into the heart of agony, and had built his plot round the refugees of terror, famine, social revolution, and financial ruin—Russians, Greeks, Hungarians, Austrians, Germans of certain classes. He had followed them through to Berlin and Paris, where they danced and fiddled for the New Rich, or starved in the underworld, or sold themselves—pretty girls, fine ladies!—for the means of life. From Red Terror to the cabarets of pleasure! He had seen it all, lived with these people, heard their stories, helped them a bit. Now he was putting it all into this film drama—the stark truth of human tragedy and courage. If it didn't tear at people's hearts, make them shed tears of blood, then he was no artist.

"It sounds thrilling," I admitted. "But why are you working in Berlin?"

He grinned and put his fingers to his lips and whispered, "Trade secrets!" as though he couldn't tell. But presently he revealed his reasons and his trouble.

"That studio in the Zeppelin shed is the best in the world for size and lighting. And German labour is cheap and good—though more than I can afford, worse luck. I couldn't do the job in London half as well for twice the money."

"It seems a pity," I said doubtfully, and he agreed, but put up his defence.

"Over here they're good craftsmen with a sense of art. No strikes, starvation wages. With my small capital—nothing like enough—England is impossible."

There were other reasons why he worked in Berlin. He could get all types there—Russians, Austrians, Hungarians, all the refugees. Gold wasn't flowing their way after the stabilization of German money, and they were desperate for jobs.

"I'm doing it on the cheap," said Harshe. "But all the same, I'm spending every bean I've got, and getting worried. If there's any hitch, I sha'n't be able to carry on. That's why I'm driving hard, to get through it and save expense. That's why young Robin has to shave his pretty face at seven-thirty in the morning, and why little Rosaline falls asleep over the tea-cups, poor child. Yesterday we worked fourteen hours without a break. . . . Killing!"

He asked me to go to the studio one day. He wanted my advice about some tangles in the plot, and said he would take it as a great favour if I would help him a little.

"All I know," I said, glad to be of any use, and keen to see his show.

Later in the evening, after a second liqueur and some yarns about old times, he revealed a side of his character which I had not suspected.

"I'd like you to know that Austrian lady, Hilda Freudenberg," he said casually. "If I get through that job all right, I want to marry her—if she'll risk it!"

I wondered what his people would say if he took home an Austrian wife. They were old-fashioned English folk, as I happened to know: an old Colonel who believed it would be good for the world if every German baby could be strangled in its cradle—I doubt whether he would make an exception in favour of Austrians—and his lady-wife who was hardly more forgiving. I also wondered a little about that cabaret in which young Hermann Winter had made friends with her. Not a nice place, he had said.

"She's very pretty," I remarked in a non-committal way.

"She's pure gold," he answered.

Then he knocked me edgewise by telling me that she had a little daughter aged seven—"A fairy thing," he said, smiling with a sudden tenderness in his eyes at the remembrance.

"A little daughter!" I exclaimed in a startled way. "What about her husband?"

Harshe laughed at my anxiety, and said, "Don't be alarmed. There's not going to be a scandalous divorce, or anything like that. We're a moral crowd in my 'movie'—barring a few."

Then he spoke seriously.

"Her husband—a Russian lad—was one of the first victims of Lenin and his gang. He joined his father against a white wall. . . . Very rough on his girl-wife, with a baby coming."

He gave a heavy sigh, and then nodded when I asked him if he had met her first in Berlin.

"She tried to earn her living here. Not so easy. Sang old folk-songs in the wine-rooms of the Friedrichstrasse. Can you imagine? . . . Twenty marks a night—starvation wages—and every humiliation. Well, I saved her from that, thank God! She's wonderful in 'The School of Courage.' "

He rose from the chair with a sudden glint in his eyes, and I saw that the lady of whom he was speaking was coming across the room, holding hands with Rosaline Brook, the little American film star, while Robin Dale followed, with their cloaks on his arm, and looking very elegant in evening clothes.

III

Young Dale had a bright suggestion which he put to Harshe.

"Come and join us at Oliver's. Rosy and I must dance or die, and Hilda wants a partner."

"If it is Mr. Harshe!" said the Austrian lady.

Harshe looked tempted, but after a moment's struggle refused the invitation.

"I'd like to. But I've a hundred things to work out in my mind about that Kremlin scene to-morrow."

"Let it rip," said the boy.

Harshe had other reasons why he couldn't come.

"I must have a talk with Anton Rosen. It's his big scene to-morrow—and he's giving me a lot of trouble. I can't think what's come over him lately. He's as sulky as a bear."

Watching these people as an outsider, I noticed that the face of Hilda Freudenberg was suffused with a quick blush which made her fair skin flower-like, as when she had seen Hermann Winter.

"He's a little mad, I think," she said in her low-toned voice.

"Mad jealous," said Harshe, "because I've put you in the place of that woman Magda, who we all know is his mistress."

Hilda Freudenberg put her hand on Harshe's sleeve and spoke persuasively.

"Come! It would do you good to forget the picture for a little while. All those troubles!"

He smiled and shook his head.

"Business first, until the job is finished. Then——"

He looked at Hilda Freudenberg with eyes that expressed great desire, and then turned to young Dale and the little American girl.

"You young people ought to go to bed instead of dancing. Think of that early call to-morrow!"

Robin Dale said that if he didn't get the smell of the studio out of his nostrils he would go sick. Besides, what was the good of being in Berlin unless one saw something of its life? . . . It was he who suggested that I should take Harshe's place as Hilda Freudenberg's partner, and, although I'm no dancing man, I volunteered, having nothing else to do that evening.

As it happened, Hilda Freudenberg and I sat out mostly, while Robin and Rosaline danced—with such grace and rhythm that they received the applause of the company. They looked wonderfully fresh and romantic in that crowd of middle-aged Germans, who, I think, were envious of their youth and charm—as I was. The band had an American trick pianist—a "Bowery boy!" said Rosaline Brook, who knew the type. He lit a cigarette as he played, pretended to quarrel with the leading violin, changed chairs, and did many funny tricks while he never lost the rhythm of his noisy jazz. Old stuff, and rather boring, I thought, though the German men and women were enormously entertained as they danced in the Berlin style, which young Dale said was "echt Deutsch."

The young lady by my side was rather silent until I startled her by a remark I made.

"I once knew some people by the name of Freudenberg."

She looked at me with surprise, and inquired where I had known them.

"In Vienna. There was a Captain Otto von Freudenberg attached to the Court in some way. His wife was an English girl who had gone to school with my sisters."

She drew a quick breath and answered with emotion:

"My mother!"

I looked at her curiously and searched back into the memories of my first holiday abroad as a very young man.

"They had a little girl," I said, "with a flaxen pig-tail. She used to go dancing over the polished floors of the old Hofburg Palace."

"Yes," said Hilda von Freudenberg—it seemed that she had dropped that "von" from her name—"that was me as I remember myself in dreams, and as I see myself in my little daughter!"

I reminded her how even the Court flunkeys became human at the sight of her. And one day when I happened to be there the old Emperor passed, and then stopped a moment, and turned to kiss her with a sudden tenderness in his dim old eyes.

The girl at my side was silent for a moment. Then she spoke very softly, with a break in her voice.

"That was before the world changed."

"Your mother and father?" I asked quietly.

She lowered her head. The fellow at the piano was performing his monkey tricks. The band was playing stridently, so that I could hardly hear her answer.

"My father was killed in the War. . . . My mother died. Pneumonia, the doctor said. It was really hunger. . . . Vienna was terrible after the War."

I remembered Vienna after the War—its unlit streets, its beggars, its people in despair. In the hospitals and homes I had seen the tragedy of Austrian childhood, withered, blighted, dying. In the dancing-halls I had seen pretty girls—girls of good family—selling their love for the price of a meal.

"Yes," I said, "Vienna was terrible after the War."

Hilda Freudenberg was silent again, thinking back. Then she surprised me by her next words.

"And yet," she said, "I was very happy for a time in those dark days. They were the happiest of my life, perhaps."

"Incredible!" I exclaimed. "How was that?"

She answered with a wonderful simplicity.

"It was then that love came to me. There was a young Russian in Vienna, just a boy. He had escaped from the Bolsheviks after the fall of Kerensky. He fell in love with me. While the world was falling into ruin, we loved each other and found life wonderful!"

"How long did that last?" I asked, remembering what Harshe had told me and looking at her with pity.

"Three months," she answered. "He went to Moscow to see his mother who was dying. He promised to be back in a month."

She did not tell me what had happened, but nodded when I said, "Harshe told me."

The band was playing its wild music, the fiddlers were fooling with the trick pianist, young Dale and the little American girl came dancing by and smiled at us. They did not guess what a tragic tale I was hearing from the lady who raised her hand to them merrily.

"After that," she said, "I came to Berlin, with my baby-girl. You see, I was quite alone in Vienna after my mother's death. I thought Berlin was still rich, with plenty of food, and I had an uncle there, my father's brother."

She put her elbows on the table and leant her chin on her clasped hands, and looked into the little flame of the candle under its rosy shade.

"One day I rang the bell of my uncle's house." She asked with a little smile about her lips: "Have you ever heard the clanging of a bell when all one's life hangs on the answer, and no one comes?"

"No one answered?" I asked.

It was an empty house, she told me. Her uncle had committed suicide on the day of the Armistice, which broke his spirit.

"So then?" I asked.

Her answer was a light laugh with a little gesture which seemed to explain the inevitability of the things that happened.

"I had a hard time. My baby-girl gave me courage. Without her——"

I thought of that cabaret in the Friedrichstrasse where young Hermann Winter had seen her, and where Harshe had met her. Yes, it must have been a hard time for the daughter of Otto von Freudenberg.

She looked into my eyes with that sincerity which seemed to me her great charm. I think she saw that I understood.

"Yes," she said, "it was pretty bad. I hate to remember those days. But then Mr. Harshe helped me, and now I am well-to-do, and perhaps one day—when this film is shown—I may be famous!"

She laughed as though that idea amused her, and was rather unbelievable. Then she spoke the name of Harshe again, with something like adoration.

"How can I pay him back?" she asked. "He has been so good—so good!"

I knew one way in which she could pay him back. That way would be easy when he asked her to be his wife, and the prejudice I had had against her when Harshe first told me of that intention vanished as I glanced at her face again and saw its spiritual beauty—"A fair Madonna," young Winter had called her.

Our private talk ended there, as Robin Dale came back from the dancing-floor with Rosaline Brook, the little film star.

"I'm parched for a drink," said Robin. "What about a bottle of bubbly?"

"Me for orangeade," said Rosaline.

There was a tired, lack-lustre look in her Irish eyes, and she put her hands over them, complaining that the world was dim.

"It's the light in the silly old studio," she said. "Robin and I were in the glare of it for hours yesterday. I'm as blind as a bat!"

Robin Dale fumbled in his waistcoat pocket.

"I have some precious drops," he answered. "If the child will be very good and hold back her pretty head, I'll restore the lustre of her little peepsy-weepsies in two ticks. Take Grandpa's word for it."

He pulled a little phial from his pocket, and two Germans with their ladies at the next table to ours were astounded to see the beautiful Rosaline tilt back her head while Robin Dale with the "bedside manner" of a family doctor poured a little tincture into each eye.

"How's that?" he asked.

"Fine!" said Rosaline. "I can see your funny face ever so much better!"

I'm sure the Germans at the next table believed they were in the presence of a new form of vice. But it was explained to me that it was a simple remedy well known for eye-strain in the "movie" world.

Later in the evening Rosaline Brook sneezed twice, and it seemed to alarm Hilda Freudenberg and Robin Dale out of all proportion to the importance of that natural and not unusual irritation of the mucous membrane.

"My God!" said young Dale with consternation.

Hilda Freudenberg touched Rosaline's hand and said, "You're shivering, my dear! For goodness sake——"

"A slight chill, I fear," said the little film star in a jaunty way. "Don't tell Mr. Harshe or he'll get scared. If I fall by the wayside——"

"Good heavens!" said Robin Dale. "It would hold up everything and ruin the whole show."

Rosaline Brook said it wasn't going to happen. Two sneezes didn't make a tragedy.

"To bed, child!" said Robin Dale, with an air of authority. "We mustn't risk these dreadful things."

We went back in a taxi to the Esplanade and Hilda Freudenberg held Rosaline's hand all the way, and looked anxious when the little film star shivered and cuddled closer.

"Better send for a doctor, dear child," said Robin. "In any case, there'll be no early call for you to-morrow. I'll speak a word to Harshe."

Rosaline Brook sat up suddenly in a blaze of anger.

"You certainly won't. I'm wanted to-morrow for the big scene. Do you think I'm one to lie down on my job? Not if you know little Rosaline!"

He had to promise under pain of excommunication that he would say nothing to alarm Gilbert Harshe, and he did so when she allowed herself to be led meekly to bed.

Robin and I sat in the lounge over a cup of chocolate, and I spoke my thoughts aloud.

"Women have a lot of pluck!"

I was thinking of Hilda Freudenberg's tragic tale and of that hard time which had brought her to a low haunt in the night life of Berlin. But young Dale thought I referred to Rosaline Brook and he answered with warm agreement.

"That kid has enough pluck for ten toreadors!"

He uttered some gloomy forebodings.

"If Rosaline gets a real chill, it will be the devil to pay for poor old Gilbert Harshe. She's in the picture all the time, and if she has to drop out for more than a day or two the whole blooming show will go smash."

"As bad as that?" I exclaimed.

Robin Dale nodded, and blew a very perfect ring with his cigarette smoke.

"Between ourselves," he said, "dear old Gilbert is working on a very close margin. Needless to say the expenses are just about twice as much as he estimated."

"How's that?" I asked; and young Dale replied with a laugh:

"They always are! Salaries, lighting effects, that old Zeppelin shed, costumes, expensive sets—wow! It needs big capital, and unfortunately dear old Gilbert may have to do a nose-dive before he finishes his flight."

"Meaning what?" I asked.

"Well, speaking frankly," said Robin, "I reckon he can last out another week. After that he'll have to close down whether we've shot the last scene or whether we haven't. A poisonous shame if that happens! It's a great picture as far as it goes."

"So if Rosaline were to fall sick it would be rather serious," I remarked.

"A Shakespearean tragedy," said young Dale.

He began to whistle a lively tune and put on a merry and bright expression, which I saw was intended for Gilbert Harshe, who came striding towards us after a friendly wave of the hand.

“Back again?” he asked, as though surprised to see us so soon. “What have you done with the ladies?”

“Too sleepy to dance,” said Robin Dale cheerfully. “Both retired to their chaste little beds, leaving us in the lurch.”

“Very wise of them!” remarked Harshe good-humouredly. “I’m going to work them hard to-morrow, poor darlings.”

Young Dale shot a glance at me as though to say, “What a life!”

Neither of us said a word about the health of Rosaline Brook—those alarming sneezes!—which might jeopardize the fortune of Gilbert Harshe and the fate of a great film drama.

IV

I drove out next morning to the Zeppelin shed which had been turned into a "movie" studio after a certain clause in the Treaty of Versailles prohibiting Germany from constructing any more of those military airships which had come sailing over London with large-sized bombs and destroyed—before their own destruction—the insular security of the British mind.

It was ten miles out from Berlin, down the long straight road through the Grünewald which the Kaiser had drawn in a bee-line from his palace at Potsdam to his palace in Berlin, so that his Prussian Guards might march that way without a swerve—though, as a friend of mine remarked, "What difference would it have made if there had been a bend in the road?" My German taxi-driver, however, took advantage of the undeviating line ahead to go "all out," and I had a sense of miraculous escape when he halted at last outside the enormous brick building in which the Zeppelins had been housed.

Going through a narrow door I came into a vast hall in which there were stacks of scenery, a tangle of wires, a smell of wet plaster, and a chilly atmosphere which revealed my breath like a white mist. Beyond a high wall of canvas there was a blinding glare of yellow light, and I lost myself pretty utterly down long corridors trying to reach that vivid illumination, which I guessed was on the central stage of Harshe's film drama.

German workmen in plastered overalls pushed me on one side to make a passage for a piece of scenery eighty feet high, which I recognized instantly as a part of the Kremlin in Moscow, where the tall tower of Ivan Velike overlooked the battlemented walls. I dodged them, tripped over some coils of wire, wedged myself between two plaster walls, and came into the Red Square of Moscow as I had paced across it in a year of famine. The scene was startling in its realism. The walls seemed of solid stone. There were undoubtedly Red soldiers of Trotsky there under a high archway. A droschke drove across the cobble stones, deeply rutted as I had known the streets of Moscow when they had made my bones ache above broken springs.

A crowd thronged across the open space. They were the very type I had seen in Moscow three years before—old peasants in their sheepskin coats, fur caps, bast shoes; Cossack officers in astrakhan cloaks reaching below the tags of their black topboots; gipsies in rags and tatters of many colours; laughing-eyed women, and straw-bearded men in leather jackets with rags round their feet; here and there an officer of the Red Army, a Hebrew Kommisar, a long-haired student.

Standing underneath an archway leading into the Red Square, by the Shrine of the Iberian Virgin, exactly as I had seen it a score of times, was a group of men and women guarded by Red soldiers. One glance at them in that lurid light which lit up the whole scene told me that they represented Russian aristocrats and "intellectuals" of the old régime, in shabby clothes but once of good cloth and cut, dirty, but with faces, which no dirt could disguise, of people of education and good family.

One of the men, dark-eyed, deadly white, with a handsome, tragic face, was leaning with his back to the wall, smoking a cigarette with a look of disdain at the Red soldiers, who stood with slung rifles in front of him.

All this was pantomime, a scene for a "movie," yet so much like the real tragedy in Moscow during the time of Terror that for a moment it made me feel uneasy.

A young man with tousled hair in the uniform of a British officer, all torn and blood-stained, moved away from the crowd in the archway, came towards me, and gave me a cheerful "Hullo!" It was young Dale, whom I dimly recognized in spite of the paint on his face and this disguise.

"Excuse my abject appearance," he said. "I've just escaped from the Bolsheviki! Come and have a drink before dear old Gilbert catches sight of you. This studio is stone cold and I'm frozen to the marrow-bones."

He led me rapidly through an iron door, on which I saw a large notice to the effect that no one must leave the stage without permission of Mr. Gilbert Harshe. Young Dale paid no attention to that, and I presumed that he took the permission for granted.

"That dressing-room of mine!" he said—"it's as bad as a dug-out in war-time, barring shell-fire. The mice make a picnic of chocolate biscuits sent by a funny old aunt in Bournemouth. Fortunately they haven't learnt to drink whisky, yet. Otherwise I should be undone."

We went down a dark corridor warmed by a little charcoal stove, but still damp and cold. There were doors on each side, and out of one of them came a tragic-looking girl in ragged clothes with dark rings round her eyes, and carmine lips, vivid against her yellow-white skin. I was surprised when she said "Good morning!" very graciously before flitting away from us.

"Who's that?" I asked of Robin Dale. He looked surprised, and then laughed.

"We look a bit different in our make-up! That's Hilda Freudenberg, who was at tea with us yesterday. A wonderful actress, and a charming lady. Even if I didn't like her, I should have to be polite, because without a doubt she's going to be Mrs. Gilbert Harshe one day. Dear old Gilbert worships the ground she treads on, and lets everybody know it."

He took me into his dressing-room, a small box-like chamber with a deal table littered with grease paints, shaving apparatus, French novels, and tins of tobacco. Two kitchen chairs were piled up with clothes, which Dale pitched on to the floor.

"Take a pew," he said. "I'm certain you can do with a whisky after that long drive. As for me——!"

He poured out a stiff dose for each of us and drank his own neat, after wishing me good luck.

"The best preventive of influenza, pneumonia, and all the diseases that lurk in dark corners for delicate souls like me!"

I asked a question which had been nagging in my mind on the way down.

"How's Miss Rosaline?"

"Not at all well," he answered gravely. "She ought to see a doctor and go to bed. But she'd rather die than let down dear old Gilbert. Let's go and cheer her up."

He took me down the corridor again and tapped at one of the doors, and then put his head inside.

"Is it well with the child?" he asked, and then beckoned to me to enter.

It did not seem to me that it was at all well with the child.

She was lying on a horse-hair couch, dressed as a dancing girl, such as one sees in the Russian cabarets with their national head-dress, and in spite of the paint on her face she looked ill and feverish. She coughed in a way that rather frightened me, though I was no doctor, before holding out her hand and saying, "Make yourself at home! There's a chair with three cracked legs in the corner over there!"

I was left alone with her when a call came for Robin Dale, and he had to rush away without another word.

"Look here," I said in a fatherly way, "you ought to get out of this cold studio, or you'll get pneumonia or something. Can't you lie up for a week?"

She laughed at me and cried, "A week? Good heavens! the man doesn't know how important I am! If I drop out, everything will stand still. And Mr. Harshe can't afford it. He's working against time and money."

"Yes," I said; "I know all that. But your life is worth more than a 'movie'—the best ever made."

She kissed her hand to me and said, "Merci, monsieur!"

I spoke bluntly, as she shivered a little. "I believe you're really ill. Let me tell Harshe to send for a doctor and give you a rest. I insist!"

She sat up on the sofa, looking exceedingly pretty and very angry.

"Say!" she asked in her American way, "who gave you authority over my little life?"

I smiled at her, but was not to be daunted.

"No one. I'm a perfect stranger, and all that, but I believe in common sense."

She seemed very much amused.

"Common sense has nothing to do with the movie business, Mr. Stranger. We're doing a work of art, to which all things must be sacrificed—the health of women, the love of men, sleep, warmth, food!"

"Well, I'm going to tell Harshe, anyhow," I said stubbornly. "He's not a baby-killer for the sake of business."

The little film star jumped up and caught me by the arm.

"You mustn't tell Mr. Harshe! Please! He's working on his nerves, with a million worries. I don't want to be the last straw to break his dear old back."

"I like your loyalty," I said ungrudgingly. "All the same, it's foolish."

She spoke to me seriously, putting her hand in mine in a childish way.

"It's kind of you to worry! But you see it's like this. I've been drawing a mighty big salary from Mr. Harshe, week after week. It's been draining him, ever so much! And he can't afford to go on with this expense. The least I can do is to play up to the end, which is only a week or two more."

"Harshe is lucky in having such good friends," I said.

"He's the best producer I've ever worked for," she answered, "as good as gold, and I'd feel terribly bad if I let him down with a heavy bump, just before the picture's finished. See what I mean? . . . Loyalty!"

I saw what she meant. I also thought she was looking more ill than I had imagined, when she leant up against the wall, coughing with a handkerchief to her mouth. It was a little red stain oozing over the handkerchief at her lips which alarmed me horribly.

"Good God!" I said in a frightened voice.

"Don't be scared!" she laughed. "It's only lip-stick."

But I didn't believe her. It was one of her plucky little lies. The child was spitting up blood with that cough of hers. But I could say nothing more, because there was a bang at her door and a woman's voice called out, "Wanted, Miss Brook! Mr. Harshe is waiting for you."

"Coming!" the girl called out gaily, kissing her hand to me, and ran out of her room.

When I next saw her a few minutes later she was standing under the walls of the plaster Kremlin in a blinding light, trying to rescue Robin Dale from a crowd of Bolsheviki, while Harshe was shouting out directions and a camera man was shooting the scene.

I felt sorry for Harshe. I felt certain that this little film star would break down before the job was finished, and hold up the whole show.

But, as it happened, I was wrong. At least, something else happened before Rosaline sent for a doctor.

V

On the outskirts of the scene the crowd of Russian aristocrats, peasants, Red soldiers, Kommisars, and children, stood, in groups, talking German, Russian, English, and French.

A little apart, but not far from where I stood, I noticed the figure of Hilda Freudenberg, who had passed me in the corridor when I had gone to Robin's dressing-room. She was listening to the conversation of the tall young Russian whom I had seen standing with his back to the wall smoking a cigarette in a disdainful attitude. He was talking to her excitedly, even with passion, as it seemed to me, and involuntarily I overheard some of his words—in German.

"If you consent to play Magda's part, I will tell Herr Harshe what I know about you."

She drew herself up and answered coldly.

"There is nothing I have to hide. In any case you forget yourself, Anton Rosen."

He hesitated, and then spoke with a harsh laugh.

"I do not forget your lover, Hermann Winter. . . . In that dirty cabaret! . . . Everyone knew, except this stupid Englishman, who thinks you so much more virtuous than Magda, whose part you have stolen."

I did not hear Hilda Freudenberg's answer. Perhaps she didn't answer. I only saw her slip away from that Russian actor as if he had struck her in the face when she had no one to defend her.

I was painfully distressed. The name of Hermann Winter, with whom I had become very friendly in Berlin, gave me a kind of shock. He had been the first to tell me about this Austrian girl, and that life of hers in the cabaret. He had confessed that he had gone there many times to see her. They had been "good friends," he had told me. Nothing more than that, I was certain. Because of my remembrance of her childhood in the old Hofburg Palace in Vienna, and my visit to her people—all those years ago—I felt a keen interest in her, beyond idle curiosity. Especially now that Harshe was in love with her. The words of that Russian stirred me with a sense of rage. What a blackguard thing to say! What a skunk! . . .

I was boiling with this indignation when Harshe discovered me at last between a change of scenes and led me to a charcoal stove where Robin and Rosaline stood warming themselves.

"It's a strange crowd here," he said. "If I could get their life-stories on to the screen, it would make more drama than any film picture yet produced. Only the censor wouldn't pass it all!"

He laughed, and looked at the crowd of "extras" gathered outside the Kremlin wall, as though he were thinking of their private histories.

"Who are they all?" I asked. "From what class do they come?"

"Mostly Germans," said Harshe, "with just a sprinkling of Russian refugees, a few Austrians, a Hungarian Count—poor devil—and some Poles. All of them—except the stars—desperately in need of the starvation wages I pay them for the job."

He lowered his voice and described some of the people standing about.

"Do you see that old fellow dressed as a Russian peasant? The one with a white beard. He used to be an Admiral in the Russian Navy and a great friend of the Czar. And that little lady with the shawl over her head! She was in the fire at Smyrna after the entry of the Turks. Her husband was a Greek merchant. They stuck him with a bayonet, and both her children were drowned. She's a German from Hanover and a very dear soul."

I remembered his hatred of all Germans, and saw the change in him. There was a love of humanity in his eyes, beyond all racial prejudice, as he gazed round upon this strange company of players who were in his service.

"Most of the Germans here," he said, "have been pretty hard hit by the economic conditions. Some of them were half starved when I engaged them. They had got caught between the wheels—between inflation and the Renten mark! That pretty girl with the blue eyes and the flaxen hair cried when I told her I had completed my crowd. She's keeping a blind husband—an ex-officer of Ypres. I didn't want her, but I stretched a point. An extra twenty marks a day won't break me—perhaps!"

He seemed to find some spiritual comfort in the thought that his "movie" was supporting so many people.

"They're my characters," he told me. "I mean they're the actual types I've introduced into my story. They've *lived* the things I try to show. They've known the agony I can only suggest. They've starved, suffered, sold themselves, struggled, despaired, like the people I put on the screen. 'The School of Courage!' Well, these people—or some of 'em—have needed a lot of pluck to pull through as far as this."

He nodded his head in the direction of the tall young Russian who had spoken such brutal words to Hilda Freudenberg.

"See that fellow? He calls himself Anton Rosen. He's one of those innumerable princes. Lay for six months in a Russian prison, starving and lousy, before he escaped by killing his guard and getting out as a Red soldier. A surly, temperamental sort of chap—I've no end of trouble with him!—but just the face and figure I want, and a first-class actor if he gets my idea."

Perhaps the Russian was aware that Harshe was speaking about him. He suddenly advanced towards us and spoke to Harshe in fairly good English, and in a passionate temper.

"Mr. Harshe. I will play my part no more! I walk out of this studio. I wish you a very good day."

He turned on the heels of his long Cossack boots and would have walked straight away if Harshe had not caught him by the arm and swung him round again with rough good-nature.

"What's all this nonsense, Anton? I thought we had finished the argument yesterday."

"That is true," said the Russian. "There is no argument. I have decided. I go away—and do not come back."

He struggled to release his arm from the tight grip, but Harshe kept hold of him and spoke sternly.

"You're not going just yet. I want you for the next scene—in five minutes. Please remember your loyalty, to say nothing of your salary, and play the game."

The young Russian flung up his arms in a rage.

"Loyalty! . . . Play the game! That is very English. A nation of hypocrites! What was your loyalty to Magda Yronska? Why did you give her part to that Austrian woman?"

Harshe's voice was cold and hard when he answered.

"Magda Yronska liked her bed too much. She was never to be found when I wanted her. In any case, that is my business as producer."

"It is my business," said the Russian. "Magda is my mistress. What affects her, affects me. We work together or not at all."

"In this company," said Harshe quietly, "I don't engage actors with their mistresses. In any case, the part is now being played by Fräulein Freudenberg, to my satisfaction."

The Russian who called himself Anton Rosen flung his cigarette away with a gesture of rage.

“To your satisfaction!” he repeated scornfully, “Yes, you despise my poor Magda because she is my mistress. You are a moral Englishman. You only employ virtuous people in your company, is it not? Like Fräulein Freudenberg, from the *Wein Stube* of the Friedrichstrasse!”

I saw Harshe clench his fist, which was a little inconsistent with his principles of peace.

“Let us keep that lady’s name out of our conversation,” he said, with a rather deadly anger.

“She has stolen Magda’s part!” cried the Russian. “Or rather, you give it to her because you love her. That virtuous lady who was the mistress of a German profiteer——”

I looked at Harshe and saw his face flame with rage. He raised his fist as though to smash the Russian’s face. Some little veins in his forehead swelled out, and the line of his mouth hardened.

Then he lowered his fist and spoke in a low voice.

“Get out! If you’re not outside this studio in three minutes, I won’t answer for my—self-control.”

The young Russian saluted gravely and courteously, turned on his heel, and walked in a slow and stately way to the iron door leading to the dressing-room. He stood there for a moment to light a cigarette, and then disappeared.

Harshe was breathing heavily until with a strong effort he mastered himself and spoke to me calmly.

“That man is a Russian prince. Did I tell you? He is also a Russian cad.”

He stood staring at the boards with a frown on his face, and then laughed.

“ ‘The School of Courage,’ ” he said. “Well, I’m afraid this puts the lid on it. All my efforts gone to waste. All the loyalty, art, and industry of this good crowd.”

I questioned him anxiously, and used the last word in the title of his play.

“Courage!”

Harshe turned round and smiled at me, and put his hand on my shoulder, as though to steady himself.

“Courage isn’t good enough now, except to cut our losses and keep smiling. That fellow’s departure knocks me edgewise. He was the chief character in the last scenes—some already shot.”

“What difference does that make?” I asked.

He was amazed by my ignorance.

“I shall have to shoot ’em all over again! Keep all these big sets standing, at enormous expense, until I can get another actor of the right type to replace that—swine! It can’t be done and that’s all there is about it.”

He passed his hand over his forehead with a gesture of weariness—or resignation, and then smiled again.

“It’s been a good try, all the same. I don’t regret it! . . . The only thing I funk is telling the crowd that I’m closing down.”

He moved away a few paces towards the groups gathered on the edge of the lighted space, as though he intended to tell them there and then. But I grabbed his arm and spoke with some emotion, because I hated to see a big effort go to waste and pluck defeated.

“Look here, surely you can get some more capital? A cable to America?”

Harshe shook his head and seemed to see a joke somewhere.

“I’ve tried all that! America doesn’t believe in my scenario. I hawked it from New York to San Francisco and couldn’t raise a thousand dollars.”

“German money?” I suggested. “Some of these people seem to have a lot.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“German money is hard to get unless I cut my plot to pieces, which I’m damned if I’ll do. They think I’m anti-German, whereas I’m pro-Peace. Nothing doing—except to face the music. . . . I’m down and out.”

I could only say “Hard luck, old man!” but felt desperately sorry because he would have to haul down his flag after this gallant adventure.

We joined a group of principals around a charcoal stove. They were drinking coffee out of thick cups placed for them on a rickety table. Rosaline was standing on a hot brick which Robin had heated on the glowing charcoal, with considerable pride in his patent food-warmer.

Hilda Freudenberg was the first to see something alarming in Harshe’s strained face and serious eyes.

“What has happened?” she asked, with great anxiety.

Harshe made a gesture of resignation.

“The end of this adventure. . . Anton Rosen has thrown up his part.”

There was a moment’s silence until Robin Dale spoke.

“Chucked it altogether?”

“Ratted!” said Harshe.

“Swine of swine!” cried young Robin.

Harshe smiled a little at this outburst and answered quietly:

“I agree. The curse of it is we can’t do without him, and it means that I’ve shot our biggest scenes for nothing. Just wasted a mint of money.”

“Could you set the law against him?” asked Robin. “Sue him for breach of contract?”

Harshe didn’t think so. As a matter of fact, he had told the fellow to go, though he seemed to forget that.

Rosaline Brook became excited, and there was a flame of anger in her big dark eyes.

“I just can’t believe it. I’d hate to think a man could be so mean! . . . After all our work!”

“Yes,” said Harshe. “That’s what hurts.”

It was Hilda Freudenberg who asked a question about the motive behind Anton Rosen’s act of treachery, as it seemed to them all. She put her hand on Harshe’s sleeve, and her words came rather breathlessly.

“Why does he leave us like this? For what reason? What did he say?”

I could see the anxiety with which she asked those questions, and I remembered—and tried to forget—some words spoken by that Russian, Anton Rosen. Was she afraid that he had made that accusation about her relations with Hermann Winter? The thought came into my mind, with a momentary suspicion which I knew to be unworthy.

Harshe did not show by the flicker of an eyelid that Anton Rosen had spoken outrageous words about her. He had just wiped them out of his mind, as a gentleman ignores a foul story by a dirty-minded fellow.

“He had no reason except temper—and silly jealousy. It was because I ‘sacked’ that woman Magda, for whom he’s ruining himself, poor fool . . . These Russians!”

I saw Hilda Freudenberg’s candid eyes scan his face as though for any shadow there, unrevealed by his words. Then her voice thrilled with anger.

"He is mad, that Anton Rosen. He is wicked also."

"Forget him," said Harshe with an impatient gesture, as though obliterating the man. Then he spoke again in a frank, manly way which renewed my admiration of him, considering how much this business meant to him—"everything," as he had told me.

"The truth is, my dears, that I can't go on. You see how I'm fixed. And you know all the difficulties I've had, and my lack of capital. I bit off more than I could chew—to put it vulgarly. I mean, I underestimated the cost of things. The idea was too big for the cash. . . . Well, it's been a great game while it lasted. I've enjoyed every minute of it, and your friendship best of all. You've been wonderfully patient, magnificently loyal, with all my nagging and slave-driving! I'm desperately grateful to you all. I can never pay back. My only regret is that all the art and beauty, and sense of drama, you've put into this unfortunate picture will never be shown to the great public. I feel caddish for having wasted it all. I hoped so much to make you more famous than some of you are already—world-famous, like little Rosaline Brook, and our Court-Jester, Robin Dale. Never mind! You'll get other jobs easy enough—you famous ones. It's harder on the poor people here, who'll be out of work again. I'm sorry about that. Now I thank you—from my heart—and if you'll excuse another speech, which you needn't listen to, I'll tell the crowd."

Hilda Freudenberg was weeping, and Harshe saw her tears and lifted up her hand and put it to his lips.

It was Rosaline Brook, the little American film star, who stopped Harshe from making his second speech. She had her hand on Robin Dale's shoulder and cried out excitedly:

"This is all poppy-cock! We're just going to finish this picture. That's all there is to it!"

Harshe smiled at her, and shook his head, but she was not to be silenced.

"It's my loveliest part. Do you think I'm going to miss my chance of the biggest hit in the world? Not on your life, dear people!"

"What's your idea, sweet child?" asked Robin.

Rosaline's eyes were feverish. As I know now, and had already guessed, she was hiding her ill-health by sheer will-power, for the sake of "the show," and refused to think of resting until she had played her last scene.

"The pluck of ten toreadors!" young Robin had said. Well, I saluted the spirit of the girl after her next words, which were rather splendid.

"If it's any help," she said, "you can have my idea for what it's worth. I've been drawing a big salary as a film star. Just robbing poor Mr. Harshe! Well, I'm handing it back—all I haven't spent!—and playing—for love—until the last shot."

Robin Dale went down on one knee and kissed her hand with mock gallantry which was more than half sincere. Then he rose and shouted.

"Bravo! Bravo! . . . That's a sporting offer and a fine lead. I'm doing the same. . . . And so say all of us!"

He began to sing the old chorus, as though at a public banquet.

"*And so say all of us!*
For he's a jolly good fellow——"

Harshe grinned at him, but there was a glint of moisture in his eyes, and I could see that he was deeply moved.

"It's fine of you," he said. "Good and generous! But saving your two salaries won't help me much. There's all the crowd to pay—they can't afford to work for nothing—and if I have to shoot those scenes again I shall want a lot more capital. No, my dears, the game is up."

"Give me a week," said Rosaline Brook. "If I don't get some capital out of the United States, I'll never play in a movie again. I'll cable to all the men who sent me flowers when I sailed, 'Say it with dollars!' That's my message to those who love me!"

She laughed, and yet was desperately in earnest. Even now I remember the child's courage with the glow of admiration that came to me in that cold Zeppelin shed. She was offering her health as well as her salary. Perhaps even her life, if she felt as ill as I thought she looked.

Robin Dale backed her idea.

"I agree with Rosaline. Don't let's haul down the little old flag until we've moved heaven and earth, Jews and Gentiles, for the price of victory. Give us a week or two, dear old Gilbert. Put it to the crowd. Tell them exactly what has happened, the treachery of that swine Rosen, and the state of your treasury. Ask them if they will put their salaries into the pool while you hustle round for new capital."

Harshe was impressed, and I could see that he was thinking out the possible odds of luck which might save his venture by any fluke. He stood quite silent, with his head on one side, staring at the floor-boards, while the little veins on his forehead throbbed.

"If I could find another type like Rosen," he said presently, "someone who could step into his shoes quickly——"

Then he thrust the idea away from him.

"No, it's only playing with false hope. Besides, I haven't the nerve to ask the crowd to go on playing—or hanging about—on the off-chance of getting their pay. It might be keeping them from better jobs and letting them down while I scooted around for mythical money."

Robin Dale pressed his arm.

"It's idiotic to throw away the finest picture ever screened, in sight of the last shot. Bad business, old man! We've got real property worth a hell of a lot to any financier who'll take a chance and come in with the bit extra. As for the crowd—just try them! Put it up to them. It's only fair. I'll bet I know their answer!"

"I funk it!" said Harshe in a low voice. "The humiliation——"

It was the little film star who made him jerk his head up as though her words had stung him.

"Weren't you one of the heroes of the Great War? What about the white feather in time of peace?"

For a moment Harshe was offended, almost angry. Then he looked at the little painted lady, and laughed.

"It's my pride," he said, "not lack of pluck! Well, I'll go through with it because you're all so generous. It gives me more faith in human nature. Keeps me humble."

He stepped away from the group, picked up the megaphone, and called out some words in German. It was a call to the company to get together. He had an announcement to make. Would they come up and listen to what he wanted to tell them?

I shall never forget that scene as the crowd of film actors came forward and pressed close on all sides, some of them standing on chairs and boxes to look over the heads of the others, some in the half-darkness of the great scene outside the Kremlin walls, some in a vivid glare of yellow light.

Harshe spoke in slow, deliberate German, which all that mixture of races could understand. I need not repeat his words. He just told them simply his trouble and his faint hope. Anton Rosen had deserted him, for reasons best known to himself, and that would mean shooting a lot of scenes again and delaying everything. Unless he could get more capital, he couldn't go on. In any case, he couldn't pay their salaries for more than another week, unless new money were forthcoming. After that week, would they stand by him and wait—perhaps without payment—on the off-chance that he might raise the extra money? The principals had agreed to do so—very generously. As far as the rest of the crowd were concerned, he couldn't ask them to make the same sacrifice, which would be greater for them—perhaps impossible. But he would like to hear their views. In any case, he was enormously grateful for all their work, and patience, and understanding of his ideas. . . .

I watched the faces of that crowd as he spoke to them. At first they looked stunned by the news he gave them. Then frightened and

dismayed, as though the future held no luck for them. They whispered to each other. A few women began to weep silently. Towards the end of Harshe’s speech I saw some of the eyes that were watching him light up with hope, or enthusiasm, or, perhaps, comradeship and loyalty. It was clear that as a producer he had won their friendship and esteem—by the human touch he had, and a thousand little acts of courtesy and consideration at which I could only guess, knowing the chivalry of the man.

One of the young Russians was spokesman for his own people. Then an old German, dressed as a Russian refugee. The answer was the same in both cases. On behalf of the crowd they offered their services to the end of the picture, with wages or without. “Herr Harshe could count on their perfect loyalty.”

Then they cheered him again and again, and I have never seen a man more moved by the loyalty of good friends. Tears stood in his eyes, and he did not trouble to hide them, when he thanked them with broken words.

Before I left the studio that afternoon he took me on one side and put his arm through mine.

“I’m glad you saw what happened,” he said. “The world doesn’t think much of ‘movie’ actors. A rotten crowd! That’s the usual verdict. . . . Well, you and I don’t think so, after what they’ve done to-day. I’d go through fire for friends like that!”

Poor old Harshe! He was as pleased by that demonstration of loyalty as though he had found the capital he wanted, and I saw that he was buoyed up with new hope which seemed to me illusory. It was not so much the money he hated losing but the big idea with which he had hoped to touch the heart of the world.

VI

It looked as though luck were dead against Harshe. I did a little scouting round in Berlin, but there was nothing doing in the way of capital. The film business, I found, was not in good odour in financial circles—or any other. The risks were too great and there had been a heavy slump in the "movie" market.

Apart altogether from money, he was, as he admitted, "up against it." He would have to replace that fellow, Anton Rosen, by another actor of his type and style, and at that moment Berlin didn't seem to provide the right kind of Russian who could step into Rosen's shoes and carry on. But a worse thing happened, as I guessed it would. Little Rosaline had cracked up at last and taken to her bed, willy-nilly. She was in the hands of a German doctor and two nurses. Whatever happened, nothing could be done until she was well enough to face the camera again.

It was at this time that Harshe showed his mettle most finely, I think. In spite of his worry—and the nerve-strain must have been severe, and the constant disappointment would have sickened a weaker man—he never revealed any irritability or bad temper, or forgetfulness of the little courtesies of life. He was much more distressed about the illness of Rosaline Brook than the failure of his life's ambition—as the unfortunate film picture certainly was.

Over and over again he expressed his sympathy and anxiety.

"To think of that child going on like that! Letting me work her for hours on end while she was sickening for this illness! I feel like a baby-killer! I'll never forgive myself!"

Every day he sent her great bouquets of flowers which the German nurses kept out of her room because of their scent. Three times a day at least he telephoned to these devoted nurses to inquire as to the progress of their patient, and was only momentarily satisfied when every time they said that the "*gnädiges Fräulein*" was going on as well as could be expected, that she had had a fairly good night, that her temperature was not so high.

What he was doing at this time to get hold of new capital I don't know, but he was spending a lot of small change in taxi-cabs, and I have an idea that he was interviewing every German financier who had any interest in the film industry, and others besides. Several times I saw him in the lounge of the Adlon, talking earnestly and persuasively with little Jewish-looking men who accepted his cocktails, looked very polite and interested, but spread out their hands in a way that said "Impossible, my dear sir!" as clearly as though I had heard the words. Once, at such a time, Harshe caught my eyes on him and smiled with an almost imperceptible shake of the head. That also meant "Nothing doing!"

Meanwhile poor young Robin Dale was disconsolate without that little American star who had teased him so unmercifully. He also spent large sums of money in flowers which she was not allowed to keep in her room. With no work doing at the studio he found time rather heavy on his hands in the city of Berlin, and fell back on my company for lack of better entertainment. It was while we were dining together in a chic little restaurant in the Kurfurstendam that we were both surprised to see Hilda Freudenberg at a table in the corner of the room with a friend who sat with his back towards us, so that we could not see his face even when he was talking with a waiter. There was a little girl sitting next to the lady, with a table-napkin tied under her chin—a fairy princess aged six years or so, whose grace and daintiness attracted the attention of the other diners, who kept smiling in her direction.

"Hilda's baby," said Robin. "I'm desperately in love with her!"

Because of that love he left his own dinner for a moment and went over to the other table. I saw him kiss the little girl in his charming way and say something which made her laugh before he turned to Hilda Freudenberg and raised her hand to his lips. It was then that I saw the man who had his back turned. He shifted sideways to greet Robin in the friendliest manner. It was my friend Hermann Winter.

I confess that seeing him there with Hilda Freudenberg gave me a sense of uneasiness and even distress. Certain words spoken by that Russian fellow came into my mind, poisonously. "Hermann Winter's mistress," he had said. "Everybody knows." It is the curse of social life that, however charitable one may be, however broadminded and disdainful of slander, an accusation like that is not easily obliterated or forgotten. The man, no doubt, was a liar, and was certainly a cad. He had proved that by speaking as he did to a defenceless woman. . . . And yet for Harshe's sake and my own admiration of a charming lady, I wished that Hermann Winter had not been in that restaurant with Hilda Freudenberg. I had a sense of suspicion which I could not overcome.

Dale was obviously telling them that I was in the room. They both turned and greeted me, young Winter by a little wave of the hand, Hilda Freudenberg with a gracious smile. Then Robin came back with a message.

"They want us to join them for dessert. It's luck finding them here!"

I think he saw a shadow on my face, and was conscious of my rather gloomy silence afterwards.

"Little Anna is wonderful!" he said. "It's a privilege to know such a darling of the gods."

I could not refuse the invitation, and that abominable suspicion of mine was stifled by the perfectly natural and simple greetings of both Hermann Winter and the lady. It was only for the shade of a moment that I saw a faintly deeper colour creep below Hilda Freudenberg's fine skin and that in her eyes I saw, or thought I saw, a guarded look.

She put her arms around her little daughter and spoke to me above her head.

"History repeats itself! . . . I must have been like that when you came to Vienna as a boy and saw me dancing through the Hofburg Palace."

Yes, she had been exactly like that, as I remembered, with a kind of pang because of the swiftness of time's passage. I twisted one of little Anna's golden locks round my finger and stooped to kiss her.

"I hope she won't see so much unhappy history as you and I," I said. "Perhaps we're getting out of the shadows now. It may be a brighter world for the children of to-morrow."

They were rather heavy-going words for a dinner-table conversation, and I was aware of that, but spoke to hide a sense of nervousness. My remarks led to a general discussion, in which Hermann Winter proved himself to be a light-hearted pessimist and Hilda Freudenberg an optimist, because of her belief in an idealism which Winter denied. And then, when that discussion languished a little, young Winter startled me by something he said about Harshe's "movie."

"Miss Freudenberg is trying to persuade me to finance your friend's film drama. I have had to confess that my old father keeps me on so tight a string that I cannot even pay my debts!"

Hilda Freudenberg spoke to him eagerly, as though he had revealed her secret and passionate hope.

"Could you not persuade your father? It would be good business for him—and he could spare the money—so easily! Out of all his millions—it would be so little."

She turned to me, and in her eagerness put her hand on mine.

"Help me to persuade Mr. Winter to ask his father! It would be so splendid for the whole world and the cause of peace."

Hermann Winter laughed in his careless way.

"You don't know my old father. As hard as his own steel. As mean as one of Balzac's misers. And very suspicious of his prodigal son!"

"He would be pleased to see you taking an interest in business," said Hilda Freudenberg.

Young Winter didn't seem to think that argument would work.

"He would suspect that I was trying to 'touch him' for—other purposes. He might think my interest in the 'movie' world somewhat influenced by the attractions of a little star, perhaps. Oh, he is a very suspicious old gentleman, is my honoured father!"

He was smoking a cigarette, and through its bluish haze he looked across the table to Hilda Freudenberg with a smile that seemed to hold some secret understanding.

"And yet," he said thoughtfully, "I'm rather tempted to put the idea before the old man. I'd like to support a high ideal! It would make me feel less of a parasite!"

Robin and I took up the argument. I felt curiously elated now that Hilda Freudenberg had revealed her reason for dining with Hermann Winter that evening. She was doing her bit to get capital for Harshe. All that suspicion of mine, caused by the poison of that Russian fellow's slander, was utterly false. She had met young Winter again in my company, and her quick mind had gone to the possibility of his father's millions for the rescue of "The School of Courage." What a fool I had been not to think of the same idea!

Young Winter listened to the arguments of young Dale and myself with smiling patience. Then he asked a question, but his eyes were upon Hilda Freudenberg.

"Speaking in a strictly business way, what do I stand to get out of it? You see, as the son of my father, I speak selfishly. What profit shall I get? What reward?"

"Kudos," said young Robin—"and a handsome share of profits in a big success."

"What do you say, *gnädiges Fräulein*?" asked young Winter.

She looked at him with a little smile about her lips, and a heightened colour.

"Gratitude as well," she said. "The whole company would bless your name. Please! . . . We beg of you!"

Young Winter was staring down at the white tablecloth with a queer smile, as though thinking the matter out.

"I'm rather scared of my old father," he said. "But I'll have a go at him. . . . For purely selfish reasons, of course. Those benedictions, and that gratitude! They appeal to me more than the other uncertain profits."

We were all rather excited by this new hope. I could see that Hilda Freudenberg had set her heart on it, though young Winter suggested that the odds were against success. Then, soon afterwards, we all rose from the table when little Anna snuggled her head against her mother's arm and looked too sleepy even for Robin's playfulness. Hilda Freudenberg asked the head waiter to call a taxi, and it was Hermann Winter who saw her home.

Robin and I walked back to our hotel on a starlit night, and it was something the boy said which spoilt the rest of the evening for me.

"I hope that fellow will drag the money out of his profiteer papa. But I didn't like that question about his reward."

"Why not?" I asked. "It sounded natural and business-like. Anyhow, he was half in joke."

Robin Dale glanced at me sideways.

"I didn't like his smiling eyes. There was a fellow in one of Shakespeare's plays who 'smiled and smiled.' . . ."

"Young Winter's an idealist," I said, rather warmly. "To-morrow he's going to show me the poverty side of Berlin. He pretends to be a profligate, but I believe he's a good chap."

"Glad to hear it," said young Robin. "And I withdraw all insinuations."

But he could not undo the effect of his words on my mind. They had reawakened that sense of uneasiness about the friendship between Hermann Winter and the lady upon whom my friend Harshe had set his heart.

After saying good night to Robin Dale I found Harshe waiting for me in my room. He was rather despondent at having no progress to report, and I did not care to buoy him up with hopes about Hermann Winter which might lead to nothing. Besides, I felt a little constrained about the whole matter and preferred that Hilda Freudenberg should tell him, if she cared to. But I mentioned casually that I had just seen her at dinner with young Winter, and wondered if he would be startled or annoyed. But it was obvious that it had no such effect upon him. He did not show the least sign of jealousy or suspicion, though Anton Rosen's words—"Hermann Winter's mistress"—must have been in his mind as poignantly as they were in mine. It was splendid of him, I thought, that his nature was incapable of harbouring the least suspicion of truth in that accusation.

"She told me she was dining with him," he said simply. "He was kind to her in those old cabaret days."

I wondered if I should give him some kind of warning, or tell him of my own uneasiness. But I simply could not bring the words to my lips. Harshe was not a man who would tolerate any hint or innuendo in that kind of way. There had been something rather terrible in his anger against that Russian. Another word, and the man would have gone to the ground with a crash.

"She must have had a rotten time," I said evasively. "I know those cabarets!"

"Yes," said Harshe; "it was the usual kind of place—perfectly foul. She was like a lily in a jungle. I think her purity was astonishing even to the young swine who went there for wine and women. They couldn't make her out."

"Strange that you never met young Winter there," I said quietly. "I'm afraid he was one of the young swine—though with a touch of decency redeeming his decadence."

Harshe did not remember having seen him there. He had only been there twice himself, once by accident, the next time because he could not resist the memory of so sweet a face.

"She hates to remember that time," he told me, "and I want her to forget. As soon as that business of mine is settled—one way or the other—I want to take her away for a long rest in Italy or France. A honeymoon, with a little daughter, ready-made!"

He looked at me shyly, as though he had given himself away too much, and then laughed.

"You used to call me a sentimentalist! . . . Well, I haven't altered, you see."

"Good for you!" I told him, but I spoke insincerely. At the back of my mind was the nagging thought that this old friend of mine, with his idealism and sentiment, might get a worse blow from fate than the failure of this film picture. I was not so certain as he was of Hilda Freudenberg's purity of soul, though I hated myself for that suspicion and tried again to stifle it.

VII

Harshe came with me to that “Nacht Asyl” which young Winter had promised to show me as “the other side of the picture” in Berlin life. We agreed to dine afterwards at his father’s house off the Thiergarten. Some ladies would be there, and he had invited Hilda Freudenberg to join us. . . .

Looking back on that evening, I find it extraordinary that this chance visit to a night shelter in Berlin should have led to the most astonishing development in the drama of that “School of Courage” and the lives of its actors. Yet it is, as I have always found, by such accidental threads that the web of life is woven. They seem to join in a haphazard way, a stitch here, a stitch there, until one sees the pattern of that plot in which our human adventure is recorded. And behind it, surely, is Design—not merely chance. . . .

On the pavements were crowds of German Jews of the humblest class, haggling at wooden booths for cheap food and second-hand clothes. I noticed a number of young men still wearing the green tunics of war-time, without shoulder straps or buttons—six years after war! One of them was nearly run down by our car and Harshe drew his breath in sharply as we just dodged past him.

“Blind,” said Harshe. “One of the victims of war. Poor devil! . . .”

Young Winter laughed and studied Harshe’s face with a kind of admiration.

“You feel things still? That is wonderful! Most of us have given up pity and a sense of shame at life’s inequalities. If I hadn’t killed my conscience a long time ago I shouldn’t be driving through these slums in a high-powered car paid for by my rich, dishonest father.”

Harshe searched his face and his smiling eyes.

“I think your conscience is not quite so dead as you make out. I rather suspect you of sympathy and idealism.”

“You astound me!” said young Winter. “What makes you accuse me of weaknesses like that?”

“Because you’re taking us to the Nacht Asyl,” said Harshe, with a smile about his lips. “You want us to see the realities of poverty in Berlin. And I think you want to go there again for your own sake—to keep in touch with pity, and refresh your sympathy which seems stifled by a life of luxury. That’s how I read you. Excuse me if I’m wrong.”

He was uncannily right, as young Winter confessed to him with consternation.

“Yes, that place puts a spell on me. I’ve been there six times. The Director thinks I’m a philanthropist because I hand him out paper money. But it’s really a kind of morbid disgust at the contrast between my own life and the life of those poor wretches who are down and out. I should be one of them if my father didn’t pay me an allowance out of the monstrous profits of his slave-paid industry.”

A little later he gave us another glimpse of self-revelation.

“I’m a kind of Hamlet!”

“How’s that?” asked Harshe.

Young Winter lit a gold-tipped cigarette and developed his thesis.

“I feel myself torn at times by a moral conflict. On one side luxury, beauty, vice; on the other, a call to self-sacrifice and beautiful idealism!”

Harshe answered him in his own spirit of irony.

“You don’t answer the call?”

Winter shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

“Once or twice—in a low state of health—I’ve been seriously tempted towards idealism. But the mood passes, I return to the husks of the prodigal son.”

“You’re maligning yourself,” said Harshe. “I believe you’re a philanthropist.”

Hermann Winter wanted to know his reason for such an astounding assertion, and Harshe had a good one.

“One knows a man by his friends, and especially by his women friends. Hilda Freudenberg is dining with you to-night and she’s a shrewd judge of character.”

That remark silenced young Winter utterly. I saw him blush, though it was five o’clock on a winter’s afternoon and almost dark, except for the street lamps and a gleam of red in a stormy sky. After that he stared out of his car with an occasional sidelong glance at Harshe, who had become absorbed in his own thought, until we came to the Nacht Asyl.

It was an immense stone building divided into wings like a barracks, and I shall never forget my impression of that house of refuge for homeless folk. Inside the building, as on every night, were nearly five thousand men and women who were so utterly destitute, so irrevocably caught between the wheels of life’s industrial machine, that they had nothing between them and starvation but the little bowls of thin gruel which we saw delivered to them, and no shelter for their bodies but this free lodging where they lay in crowded quarters until, at six o’clock next morning, they were turned into the streets again.

It was the character of the people there, and their type of face, and the look in their eyes, that startled one and made one shudder. These were not the drunken and besotted crowd that one sees in free lodging-houses in other cities. Perhaps there were some of them there, but I saw mostly young men with good clean-cut features, and middle-aged men of respectable and even distinguished appearance, and elderly, bearded, white-headed men, who certainly at one time had known the refinements and decencies of life.

We stood outside one of the long dormitories in which four hundred men or so were densely crowded between lines of wooden bunks. Some of them were undressing. Others lay on their beds. Here and there a couple were playing cards. They had come in from rain-swept streets. Their clothes were steaming in a room unventilated by any open window, and warmed by central heating. It was suffocatingly hot, and a sickening stench of wet rags, human bodies, foul breath, struck me in the face as I stood there, so that I reeled back. From some of the beds came the sound of hacking coughs, rising above a murmur of conversation, and the restlessness of many feet.

“From what class do these men come?” asked Harshe.

The Director shut the door and locked it, and then answered.

“From every class! . . . professors, students, journalists, labourers, doctors, merchants, clerks, hawkers, mechanics—and aristocrats!”

Harshe raised his eyebrows, and repeated the word “aristocrats” with incredulity.

“Last week we had a Freiherr,” said the Director. “What you would call a Baron. . . . There are some of the people who were drowned by the floods of paper money that ruined many classes in Germany. Many of the young men here are unemployed and unemployable because as soldiers they learned no trade in time of war, and now can earn no living. This is the wreckage of a nation’s manhood. These are the human derelicts of our national defeat. Perhaps it is as bad in other countries. War made many victims among all the peoples. You have your own unemployed in England.”

Harshe gripped my arm, and whispered to me.

“This is another picture for my ‘School of Courage.’ Think of the tragic lives in these ghastly rooms—the adventures that brought them

here! This is a House of Despair."

He was very much affected, though he had waded through the misery of Europe after war, and he followed the Director with eager interest through the wash-houses and disinfecting rooms where the people who came in verminous—crawling with vermin—had their bodies and clothes cleansed. But I could see that it was the human side of the institution that held his interest—these people, their faces, their types, their eyes.

"They look at us as if they were in hell," he said once.

We went to room after room, eight or ten of these long dormitories, in which other men, hundreds of them, were undressing, coughing, talking, whispering, groaning, stifling and sweating, in a mass of human misery and dejection. They stared at us as we stood looking in upon them. I was aware of hostility in some of those eyes, and in others a sense of shyness and shame.

It was as we stood at the door of one of these rooms that Harshe gripped my arm again and whispered.

"Look! That young fellow—standing by the bed there. . . . How extraordinary! . . . Amazing!"

I saw the man at whom he was gazing. It was a young man, with a dead-white face and black hair. One lock fell over his forehead. He was staring at us with a kind of sullen disdain. There was a look in his eyes that reminded me of an animal behind the bars of a zoo, stared at by a holiday crowd.

"Who is he?" I asked.

Harshe whispered his reply.

"A Russian, certainly. And remarkably like Anton Rosen. The same type, anyhow. With a little grease-paint——"

Some idea seemed to excite him.

"By Jove, yes! . . . If he could act—or let me coach him—I could replace that swine who let us down. It would save shooting those scenes again."

He spoke to the Director, glancing from time to time at the young man in that suffocating room with its crowd of bed-fellows from the underworld.

"Certainly!" said the Director. "Let me speak to him."

He went into the room alone and we saw him go up to the young man and talk to him. He looked startled—almost afraid I thought—and shrank behind a group of men. But presently, with evident reluctance, and a timid look in his eyes, he came with the Director to the door.

Harshe spoke to him in German, very courteously.

"May I have a word with you?"

The young man looked at him with moody eyes.

"What for?"

"If you are wanting work and a good wage, I might help you," said Harshe. "Are you a Russian, by any chance?"

For a moment the young man did not answer. He seemed to suspect some trap, and I wondered if he were afraid of the police for some crime which had brought him to this Nacht Asyl as a good hiding-place. He was certainly a gentleman, or had been one. I noticed his delicate hands and his fine haggard features. It was no peasant or labourer who stood before us.

"I am a Russian," he said, after that hesitation. "What, then?"

Harshe explained his purpose simply and briefly.

"I am producing a film picture which deals with Moscow. I want a Russian of your type. I'll pay you twenty marks a day for a week, if you'll let me teach you how to act a bit. Does the idea appeal to you?"

It did not appeal rapidly. It seemed to take some time for the man's mind to grasp the meaning of this astounding offer. Then he answered with a slow smile softening the line of his mouth.

"There are many men here who would sell their souls for twenty marks a day. I will sell my face for that, if it's any use to you."

"And your figure," said Harshe. "It's the way you stand and move. Exactly right. Against a white wall——"

The young Russian started, and then laughed with a note of irony.

"A good many Russians have stood, against white walls. In Moscow and other places."

"Yes," said Harshe, "that's what I mean. It comes into my film picture."

He gave the address of the Zeppelin shed to his new acquaintance and asked him to be there at a certain time. Then I saw him hold out some paper money.

The young Russian didn't take it at once.

"I haven't earned it yet," he said. "I may be a failure at the job, as I've failed in most others."

He looked back into the long dormitory from which the human stench enveloped us. Then he took the money and said, "I'll do my best."

Harshe's eyes lighted up.

"Good! . . . And now you might give me your name."

The young Russian hesitated again and then gave a name which Harshe scribbled on a card. At the time I didn't hear it, but now I know it was "Serge Detloff."

We left him standing there in the corridor, a tall figure with a tragic, handsome face.

In the car on the way back to the centre of Berlin, Hermann Winter told us a surprising thing.

"I've seen that Russian before. One can't forget a face like that. . . . He was a waiter in some restaurant down the Leipsigerstrasse. Yes, I remember! He spilled some soup over me one evening and I made a row about it, so that he got the sack! He was rather insolent, I remember, and I liked him for it. It's the best prerogative of a gentleman when he's down and out."

Harshe was amused by this story, but suggested that Winter's "row" about the soup had probably been the reason why he had found the man in the Nacht Asyl.

"Anyhow, it's my luck," he said. "He's just the height and figure of Anton Rosen. And the same type of face. If he can only act a bit I can finish the last scenes and nobody will guess the change of actors."

Then he gave a quick sigh which ended in a laugh.

"I'm talking as if I had the cash! . . . And I haven't got a hope."

I looked over at Hermann Winter. He made no sign that any capital might come from him.

But that evening Harshe had all the money he wanted, and Hermann Winter was promised his reward.

VIII

By the sudden breakdown of a wrist-watch I made a mistake in the time and was the first to arrive—twenty minutes too soon—at the house of old Otto Winter, after dressing for dinner.

It was in a turning off the Thiergarten—a fine, square-built mansion standing in a garden with wrought-iron gates. Two footmen in plain livery let me into the hall—a spacious place with pillars of dark marble and a statue of Mercury in the centre on a high pedestal. An elderly man, who would have looked like an English family butler if he had not been more like a German sergeant-major who had grown side-whiskers for a peace-time job, approached me with a grave bow and intimated that I was a little in advance of time.

The *geehrte Herr* Winter, he told me, was upstairs, dressing, but would no doubt be down in a few minutes.

He showed me into a handsome salon, divided by curtains from another room beyond, and directed my attention to a box of cigarettes on a little table. I took advantage of the offer, and while I smoked one of the cigarettes, strolled about the room, looking at the furniture and pictures. They were worth looking at, from the marvellous candelabra in Venetian glass, of the Renaissance period, to the Flemish tapestries and Persian rugs. Old Otto Winter was a man of taste, it seemed, besides being the greatest power in German industry. The pictures were all by great masters, and certainly originals. There was a superb Greuze and some Italian primitives, and one beautiful work belonging to the school of Giorgione. I had come almost straight from the Nacht Asyl to this private palace, and the contrast was rather overwhelming. In this Germany of a Versailles Treaty and a Dawes Report there were the extremes of luxury and misery, and between those extremes every grade of economic conditions from underpaid labour and middle-class suffering to the fortunes of the profiteers, dodging their taxes, refusing to pay reparations, stirring up the militarist spirit for a future war of revenge.

While I was busy with these thoughts I was startled by the voices of a man and woman speaking in the room beyond the heavy curtains. I recognized the voices of Hermann Winter and Hilda Freudenberg. They had come in through a door farther down the hall.

“Put your cloak here, *gnädiges Fräulein*,” said young Winter, speaking in German. “We can talk a little before the others come.”

There was a moment’s silence, and I wondered whether I should go to the curtains and announce my presence. But I expected that Hermann Winter would bring Hilda Freudenberg into the salon where I stood. They began to speak in low tones until I think they must have moved closer to the curtains. Then the lady spoke a sentence which I heard quite clearly.

“Then your father will advance the money?”

“Yes,” said Winter. “I’m expecting a final telegram. I’ve explained the whole scheme, and the old man seems satisfied.”

I heard him strike a match and then laugh quietly before he spoke again.

“I haven’t told him my motive for going into the film industry. . . . That romantic little bargain we have made! . . . My wonderful reward!”

Hilda Freudenberg’s voice trembled a little as she answered.

“I will keep my side of the bargain. But I want you to understand. It will be friendship, but not love. If you want me on those terms——”

I was in the unhappy position of being an eavesdropper against my will, and the words I had heard were disturbing and alarming. I strode quickly towards the door, but before I left the room Hermann Winter spoke again, with a thrill in his voice.

“On any terms. . . . Your beauty and your grace——”

I went out of the room with a feeling of guilt at having heard so much. In the hall Harshe was arriving with Robin Dale and some of Winter’s other guests. We were announced together, and Harshe, in his simple way, did not seem at all surprised to find Hilda Freudenberg already in the room with Hermann Winter. He kissed her hand with his usual reverence and was not aware of the unusual pallor of her face. It was only I, and Hermann Winter, who knew that she was saving his “movie” at the cost of herself . . . and I hated to know.

Harshe was astounded, delighted, and deeply moved when, towards the end of the chic little dinner, Hermann Winter rose from his chair, holding a telegram which had just been handed to him on a silver tray, and made a speech in his excellent imitation of Oxford English.

“I am very happy to say that I have prevailed on my dishonest but affectionate father to provide the extra capital which Mr. Harshe needs for the completion of his artistic enterprise. Here is a telegram in which he gives me that authority. It took a bit of doing, as I must admit. The old gentleman in the midst of his wage-slaves at Essen suspected me of wanting to blow his money on—well—frivolous purposes. It is only recently that he paid my racing debts and other little expenses of a careless and futile life! He has, you see, some reasons for suspicion, as I frankly confess. But when I persuaded him that it was for a business proposition out of which he might get considerable profits for his cash, he was delighted to think that at last his prodigal son had turned over a new leaf and was true to the family instinct for making money. . . . Well, that’s how it happened! . . . It’s a real pleasure to me to be the means of saving a work of art which may be a powerful influence towards world peace, and is, anyhow, filled with beauty and grace because of those who move through the pictures. . . . Mr. Harshe! I am very proud, sir, to be, in this slight, material way, your collaborator and assistant.”

I need not give Harshe’s reply, his astonishment, his gratitude, his idealism, his joy that the work of all his artists should be rewarded, as it would be, by world recognition of their genius and beauty.

I was watching Hilda Freudenberg curiously, not without pity, and I saw there, in her wonderful eyes, the sadness, and yet the joy also, of a woman who had made a great sacrifice for the sake of a man she loved beyond her own happiness. Her eyes were on Harshe’s face, and as he spoke of his joy and gratitude, they were luminous with an inner light which seemed to me mystical. For a moment I fancied she might be going to faint, because of her pallor and emotion, and Hermann Winter was also watching her, I noticed, with anxiety, but she smiled and her face flushed when Harshe, in his speech, turned to her for a moment and spoke of how much he owed to her beauty and talent in the pictures which would now be completed.

Old Otto Winter’s servants had provided a rich banquet for us. His footman filled our glasses. After dinner the guests danced in the salon where I had heard a conversation not meant for my ears, and Harshe, seeing the fulfilment of his life’s ambition, was in a gay mood and unsuspicious of any tragic price to pay for the success that was within his reach at last. Robin Dale was in high spirits, as usual, only clouded now and then by the remembrance that Rosaline was not there to tease him. He played the jester with his usual charm, but I missed the point of his jokes because of that bargain between Hermann Winter and the lady upon whom Harshe had set his heart. She was dancing with him for the last time that night, and young Winter watched them with a smile, without jealousy.

IX

There was a great scene of enthusiasm when Harshe called his crowd together again in the old Zeppelin shed outside Berlin, and announced the glad tidings that he had sufficient capital to finish the story and pay them their arrears of wages. They cheered him tumultuously, and some of the women kissed his hands in their foreign way, much to his embarrassment, as he was essentially shy. Hermann Winter was there for the first time as part proprietor, and was very much amused with that glimpse of "movie" life behind the scenes. He had driven out with Hilda Freudenberg, but soon after her arrival she had gone to her dressing-room, from which she did not appear again until her call came in the afternoon.

I spent some time with Harshe in his private room, going through a section of the scenario which wanted, he thought, some alterations to lead more directly to a dramatic climax, and we hammered at some ideas together. After that he left me, to arrange about the lighting of the big scene he was arranging to "shoot" that afternoon, and I worked for a couple of hours in his room on the last part of the scenario in which there were one or two weak points.

After that I went round to Robin Dale's dressing-room for a little conversation and a nip of his excellent whisky, and found that young man with all his make-up on ready for an immediate appearance before the camera.

"This is a great day," he said, bringing up a cane chair and making room for me in his den. "Dear old Gilbert has all the money he wants, little Rosaline is crawling back to health. 'God's in His heaven, all's right with the world'!"

He poured out some whisky and made a slight amendment to his rosy view of life.

"Barring one or two mysterious and unhappy episodes which spoil the comedy of life to a sensitive soul like mine."

I inquired his meaning, and he lowered his voice.

"If there's one thing I hate, it's to see a woman in tears. It distresses me abominably, brutal fellow though I be."

"Who's been crying?" I asked.

He told me that he had gone to pass the time of day with Hilda Freudenberg, and had found her with her head down on her dressing-table, crying her heart out.

"Not even the sight of my bonny face cheered her up," said Robin. "None of my little witticisms could get a smile out of her. . . . Joking apart, I feel rather hipped about it. She's a charming little lady, and I hate to see her so sorry for herself."

I did not answer, but sat puffing at a cigarette. I was wondering whether Hilda Freudenberg was weakening about that bargain of hers with Hermann Winter.

Young Robin was watching my face, I found. He asked a question which rather embarrassed me.

"Is there anything happening between Hilda and our new financier—that Winter fellow?"

"What makes you think so?" I asked evasively.

Robin Dale said he couldn't help noticing things, putting two and two together, and so on. For instance, upon leaving Hilda Freudenberg's room he had run into young Winter, who asked the way to her dressing-room. Having left her in tears like that, Robin wanted to save her from casual visitors.

"She's not very well," he said, "and wants to be left alone."

Winter had not taken the hint. He had the cheek to suggest that the lady would be glad to see him.

"I think not," said young Dale. . . . "I'll inquire."

He tapped at Hilda Freudenberg's door again, and when she answered opened it slightly and said, "Someone to see you. If you're too tired ——"

Hermann Winter called out to her, "It is I, Hilda!" and after a moment's silence she asked him to come in.

"A snub for me!" said Robin.

"They're old friends," I told him, but he could see that I was troubled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't like his air of proprietorship. Of course we're glad of his money, but he hasn't bought the crowd. If he tries to come into Rosaline's room without an invitation, I'll spoil that good-looking face of his."

It was rather inconsistent of him that after that speech he suggested that we should go along to Rosaline's room and congratulate her on her return to health. As a matter of fact she did not look enormously strong, and I ventured to rebuke her for coming out too soon. But she would have none of that, and was in a laughing mood as usual.

"I've slept for a week! I feel like a giant refreshed. If you want to see some wonderful acting this afternoon——"

I should have liked to have seen it, but I had work to do in Berlin, and after a merry lunch with the boy and girl who slanged each other like Beatrice and Benedick, left the Zeppelin shed and drove back to the city, thereby missing an extraordinary drama which was not in the scenario of "The School of Courage." . . .

It was Robin Dale who described it to me that evening when he came to my hotel with a strange excitement in his eyes.

"I've something to tell you," he said. "You'll never believe it. It beats everything. . . . Incredible and amazing!"

It was some time before I could get him to tell me a straight story, after a series of exclamations which conveyed nothing. Then it all came out, and I remember his words almost as he spoke them.

"It was after that lunch we had. . . . Things went wrong with the lights. They always do. . . . I wandered about with that deadly boredom which is the special disease of the movie trade, and stood among the crowd watching a scene being shot. Harshe was there, of course, and busy as usual, with a megaphone in one hand, and that look of intensity which he always wears when he is in the midst of production.

"He was putting the new Russian through his paces. The fellow was made up exactly like Anton Rosen in his big scene outside the Kremlin, and I swear to goodness I couldn't tell the difference! As like as two peas. And he was playing his part jolly well. It's where he's arrested as a Russian aristocrat and nearly torn to bits by a crowd of Russian Bolsheviki.

"He looked the part perfectly, a haughty young swine, hiding the fear in his eyes—disdainful of the rabble, and yet scared. Harshe was pleased with him. 'That's good,' he smiled. 'Well done, Detloff! Hold it like that!'

"Then suddenly he turned to Hahn, the assistant producer, and said, 'Where's Miss Freudenberg? She comes on here.'

"Hahn shouted out her name, but of course there was no answer, as she was still in her dressing-room. . . . I noticed something go wrong with that Russian fellow, the new man. He dropped his pose and looked as startled as a rabbit. His hand went to the place where his heart ought to be, and he held on to a bit of scenery. I thought 'What's the matter with the fellow? Everybody seems very edgy to-day!' Then I heard Harshe say that he would go for Miss Freudenberg himself, and saw him stride away.

"He was away for quite a time, while the scene was held up. The young Russian was whispering to two other men of his own race. They all

looked excited about something, as though a miracle had happened. Then Harshe came back, followed by Hilda and young Winter. Harshe was looking like nothing on earth, with all the spirit dead in his eyes, if you know what I mean. Like a fellow who has had a knock-out blow. He must have overheard something between young Winter and Hilda, something that had hit him pretty hard. Or they must have told him something. But he pulled himself together and spoke in his usual business-like way. 'Now we'll shoot the new scene. . . . That lighting is all wrong! . . . Miss Freudenberg, stand here, please. Detloff, you go to meet the woman who rescues you. You wipe the blood out of your eyes. You stagger a little. . . .'

"The young Russian staggered a little, but not because Harshe told him to. He was staring at Hilda like a madman—clean daft! Then he called out her name in a strangled sort of way.

"Hilda was staring back at him as though she saw a ghost. Her face frightened me. . . . She gave a queer cry, which froze me to the marrow bones. Then she went forward a little, seemed to turn dizzy, swayed, and fell bang on the floor, with a frightful whack."

Young Robin halted in his story and drew a deep breath, as though seeing that fall again, and sickening at the sound of it.

I sat forward, listening to the strangest story I have ever heard, incredible but for its truth, and impossible except in Europe after war and revolution.

"What happened then?" I asked.

Robin talked like a man who sees the thing he tells.

"The young Russian went down on his knees before her. He lifted up her head, and kissed her white lips. He was whimpering and dropping tears on her face. Harshe seized him by the shoulders and shook him and said, 'What the hell——!' Young Winter stood by looking scared. All the crowd gathered round, not knowing what to make of things. Who could? . . .

"It was Harshe who carried her back to her dressing-room, like a child. Then young Winter turned to the Russian who was still on his knees, and asked a question. I didn't hear the question. I only heard the answer."

Robin Dale was silent again. Then he gave a queer laugh and said, "You wouldn't guess the answer in a thousand years."

As a matter of fact I guessed, though it seemed impossible.

"What was the answer?" I asked.

Robin told me what I had guessed.

" 'She's my wife,' said the man, and after that began to jabber things I couldn't hear. . . ."

That was the story that Robin Dale told me of the scene in the studio that day. There had been no more work done, and Robin had driven back to Berlin, with Rosaline, who was vastly excited.

I made only one comment on this amazing narrative. It came from my heart.

"Poor old Harshe!" I said.

Robin nodded agreement.

"Pretty rough!" he answered. "First she sells him for the son of Otto Winter, and then she springs a husband on him. . . . With the face of a Madonna!"

Robin's judgment was too severe, for I knew that Hilda Freudenberg had made her bargain with Hermann Winter not for wantonness or greed but so that Harshe, who loved her, might fulfil his great ideal and win success. It was to pay him back by a loyalty that would break his heart—so strange are women!

X

I think Harshe must have walked all the way back to Berlin that evening—it was a good ten miles—for when I met him in the hall of the Esplanade Hotel he looked dog-tired and his boots were covered with dust.

“Can you come up to my room?” he asked. “I want a yarn with you.”

He spoke in a normal tone of voice, but I could see that he was suffering from some mental shock, and when we had gone into his room he took no notice of me for a few minutes, but paced up and down with a gloomy frown on his forehead. Then he turned to me with an apologetic laugh and said:

“Sorry for being uncivil. Have a drink, won’t you?”

I shook my head.

“I don’t want a drink. I want to know what’s happened. You don’t seem pleased with things.”

He smiled faintly at that remark of mine, and there was a flash of humour in his eyes for a second before the haggard look came back.

“A man isn’t pleased with things when he’s in the middle of a moral hell.”

“As bad as that?” I asked.

Harshe seemed to search for the exact truth.

“Well,” he said, “I don’t want to play the wounded egoist. That part doesn’t suit me. But two things have happened to-day which have knocked me edgewise for a time. I’m telling you because I want your advice as a good pal.”

I told him that he could count on my friendship anyhow, whatever the value of my advice.

He plunged abruptly into the middle of the tale.

“You know how young Winter persuaded his father to put up some money to finish my show?”

I nodded, and reminded him that I had been at the dinner when that fact was announced.

“Well,” said Harshe, “I thought it was a young man’s generosity. An interest in art. A sporting offer. Simple fellow, wasn’t I?”

“What was his motive?” I asked, concealing my own knowledge, which I had gained behind some heavy curtains.

“I’ll tell you,” said Harshe. His voice changed and hardened. “It was to buy the favour of the girl I happened to love. Hilda Freudenberg, with the Madonna-like face, whom I had idealized, put on a pedestal, reverenced—in my simple, sentimental way!”

He laughed bitterly, and began to pace up and down the room again, and then stopped and spoke huskily.

“She was late for her call this morning. I went to her room to fetch her. Hermann Winter was there, holding her hand. I said, ‘What in hell are you doing? Clear out or I’ll hit you!’ ”

“And did he clear out?”

Harshe allowed his lips to smile, but there was no mirth in his eyes.

“It appeared that he had a right to be there. He told me that Hilda had promised to be his wife. . . . His wife he said, not his mistress! The fellow is a humorist, you see.”

Harshe laughed horribly, as though he saw a deadly humour in his words.

He told me that when he turned to Hilda and asked her whether it was true she confirmed the fact all right. She had promised Winter.

“So that’s that!” said Harshe.

I was silent for a while and then put my hand on his shoulder with a friendly touch.

“Do you know why she promised him?” I asked.

He answered with a shrug of the shoulders.

“Young Winter is the son of the richest man in Germany. An excellent reason. Also she was his mistress before I knew her. Another good reason!”

His voice rose to a higher pitch in sudden anger.

“Can I doubt what that Russian fellow said? Anton Rosen, whom I called a liar. Why, it’s obvious! I was blinded by her innocent eyes. She was like the rest of them in that stinking cabaret—rotten to the soul!”

I kept my hand on his shoulder, though he tried to shake it off.

“Steady, old man! Play fair! You may be doing the lady a damned injustice. I think you are. I swear to God you are!”

He looked at me with a gloomy surprise.

“What do you know about it? What’s your idea?”

I spoke with a conviction that shook him and startled him.

“You’ve got it all wrong. There’s no proof at all that Hilda Freudenberg was young Winter’s mistress. I don’t believe it. I utterly refuse to believe it. There’s a look in her eyes—anyhow, I can tell you this as the truth. She doesn’t care two pins for Hermann Winter, beyond a little friendship. She wants to sacrifice herself for your sake—to pay you back for your kindness, to give you the chance of winning success. It’s her idea of loyalty. All wrong—but somehow with divine unselfishness!”

Harshe stared at me with a searching intensity.

“Good God!” he whispered. “If I could believe that——”

I assured him, with a faith that was quite sincere.

“I’m certain of it. I know it. It was her love-offering to you, old man! . . . The price of success for ‘The School of Courage.’ ”

Harshe stood there with his head bent, staring at the pattern of the carpet. It was quite a time before he answered me and then he laughed.

“It sounds good, what you say! I’d like to believe it. I’d go down on both knees—anyhow, it doesn’t make much difference now. I forgot to tell you. Something else happened! There’s a man who says he has a prior claim.”

“I heard about it,” I said. “The man from the Nacht Asyl. I can’t believe it.”

Harshe was not so unbelieving. There was nothing that couldn’t happen in modern Europe. The things that he had seen and heard since the War made fools of fiction writers. And then he said something that sounded a little mystical.

“I was guided to the Nacht Asyl. It wasn’t by accident I went there with you. Those things are arranged.”

“By whom?” I asked, and he looked at me strangely and said:

“By the Providence of the funny old film drama which is human life.”

We were silent after that, and Harshe dropped into a chair with an air of weariness, and sat there with his chin on his chest, until, after ten minutes or more, he spoke again in great dejection.

“I’m finished this time. It’s the end of my hopes, and the end of my film.”

I couldn't see it, and told him so, which made him a little angry because of my density.

"Haven't I told you? Do you think I can take Winter's money now that I know his motive for lending it? And do you think he's going to pay up, anyhow, now that he has been cheated out of his passion by a husband from the Nacht Asyl?"

Strangely enough, as it seemed, it was young Winter himself who answered that question. He sent up his card and asked the favour of a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Harshe. He would also be favoured, he said, if he could bring up Mr. Serge Detloff, who was deeply anxious for an interview.

"Tell them to go to hell!" said Harshe, with more violence than I have ever heard him use. For a moment he was out of control because of his stress of emotion and jangled nerves.

Then suddenly his old will power and his sense of chivalry prevailed over that passion and he spoke quietly to the page boy, in German.

"Ask the gentlemen to come up."

To me he explained his change of mind.

"It's only fair to see them. . . . And anyhow, I want to know the truth of things."

I had no right to be in that room as a witness of the scene that followed. I was not involved in the relations of any of these people. It was no business of mine. I was merely an onlooker of this little drama of life behind the scenes of an unfinished "movie." And yet I was glad when Harshe said, "Stay!" as I was about to leave the room when the door opened and Winter stood there with the young Russian whom I had first seen in the Nacht Asyl.

Hermann Winter was the only man among us perfectly at ease, and, I think, slightly amused with the situation. Very calmly he laid his hat and stick down on the table and drew off his fawn-coloured gloves, while he explained the object of his visit.

"I think this conversation is necessary. It affects the happiness and reputation of a lady for whom we all have a high regard."

Harshe's brows drew together and he answered icily.

"I do not discuss any lady's reputation. If you have something to say about the money your father promised to put into my film production ——"

Young Winter made a quick gesture as though waving out that idea.

"That is of no account at the moment. This is not a money matter. It is a question of—shall I say high morality?"

He smiled amiably at Harshe, who responded with a glare and some very sharp words.

"I do not admit your authority on that subject."

Hermann Winter started and flushed a little, and then laughed good-temperedly.

"No, I admit that I am not a saint or a Puritan. Still I have moments of—let me say sensibility, ordinary human decency."

There was a moment's silence, broken by Harshe, impatiently.

"What's all this about? Why have you brought that young man with you? . . . Does he bring any proof of his claim to be—what he says he is?"

For the first time the young Russian spoke.

"I have no proofs, sir. Not here in Berlin."

"Where then?" asked Harshe.

"In Vienna," said the Russian. "We were married after the War when I escaped from Russia. My father was Prince Mikhailoff."

Harshe answered with a sarcasm which I think was only a mask for his emotion.

"All Russians are the sons of princes. There must have been ninety-nine millions of them."

The young Russian smiled.

"It seems so in Berlin and other cities. But I cannot help being the son of my father. It would have been better if I hadn't been. . . . In the Russia of Lenin."

"You left Vienna?" asked Harshe, with less intolerance in his voice, as though the story of suffering stamped on the young man's face touched his sympathy a little.

"A few months after my marriage," said Serge Detloff, as he called himself. "I went back to Moscow to rescue my mother, but I was arrested by her death-bed. That scene in your film-picture against a white wall! During those years in prison I saw many men shot against a white wall, through the bars of my little window."

"But they didn't shoot *you*!" said Harshe, rather brutally I thought, though I made allowance for the stress under which he was suffering.

"They took pity on my youth," said Detloff. "I was only twenty when I was put into prison."

Harshe said something in a low voice which I thought was more in character than the stern words he had spoken.

"You have suffered, if what you say is true."

"Yes," said the young Russian gravely, "I have known suffering."

It was Hermann Winter who broke the silence that followed again.

"I must vouch for something which our friend here did not know. It was published in the papers that Prince Mikhailoff and his son had been shot by order of the Cheka. It is true that the Prince was shot, though the son was spared. You see there was every reason for the lady who had married that boy to believe in his death."

Harshe stared at young Winter and then at the Russian as though he searched for the truth in them.

The young Russian moved forward a little into the room and spoke in a curious monotone.

"In my prison, where I lay in dirt and lice, I lived only in remembrance. I had only the memory of my wife and our dear love. I thought of her beauty, her grace. . . . You cannot imagine, sir——"

"I think I can," said Harshe gently, and then suddenly the young man burst into tears, leaning against the wall with his arm across his face, as, perhaps, he had leant against that prison wall in Moscow.

It was Hermann Winter who broke the silence that followed. He spoke to Harshe in a quiet, unaffected voice.

"I think it's true, all that. From what he tells me, he escaped from Russia a year ago, and searched for his wife in Vienna, and here, in Berlin. . . . He found her to-day! It would have been sad for him if he had found her—a little later. . . . Perhaps after all we did well in going to the Nacht Asyl that night! It is possible that 'Herr Gott' had something to do with it—though I speak as an infidel! Who knows?"

He smiled, as though speaking flippantly, though I think he was serious, and took up his hat and gloves, as though going at once. But he had something else to say, and I am glad he said it.

"It was a little caddish, you think, that I should use my money, as the son of a rich man, to persuade a certain lady to be my wife. . . . I said wife, sir, and not mistress, strange as it may seem! . . . Yes, I admit that. The strange passion we call love makes men rather—caddish—

sometimes. Men like me without morality! But the lady—our beautiful Hilda—there was a very generous spirit behind her promise to me. It was her loyalty to you that made her accept me as her partner. Can friendship go further than that? I was jealous of you, because of that! To have a friend like that I would go willingly to the Nacht Asyl!"

I saw a tide of colour sweep into Harshe's face, and then ebb and leave him pale. It was caused by the shame of his unbelief in the woman he loved.

Hermann Winter moved towards the door, and said a few words more, in a genial, casual way.

"Of course that money will be all right. Good luck to the 'movie'!"

He held out his hand with a friendly gesture and said:

"*Auf wiedersehen!*"

Harshe hesitated, looked at young Winter in a troubled way, and then took the offered hand.

"I've been an egoist!" he said, with a strange humility.

XI

When Hermann Winter had left the room, Harshe remained standing for a moment holding the lapels of his coat in both hands and looking at the young Russian at the other end of the room, with his back to the window, so that his face was in shadow.

A cloud seemed to have lifted from Harshe's face. It looked serene again, and there was the old friendly light back in his eyes. I think the restoration of his faith in Hilda Freudenberg's purity of soul had overwhelmed the selfish passion of his desire for her. He had accused himself of egoism, but I have never met a man of so strong a character who had so little selfishness. Certainly at that moment, after the struggle which had torn and tortured him, he put self on one side and reached beyond it to human charity.

He went over to the young Russian, and put his hand on his shoulder.

"I believe your story," he said simply. "It's God's luck that you've found your wife again—after all this time. I'll ring up to her room. If she's well enough——"

He crossed over to the wall where the telephone was fixed, but before he took off the receiver, Serge Detloff, as he had called himself, and as his name appears in "The School of Courage," strode towards him quickly and spoke eagerly in his broken English, which I only faintly reproduce.

"Sir, a moment, please! I wish to say something which lies much on my heart."

He breathed heavily, and I could see that he was terribly excited.

Harshe moved away from the window and said, "We are friends here."

Serge Detloff had some difficulty in finding his words, not for lack of English, I think, but because what he wanted to say was a supreme act of sacrifice, hard to make and hard to say.

"It is like this. I do not wish to behave like a brutal fellow. It is possible that I come back too late, that I find my little wife too late. In that case I go away again. Back to the Nacht Asyl—if you will. It is perhaps better so!"

Harshe's eyes flashed across to mine. He seemed to ask whether I was as much astounded as himself.

"I don't get your meaning," he said.

The young Russian threw his hair back from his forehead as though to clear his mind.

"It is not easy to give my meaning—though it is clear in my heart. Down in the underworld—that hell!—I have been alone with my thoughts, always thinking of life, trying to see the truth of things, to find the purpose of life itself. There is not much in it, except perhaps love. I see nothing else but that. I do not wish to claim a love which may not be mine, or to spoil a love which may belong to others. You see?"

Harshe answered after a moment's puzzled thought.

"No, I don't see."

The young Russian made a gesture of despair.

"How can I say? It is plain to me. I have stared at it for seven years. I have tried to get courage to meet it and accept it. All that time I was a prisoner I thought. A year goes by, and I think of nothing but my little wife. Perhaps for six months she thinks of me, remembers our love, yearns for me. After that she begins to forget! She meets other men, kind, human, alive, while I am dead. Then two years, while I am still dead. Then later, four, five, six—oh, Christ!—seven years. I grow more dead and dead in prison. She thinks me dead. She remembers with a little sigh—our passing love. But in the world she is young, gay, wanting love. I search for her when I come out. Search until I weep and weaken because I do not find her. But all the time I am afraid of finding her. . . . You understand? I am filled with fear to find her."

The fear was in his eyes now, visible, and I think I understood. But Harshe seemed perplexed, and said:

"What fear? Why should you have been afraid?"

Serge Detloff put his hand up to his head, and then let it drop.

"It was seven years," he said. "That is time to live again, after a few weeks of marriage. A beautiful girl need not wait so long. It would be cruelty. There was a poem I read about a shipwrecked sailor. You know it? He came back to find his woman married to another. He went away and drowned himself, I think. That was best. . . . But you understand my fear? Perhaps I come back too late, like that sailor."

Harshe and I were silent. I do not think I have ever been so moved by any spoken words. I understood the tragic fear in this man's mind, after all that agony of waiting and searching for this girl who had been his dream in prison, and in that Nacht Asyl.

He spoke again, with that direct simplicity of his.

"You have been kind to me, sir, and I am grateful. If it happens that I arrive too late for my wife's love, because perhaps it is you she loves, I will go without any kind of trouble. After five years I have no claim. I am still a gentleman, I hope. In my mind, I mean."

He looked down at his shabby clothes as though they disguised his claim to be a gentleman.

Harshe strode over to him and put his arm around him, with sudden emotion and almost fatherly sympathy.

"My dear lad! . . . You needn't worry your head as far as I'm concerned. Your wife and I are good friends. I shall always be proud and glad of that. . . . Seven years is a long time! Good God! But I think she has waited for you—kept herself for you. . . . I hope you've come back in time!"

"How can I know?" asked Serge Detloff.

"Ask her," said Harshe, and he laughed sincerely for the first time since his walk back to Berlin.

He went to the telephone and rang up a room.

It was Rosaline Brook who answered, as afterwards I learnt.

"How is Hilda?" asked Harshe.

I did not hear the answer, but only Harshe's comment, which was "Good!"

He hesitated for a moment, and then spoke again.

"Ask her to come down to my room. Or shall we come up. There's someone here who wants to see her. It is the young Russian whom she saw to-day at the studio. If she wants to see him again—if she is well enough, I mean—he is waiting in my room."

He held on to the receiver and listened, and then put it down and turned to Serge Detloff.

"She is coming," he said.

I saw a kind of thrill pass through the young Russian. His dark eyes were luminous, but his face was dead white.

"We'll leave you," said Harshe, and he beckoned to me. But Serge shook his head, and said, "No, no! . . . Please!"

We waited for what might have been two minutes. It seemed like half an hour. Perhaps to the young Russian it seemed like eternity, though he stood motionless, hardly breathing, with his head slightly raised.

Then the door opened, and Rosaline Brook held it so that Hilda Freudenberg could pass her.

She too was white, and she looked at the man who was her husband as though he had come back from the dead. She came forward a little and then stood still with a strange, troubled smile.

"Serge!" she said in a low voice. "My dearest love!"

The young man went towards her, and dropped down on his knees and wept over her hands which he clasped and kissed.

Harshe beckoned to me again, and Rosaline took his hand, and we went out of the room, leaving those two alone.

"Not too late, after all," said Harshe. "Well . . . I'm glad."

It was in London that I saw the first production of that film called "The School of Courage." The spectators followed its drama with intense interest, moved by emotion at this sweeping picture of all the human agony, hope, disillusion, and sacrifice that had followed in the wake of war and revolution. I don't know whether they understood its plea for greater charity. It doesn't seem to have changed the heart of the world! . . .

I saw more than they did. Those faces on the screen were the people I had met. Their story was more vivid to me than the drama in which they acted. I was aware of their share in "The School of Courage," which is life. Out in the street again I took off my hat to the "movie" crowd, and especially to Gilbert Harshe, who had not been seen at all upon the screen.

THE SIGN OF THE CROOKÉD CROSS

It was a tragedy, like that of Romeo and Juliet—children of rival houses between whom there could be no open marriage—when Rita von Falckenstein and Max Hoffmann looked into each other's eyes and knew that they loved each other. The hostility that divided them was older and deeper in its traditions than the enmity between the families of those mediæval lovers. It was racial, religious, and social—tremendous barriers between two human hearts eager for union. . . .

And it was in Vienna after the War.

The first time that Rita von Falckenstein met the man who became her lover was on an autumn evening when she had finished her long day as a school teacher and was waiting for a tramcar to go home. It was a wet day and the rain was whipping the pavement outside the big square building in which she had been giving lessons to tired children—some of them underfed and most of them hostile to the knowledge she was trying to dint into their wretched little heads from her text-book of geography. Her own head was aching. Several times she had thought of her own childhood before the War and the downfall of Austria, when she had been an elegant little creature, spoilt by an English governess, and petted by all the servants in a big house. She had never dreamed then that one day she would be earning a miserable wage by teaching slum children with unclean heads. All the dreams of her girlhood so rose-tinted had been dispelled by grey reality. Life was squalid now, and unromantic, and poverty-stricken.

She stood, holding up a flimsy frock, by the "halt" where the trams stopped to take up passengers. But it was a hopeless situation. Tram after tram passed over-crowded with shop girls and factory workers, without a chance of a place. There was a queue of damp people waiting under umbrellas. They tried to push on, but the conductors shouted to them harshly: "Full up! Keep away there!" She had left her waterproof at home, trusting a false gleam of early morning sunshine. Her frock was getting soaked and she had a hole in her right boot through which the water squelched. There were tears of vexation in her eyes as another tram passed full up as usual.

Then somebody spoke to her. It was a man's voice, kind and polite, over her left shoulder.

"Won't you stand under this umbrella?"

She turned quickly and saw a young man with a waterproof coat tucked up under his chin and a felt hat pressed over his forehead. He was tall, with a serious, good-looking face, clean-shaven, with dark eyes which looked into hers as he held his umbrella over her head and said: "Allow me! . . . It's a filthy night."

Rita's mother had warned her solemnly about talking to strangers. She had told her many times that the young men of Vienna after the War were dissolute and demoralized. A young girl like Rita going in the tramcars every day would have to be very careful.

"*Dank schön*," said Rita with another glance at the tall young man. He looked harmless, and his umbrella would be a comfort.

She stood there close to him for a few moments, and by turning her head ever so little saw his face touched by the light of the street lamp. He had a delicate, finely cut profile, she thought, and he looked serious and rather worried.

"This is disgusting!" he said, as another tram passed laden with wet people. Then he laughed as though he saw some humour in the situation, though Rita could not perceive it.

"There's a good meal waiting for me at home and I'm hungry after a hard day's work. . . . I'm going to be luxurious and take a taxi. Can I put you down anywhere?"

Rita hesitated with her answer. The thought of a taxi was extremely tempting, merely for the joy of riding in one, apart from the question of keeping dry. They were only *Schieber*, and rich Jews, and fast girls, who could afford to ride in taxis in post-war Vienna. . . . He seemed quite a serious young man.

"I live at the end of the Rothenthurmstrasse," she said doubtfully. "It's quite out of your way, I'm afraid."

"On the contrary, I have to pass it. I'll stop the taxi."

She stammered a few words shyly.

"I'm afraid I can't offer to share it. I'm terribly poor. A little school teacher!"

The young man laughed as though he saw another joke somewhere.

"I'm not rich myself. A doctor. . . . But I'll be glad to take you home."

A taxi-driver saw the wave of his umbrella and brought his machine alongside the kerb, splashing up a big puddle. The queue waiting for their chance for a tramcar looked enviously at Rita and the young man as they drove away so grandly.

"Some of them will get pneumonia to-night," said Rita's new friend.

"That will keep you busy," she suggested.

He explained that he was always busy. He specialized in children's ailments, and there was ten times too much work to do.

"Even now half of them are under-nourished or else suffering from the years of hunger. . . . Rickets, scrofula, tuberculosis. . . . Poor little brats!"

He sighed as though he had a pitiful heart not hardened by professional work.

In the taxi she could only see his face—that finely cut profile—as the street lamps gleamed upon it momentarily and then left them in darkness again. He was very good-looking and she liked his voice.

"It must be wonderful being a doctor," said Rita. "It's a life of devotion, especially among the poor."

"Hard work and no profit," answered the man lightly.

Then he spoke more seriously.

"I'm keen on the scientific side of it. I want to go in for research one day. Bacteriology is my dream. It's the great adventure with endless possibilities."

"Why don't you begin?" asked Rita.

"Too poor! I've got to drudge for a living first. Still there's some compensation. I'm devoted to children."

She liked that devotion. A man who loved children must be good and kind. Her own school-children gave her sick-headaches. Sometimes she hated them.

He began to speak of his work in a Children's Clinic, and then broke off abruptly.

"I don't know why I want to bore you like this! It's absurd of me."

"I'm interested," said Rita warmly. "It doesn't bore me in the very least."

"It bores most people," said the young man. "My people among them. . . . My father thinks I'm a fool to go in for doctoring when I might make money in trade."

"Oh no!" cried Rita. "It's only the Jews who make money out of trade. No Christian has a chance against them in Vienna. They batten on us."

The young man shifted a little in his seat and then laughed.

"I'm a Jew! But, unlike most of my people, I haven't the money-making interest."

Rita von Falckenstein sat rather silent for the rest of the drive. She hadn't guessed that the man by her side was a Jew, though now he had told her it was obvious. She ought to have known at a glance, but she was stupid about things like that.

She hated the Jews like all her family and every Catholic in Vienna. It was a kind of obsession, which she shared with her father and brothers. Since early childhood she had been taught to look upon the Jews with disgust and contempt, as the enemies of the Catholic Church and a vile race. Now fear and a sense of suffocation had been added to those causes of dislike. Since the downfall of Austria it was only the Jews who prospered. They were the *Valuta hünde*, the "exchange hounds," who made money somehow out of the ruin of Austrian currency.

Now that the League of Nations had taken over the financial control of Austria, it was the Jews who took possession of Vienna. They had come in from all parts of Europe, Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Hungary, Poland. They had borrowed money from their rich relatives in Berlin and New York and London, and had bought up all the factories and shops and restaurants and banks. One saw them everywhere. Rich young Jews with oiled hair and well-pressed suits drove about in smart motor-cars, while Austrian aristocrats, the Catholic gentility of the old Régime, could hardly afford a tramcar, and dressed shabbily in threadbare clothes, and were ashamed of their boots. The best restaurants—frightfuly expensive—were frequented only by these flashy Jews, spending money freely, eating and drinking lavishly, while the gentlefolk of Austria stinted and scraped at home with hardly enough to eat, and sometimes not enough. Rita had seen them on a Sunday streaming through the doors of the Palast Hotel, where the waiters bowed to them. They were with their womenfolk, overdressed, painted women with diamond rings—or worse still, in Rita's mind, with Catholic girls—or rather girls who had lost their faith and morals—willing to accept the amorous advances of these rich young Jews, or *rich* old ones, for the sake of luxury and the life of pleasure.

The Jews, said her father, were behind the scenes of all the evil in the world, this wretched world after the War, with all its agony and future peril. They had made the revolution in Russia. There was a Jewish conspiracy to overthrow civilization itself. In Hungary, Bela Kuhn and his Jews had raised the Red Flag and behaved like bandits until they were turned out and punished—"with righteous vengeance" said her father. In Vienna young men like her brothers had banded themselves together in a society called the *Hakenkreuz*, with the sign of the Swastika as their badge, to defend Austria from the Jews and to uphold the traditions of the German race. Now she sat in a taxi with this young Jew from whom she had accepted favours. He was paying for her drive home. If her mother and father knew, they would be terribly upset. She had a sense of guilt and shame.

At the journey's end the young doctor jumped out into the rain and held his umbrella over her head while she ran into her doorway.

"Thank you," she said rather coldly.

"A pleasure," he answered politely.

He hesitated for a moment and she saw that his dark eyes were scrutinizing her face.

"Perhaps we may meet again one day. My name is Hoffmann, Dr. Max Hoffmann. And yours?"

She could hardly refuse to tell him. He had been very kind. If he hadn't been a Jew, she would think him charming.

"I am Rita von Falckenstein."

She saw him give a slight start. Perhaps he guessed that her father was General von Falckenstein, who was so constantly attacked in the *Neue Freie Presse* for his anti-Jewish speeches and his command of the *Hakenkreuz* battalions. But he did not remark on that.

"*Auf wiedersehen*," he said, with a friendly nod.

As she ran up the stone stairs to her father's flat she heard the taxi swishing away down the Rothenthurmstrasse and the honk of its horn.

Inside the flat her mother had prepared her supper and was warming up some chocolate over an oil-stove.

"You are very late, my dear! I was getting quite anxious. Such a dreadful night!"

"The trams were all crowded," said Rita. She made no reference to that taxi drive.

She went over and kissed her father on the forehead as he sat deep in an armchair reading his paper—the *Neue Freie Presse*. His square head—like Hindenburg's—had become white-haired after the War, though he was only middle-aged.

He grunted good-naturedly and let the paper drop to the floor, where he trampled on it with a slippered foot.

"Austria is finished as a Christian country," he said, as though commenting on the night's news. "Those infernal Jews have got us by the throat. I'd like to hang the lot of them. A healthy *pogrom*."

"Oh, bother the Jews," said Rita's mother. "Let's forget them for once. The poor child is wet through. Go and change your frock, dear."

Rita hesitated at the door and half turned round. She wondered with a sense of amusement what her father would say if she told him that a Jew had brought her home. . . . Better not, perhaps. Her father was getting very irritable these days.

She dreamed that night that she was still in the taxi with Dr. Max Hoffmann, and that he refused to stop outside her house, but told the driver to go on faster because General von Falckenstein wanted to kill him. "He is my father and a very kind man," said Rita in her dream. Then Dr. Hoffmann laughed harshly and said: "He is a Christian. He has no kindness for Jews like me." Rita tried to get out of the taxi, but Dr. Hoffmann held her tight and would not let her escape—until she woke up with a cry. . . . What a ridiculous dream! She blushed when she remembered it at breakfast.

It was three weeks later when she saw Dr. Hoffmann again. It was when she was teaching her class the rivers of Europe from a big map on the blackboard. The door opened and the head-mistress came in with a young man. Rita had her head turned towards the blackboard and started when the head-mistress spoke to her.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your lessons, Fraülein. This is our new medical inspector, Dr. Hoffmann."

Rita felt a hot wave of colour rise to her face. It was because that first silly dream of hers had been followed by two others, even sillier. Since that taxi drive the face of this young Jewish doctor had haunted her, waking and sleeping. He seemed to have made some extraordinary impression on her subconscious mind.

He looked at her now with quick recognition and smiled slightly as he bowed.

"I hope you didn't catch cold the other night, Miss Falckenstein?"

The head-mistress was surprised at this acquaintance. At lunch-time that morning, after the medical inspection of the school, when the young doctor had gone, she spoke to Rita about it.

"You know our new inspector? As your father's daughter, it's surprising that you have any friendship with a Jew!"

She smiled at this thought, knowing the reputation of General von Falckenstein and having read some of his speeches.

Rita answered hotly, astonished by her own annoyance.

"I have no friendship with him. He gave me a lift in a taxi on a wet night. . . . It's abominable that they should appoint a Jew to inspect this

school."

The head-mistress was more tolerant.

"Oh, I don't know. Live and let live, that's the only solution to the Jewish problem in Austria."

"But they don't let us live!" cried Rita almost fiercely. "They take all the good places, make all the money, and crowd us out of everything. 'No Christian need apply.' It's intolerable."

She was quoting her father, and her brother Hans, who could not get any work to do in Vienna after the War.

The head-mistress, a comely woman, with a plain, plump face and good-natured eyes, laughed indulgently.

"You're an anti-Semite, like your distinguished father. Well, I know many good Jews, I must say that. And this young man is very clever, they say. Nice too. He was charming with the children to-day. So kind and humorous. He won all their hearts."

Rita could not deny that he had been charming with the children. She had watched him while he examined them, and had listened to his jokes. He had put his hand on the flaxen curls of a small boy and bent down and asked him about his home-life and his toys, and pretended to be vastly interested in the child's rocking-horse which had lost its mane. He seemed to have some magic with children. The eyes of all the class brightened up. He left them laughing and happy. Certainly he was wonderfully good-looking in his Jewish way. There was something fine and sculpturesque in his face and figure, and his hands were delicate and beautiful. His eyes too were luminous with some inner light. Rita could not help noticing all that, though she detested Jews.

On the following week Fräulein Schmidt, the head-mistress, spoke to her in the corridor between classes.

"Our medical inspector is coming to tea with me this afternoon. One must be civil. But you needn't join us if you would rather not. I thought I would tell you beforehand."

That half-hour's tea-time in Fräulein Schmidt's room was Rita's little oasis in this desert of drudgery. It was a joyous break in the tedium of teaching, and she and Fräulein Schmidt—a dear, wise soul and very talented—discussed life and literature and, above all, music for which they had a passion. It was hard that she should have to give up this treat because that Jewish doctor was coming.

She felt very angry about it. All through class-time that afternoon the thought rankled in her mind, so that she became absent-minded and astonished the children by telling them that New York was the capital of Palestine. Why should she be done out of her tea by any Jew? It wasn't fair. It was very unkind of Fräulein Schmidt to break up their happy half-hour like that. Of course she wouldn't go. A daughter of General von Falckenstein wasn't going to hobnob with a Jew, hand him tea, ask him whether he wanted another lump of sugar, let him shake hands with her. He would be telling all his fellow Israelites: "I happen to know the daughter of General von Falckenstein. Yes, honour bright! Not a bad-looking little creature. But arrogant, like that hateful old father of hers. She was civil to *me* though! She knows which side her bread is buttered. We Jews——" No, she wouldn't take tea with Fräulein Schmidt at four o'clock. She would join the other mistresses in the common room and listen to their foolish chatter and meaningless laughter.

So Rita made up her mind; but at ten minutes past four, by some extraordinary freak of psychology, by some kind of mesmeric spell, she found herself pulled to Fräulein Schmidt's room and tapped at the door. She heard the jolly voice of the head-mistress:

"*Herein!*"

She slipped into the room; frightened by this weakness of will, blushing absurdly.

"Is there any tea left, Fräulein Schmidt?"

"Heaps, my child. . . . You know Dr. Max Hoffmann."

A lurking smile at the corners of Fräulein Schmidt's large mouth showed that she was amused by this surrender of pride.

The young doctor was sitting at the tea-table with a napkin on his lap and some buttered toast in his left hand. At Rita's entrance he laid down the toast, put the napkin on the tea-table and rose from his chair.

"This is a good surprise," he said in a friendly way. "Fräulein Schmidt told me that you had a headache this afternoon and wouldn't join us. I hope it's better."

For the life of her she couldn't refuse to shake hands with him. After all, it was best to be civil. *Noblesse oblige.*

She pretended that her mythical headache had almost gone. Anyhow, she was desperate for a cup of tea.

"We were talking about music," said Fräulein Schmidt. "Dr. Hoffmann's brother is leading violin at the opera. And he composed that wonderful prelude we heard the other night at that restaurant in the Prater. Do you remember how we loved it?"

She hummed a bar or two.

"Delicious! So fresh and gay and springlike. Vienna before the War. It made me want to weep."

"You wept!" said Rita.

"My brother David is rather a genius," remarked Dr. Hoffmann. "Such a nice fellow too, as simple as a child, and full of enthusiasm for every form of art. He amuses me vastly and we're great comrades. He can't understand my devotion to science. He thinks it so dull and unbeautiful. Perhaps it is, in a way, compared with music."

"Science is the beauty of natural law," said Rita. "Even music wouldn't exist without scientific knowledge."

She spoke calmly, pedantically, like the little school-mistress she was, but it was to hide her nervousness. Anyhow, she couldn't let this doctor run down his own science.

"I like to hear you say that," said Dr. Hoffmann gratefully. "I think so too, but other people don't see it in that way. My brother and I have terrific arguments. Sometimes we get very angry with each other and then roar with laughter."

Fräulein Schmidt announced some news with excitement in her voice.

"Dr. Hoffmann has offered us tickets at the opera whenever we like to have them. Isn't that wonderful!"

"My brother can always let me have two or three when I ask him," said the doctor. "I should be delighted if you would make use of them. How about next Saturday?"

Fräulein Schmidt looked at Rita.

"Would that suit you, my dear?"

Just for one moment Rita hesitated. It was accepting another favour from this young Jew. Her father and brothers would be furious, if they knew. She would be furious herself if she allowed herself to make friends with him. But they were playing "Madame Butterfly," which she adored. She had longed to go and couldn't afford it. This offer was frightfully tempting. . . .

"It would suit me perfectly, Fräulein Schmidt," she answered in a timid voice.

It was another link in the chain of fate which drew her close to Max Hoffmann.

She and Fräulein Schmidt met him on that Saturday night at the opera, and on other nights at concerts for which he obtained tickets from his brother. Sometimes he merely came up and asked if they had liked the music and did not press his company upon them. Then he invited them to have supper with him after the opera, and Fräulein Schmidt coaxed her to go, though she hated the idea of it. For Fräulein Schmidt's

sake, yes certainly for her sake, she accepted the invitation, and was a little terror-stricken lest her brother should come into the restaurant at the corner of Kärtnerstrasse—until she forgot her fear in the interest of Dr. Hoffmann's conversation. This young man had read so much, that he seemed to know everything and talked on all sorts of subjects in a serious but entertaining way, without any self-conceit or laying down the law, but as though he valued Fräulein Schmidt's, and even Rita's, opinion more than his own. He had known England before the War, and was very interesting in his analysis of English character and showed how clearly it was revealed in their fiction. He knew France too, and was fair to the French, even about their entry of the Ruhr. He believed in the future power of the League of Nations, when Germany and Russia would be inside it, and thought the only hope of avoiding another European war was in the extension of arbitration and the revolt of democracy against the use of war as an argument.

Rita listened and agreed. They were her own thoughts. And yet she had a sense of uneasiness—even of guilt. The Jews were pacifists because they had no country of their own and no patriotism. They had the international mind because of their relatives in all countries. And they were scheming to overthrow civilization by world-revolution, after which they would seize the wealth and power of the world as they had done in Russia. Her father had told her so a thousand times. Her brother firmly believed it. Her mother dreamt about it in dreadful nightmares of Red Terror as it had happened in Petrograd.

One evening after another concert she sat alone with Dr. Hoffmann. It was in that restaurant in the Kärtnerstrasse. An unfortunate thing had happened, dreadfully embarrassing. Just as the young doctor had ordered supper Fräulein Schmidt remembered that she had locked out two of the mistresses who slept at the school. They had gone out for an evening's amusement and she had forgotten to give them the keys. They were in her pocket now!

"I must fly!" she said breathlessly. "Doctor, please forgive me for spoiling this little supper-party, and a thousand thanks for all your kindness!"

Rita rose from her chair, looking frightened, and said: "I'd better go too."

"No, no!" cried Fräulein Schmidt. "Eat your supper, child—especially as the doctor will have to pay for it!"

She whispered to Rita:

"You can't possibly be so rude!"

That was true. It would have been abominably rude of Rita to refuse to have supper with Dr. Hoffmann because Fräulein Schmidt was leaving them. It would look like a deliberate insult. And, after all, he was so serious and kind and charming. Yes, she must admit that there was a charm about him which put a strange spell upon her. . . . She stayed.

He was very attentive and yet without any tricks or graces. He talked a good deal about the psychology of children, which he seemed to understand with a wonderful intuition and delicacy of mind. He told some amusing stories about the children he met on his medical inspection of schools, and made her laugh.

It was while she was laughing that she caught the eyes of a man looking at her. They were astonished, angry, reproachful eyes which she knew very well, and blushed very deeply to see so watchful of her. They belonged to one of her brother's friends—Karl von Hahnke—who came often to her father's flat, too often lately and with a purpose which made her feel afraid when she thought about it. The way he looked at her at home, the pressure of his hand, his eagerness to sit next to her at table, had begun to alarm her. Only the other day he had asked her to go to a dance with him on this very evening, and she had pleaded her engagement with Fräulein Schmidt at the opera. It had been so easy to use Fräulein Schmidt's name to satisfy the curiosity of her family about her frequent evenings away from home. Never once had she mentioned Dr. Max Hoffmann. Now Karl von Hahnke saw her having supper alone with a young Jew, like any loose girl of Vienna, laughing with him, drinking his wine.

It would look frightfully bad. Karl was one of the leaders of the *Hakenkreuz* because of his name and title. He hated all Jews with undisguised contempt, and was more scornful of them, more bitter in his speech, even than her father. He would certainly tell her parents when he came to the house again, and the silence she had kept about this young doctor, the foolish, cowardly silence, would make things much worse. She felt the colour ebb from her face. She knew that her lips were cold and white.

"You are unwell," said Dr. Max Hoffmann suddenly. "It's the heat in here. Suffocating!"

"Yes," said Rita. "I feel a little faint."

He left some money on the table—a wad of notes—and abandoned the end of the supper. He offered his arm to Rita, and she took it, feeling alarmingly unwell because of this fright. They passed very close to Karl von Hahnke, and he rose from his chair and made a stiff bow, and looked savagely at Dr. Hoffmann. Other people stared at them, perhaps because of her white face. A girl dining with another young Jew—one of the oiled young men—sniggered as she passed. She even heard her name spoken in a whisper.

"General von Falckenstein's daughter!"

It was the second time that she drove in a taxi with Max Hoffmann. He took her home, as on that rainy night when she had first met him. He let down the window so that she should feel some air on her face.

"They overheat these restaurants abominably," he said.

On the doorstep of the house where she lived she gave him her hand and said, "You are very kind. A thousand thanks."

He did not let go her hand immediately, but held it for a moment while their eyes met. There was something in his eyes, and a kind of electric shock passing through her veins, which frightened her.

He spoke shyly, rather huskily:

"I would rather like to kiss you. Would you mind very much?"

She felt her heart beating, almost painfully.

"No, no," she said. "Please!"

"Just once," he urged. "Here in this doorway. I would give everything in the world——"

She felt him draw her towards him, and a kind of weakness overcame her so that she could not resist. He put his arms about her and kissed her on the lips, in the darkness there.

"I love you with all my heart," he whispered. "Since that first night we met—in the rain—under the lamp-post where the light was on your face——"

She struggled out of his arms, and gave a little cry of dismay. There was a rush of tears to her eyes as she fled from him up the stone steps. Outside the door of her flat she had to wait until the flow of tears had stopped and her heart had ceased beating so wildly. . . . Neither her father nor mother noticed that she had committed the worst sin in the world, in their faith and view of life, as Catholics of the old Régime. She was in love with a Jew, and because she was of her parents' faith and blood and caste, brought up since childhood to regard the Jewish race as the enemies of religion—her religion—as well as rebels against the State and society under the old Emperor of Austria who was her father's friend, she felt that the love which had captured her was shameful and unholy. How was it possible that she, a Catholic girl, to whom her religion had

meant everything most sacred in life—who had been brought up in a convent school—who had often prayed for a vocation as a nun—could give her lips, and her heart, to a man who denied the divinity of Christ, and belonged to a race plotting, as her father told her, for the downfall of Christianity and civilization.

That night she wept bitterly down on her knees by her bedside, with her hands flung across the coverlet and her forehead pressed against the mattress. She prayed God to help her and give her strength to resist the temptation of this love. But though her room was in darkness and her wet eyes were closed and pressed against the bedside, the face of Max Hoffmann, so fine and delicate, so serious and chivalrous, was apparent to her, as though his living presence were in the room, bright in this darkness. She felt him drawing her towards him, and seemed to swoon again at his passionate kiss. . . .

She dare not tell her mother and father, nor her brother Hans. Time and time again, at breakfast or supper, when they were all together, she tried to get courage to say something about Max Hoffmann. The words trembled on her lips. "There is a young Jewish doctor I know. . . . He gave me a lift in a taxi once, when it was raining very hard. . . . He is a great friend of Fräulein Schmidt. . . ." But her courage failed her, always. How could she possibly tell them when at every meal by some malign chance, the question of the Jews came up, and either her father or Hans cursed them as the cause of all the evil in Austria, if not of the world. Hans was getting ready for a great march of the *Hakenkreuzler* through Vienna.

"It will make the Yids feel nervous for their throats," he said. "Ten thousand *Hakenkreuzler*, and all ex-soldiers, with the sign of the Swastika on their arms. If any Jews dare to cross our path on Sunday we'll kill them like rats. They know jolly well what we stand for. A united German race, and to hell with Jews, Bolsheviks, and M. Poincaré!"

General von Falckenstein smiled indulgently at his son's violence of speech.

"It's no good asking for trouble, my lad! You needn't go out of your way to kill Jews or anybody else. The *Hakenkreuzler* must behave with dignity and self-control as defenders of the old traditions and men of discipline."

"Quite so," said Hans. "All the same, I wouldn't mind a 'regrettable incident' as the papers call it. We could spare a Jew or two from Vienna, without shedding tears about it, and it would be a good advertisement for the *Hakenkreuz*."

Rita suddenly found herself speaking, excitedly, emotionally:

"I think what you say is horrible! It's utterly un-Christian. . . . Our Lord came on earth to preach love, not hate. He said 'Thou shalt not kill.' . . . Why should you want to kill Jews? They are good people and human like ourselves. They have mothers and fathers and little children. They obey the law and live peaceful lives. We owe a lot to them in art and music and trade. What would Vienna be without the Jews? We should all die of starvation, as we nearly died before they brought in money and revived trade, and all that."

Her brother Hans stared at her with astonished eyes and then laughed loudly.

"Good heavens! Our little Rita is defending the Jews! Saint Rita—who nearly became a nun—is upholding the race who have the curse of Christ upon them. Can we believe our ears?"

General von Falckenstein took hold of his daughter's hand at the breakfast-table and patted it.

"Our little Rita speaks like a good girl. Only she doesn't understand. Charity is misplaced towards people who deny the faith of Christ, who plot and scheme in all parts of the world to undermine its laws, and teach atheism and revolution to the rising generation in all countries where their evil influence spreads. Look at Russia, my dear Rita. Look at the work of the Jews there. Do you want Austria to become like that, with blasphemous texts carved on the walls—'Religion is the opium of the people'—and a gang of Jewish cut-throats enslaving the spirit and bodies of the nation? If we don't defend ourselves—if we don't organize such bodies as the *Hakenkreuz* ready to fight for faith and country—that is what will happen to us. Beyond any doubt. The *Hakenkreuzler*, whom I have the honour to command"—he could not resist that touch of pride—"are modern crusaders sworn to defend the cross of Christ."

"One cannot defend Christianity by murder," said Rita passionately.

Her father coloured up angrily and released her hand. "There is no question of murder. I must beg of you not to use such words."

"Hans wants a 'regrettable incident,' " said Rita—"what is that but a chance of killing some poor Jew?"

"After provocation or insult," said General von Falckenstein gravely.

He rose from his chair at the table, pushing away his coffee-cup.

"I desire this conversation to cease. You are obviously unwell, my dear. Nerves, no doubt. I think you ought to see a doctor."

What he said was perfectly true; apart from his last suggestion. Rita von Falckenstein was exceedingly unwell in mind though not in body. Her nerves were unstrung, by mental and spiritual conflict. But she was seeing too much of a doctor, and he was the cause of her malady. She had seen him almost every night for three weeks since that evening when he had kissed her in her father's doorway. On the following evening he had waited for her outside the school-house and had come up to her with an eager look, half shy, half glad, in those dark, luminous eyes of his.

"Have you forgiven me?" he asked. "That kiss—I had no right—it was unpardonable——"

But unpardonable as it might be, he had kissed her again that very evening in the darkness of a side street nearer the school-house under a blank wall, and almost every night since. She had not the strength of mind to refuse. In his presence she could not deny her love for him. Some terrific attraction in his personality broke down all her prejudice and fear. It was partly because of his gentleness, his tenderness. How could she think of him as a man who wanted to ruin civilization and destroy faith in God, when he was devoting his life to good work, and loved children and beauty.

"Nothing matters except your love," he pleaded. "I worship the light in your eyes, your smile, the sound of your voice——"

She told him it was impossible—this love of theirs.

"I'm a Catholic," she said; "and you're a Jew. Don't you see that we mustn't love each other?"

"No!" he answered. "I don't see. I know that I love you."

"You hate my religion," she said pitifully. "How can I love you without sin?"

He laughed at that and put her hand to his lips.

"I don't hate your religion. I don't hate anybody's religion. Where Love is there God is also. Wasn't it old Tolstoy who said that? Anyhow, it's my faith."

"You don't believe in Christ," said Rita.

The young doctor was silent and thoughtful for a moment. He poked the point of his umbrella into a crack in the pavement in that side street by her school-house where they stood away from the light of the street lamp.

"I believe in Christ's goodness," he said. "If all Christians would live up to Christ's teaching it would be a wonderful world. . . . Believe me, I'm not bigoted."

"That isn't enough," said Rita. "How can we love each other when you couldn't follow me into church, when it would all seem mockery to

you—the altar, the candles, the pictures of the saints, the statue of the Blessed Virgin—all that seems beautiful to me?"

"I will stand outside," he said humbly. "Without mockery—with prayers in my heart to make me worthy of you—to make you happy."

"We can never be happy," she cried, and the tears filled her eyes.

He did not seem to understand the strength of the barriers between them—social as well as religious, political as well as social. Her father had been an equerry of the old Emperor. His family was one of the oldest and noblest of Austria. His present poverty had not broken his pride nor made him forget his family history—those knights and barons of the Holy Roman Empire. He would rather see Rita dead than wedded to a Jew. All her relatives, her old aunts and her innumerable cousins, would be scandalized and horrified. They would never speak to her again. She would be cast out by her own people.

"Don't you understand?" she said, one evening as they stood together in the shadow of the blank wall after school hours, when he had come to meet her again. "Can't I make you understand? My father is General von Falckenstein, who commands the *Hakenkreuz*. He would kill me if he knew that I loved you ever so little . . . if he could see me now as you hold my hand."

The young doctor laughed, but with bitterness and vexation.

"It's incredible!" he said. "At this time in the world's history! I can't believe in such stupidity—such damnable intolerance. I thought it was just the hot air of politics—that stuff in his speeches. Surely he wouldn't wreck your happiness or prevent our love simply because I have Jewish blood? . . . It isn't bad blood, after all. It goes back a long way. Our prophets and patriarchs came fairly early in the world's history, and their God is your father's God, presumably. I'm not a rich man, but I'm not a bandit! I do my best to cure Christian children when I find them ill. They're not afraid of me, I think."

"They love you," said Rita. "They're always talking about their kind doctor."

"Then why should your father shut his door against me?" asked Dr. Max Hoffmann.

"He is a Catholic," said Rita. "He thinks that the Jews are working for world-revolution. He thinks that without the *Hakenkreuz* they would do to Austria what they have done to Russia."

Dr. Max Hoffmann pushed his hat to the back of his head as though to air his brain a little. Then he laughed again, as though only humour could deal with this situation.

"It's ridiculous for us to stand here talking politics. What has love to do with all that nonsense? . . . I suppose there are mad fools here and there working for world-revolution. I've never met them. In my own family we work at other things. My mother mends her sons' shirts and socks. My brother David works at music day and night to give a little melody to life. I work at this doctors' drudgery with ambition for research work. . . . Russia? Well, they are not all Jews there. Lenin wasn't a Jew. Nor Tchicherin and others. . . . I suppose it was natural that Jews should come to the top in time of revolution. They had nimbler brains—and better education—than Russian peasants. They had old scores to wipe out—the memory of many massacres and horrors done against the Jewish race. Jews have their fanatics like other races. They are not nobler, nor better, nor worse than other people. . . . But I can't see any sense in this bogey of Bolshevism as far as the Jews are concerned. So far from wanting to overthrow capital, most of my people want to get more of it and keep it safe! . . ."

He smiled at this thought, and seemed to find a joke in it.

"That's the general accusation against us, and rather true. We think too much of money-getting, most of us, though there are millions of poor Jews who don't get much. But the other thing can't be true at the same time. People don't destroy the sources of wealth if wealth is their object in life. This anti-Semite stuff seems to me so illogical. I can't make head or tail of it. I don't want to. I've no patience with it. I believe in human brotherhood, kindness, hatred of cruelty, peace, and love. I believe most of all in love. I want it most of all, between you and me, Rita. Let me kiss you again . . . There is no one passing! . . . . Please. . . . Just a very little one, while I put my arms round you, while I hold you like this."

"We are wicked," said Rita. "I feel ashamed. Oh, my dear—my dear lover!"

It was a terrible situation for her. She felt guilty, not only because of the secrecy of this love and the barriers of family intolerance but because of her own religious scruples and agonies of conscience. How could she marry a man who did not believe in her faith? She went to early morning Mass before her hard day's work and prayed for guidance before the statue of the Blessed Virgin in Stephankirche. She even prayed that Max Hoffmann might become a Catholic, but when she told him that he smiled and shook his head.

"I'm an incurable free-thinker. Not even a good Jew. I believe only in humanity and love and beauty. That is my Holy Trinity."

She pleaded with him.

"Max—for my love's sake—become a Christian! Let us worship at the same altar. How beautiful that would be. Then we could go hand in hand to my father."

She slipped little books of Catholic devotion into his pocket and made him promise to read them. She thought out arguments and read up evidence to prove the divinity of Christ and interrupted his love-making in obscure little restaurants where now and again they stole half an hour at lunch-time for secret meetings. He listened always with tolerance, unbroken patience, but also with amusement.

"Don't let's worry about religion!" he said. "Isn't our love enough?"

Over and over again he pressed her to go to his own house to meet his father and mother and that brother of his, the musician. And at last she yielded, and spent an evening with his people. But it wasn't a success. Even he admitted that afterwards, ruefully. She saw at once that there was an invisible barrier between herself and Max Hoffmann's family and friends. His father and mother were kind and polite, they called her "my dear," and offered her their simple hospitality, but she saw that they were uneasy, watchful, and disapproving of their son's love affair. Their conversation was forced and guarded. Now and again Max Hoffmann's mother, a delicate-looking woman with grey hair and a thin lined face which had once been beautiful—Max had inherited his fine profile from her—sighed deeply as though she found Rita's visit a strain. The father, a scholarly-looking man with a pointed beard, was a professor of Oriental language and was very grave and courteous, but he was painfully nervous and ill at ease, and lapsed into silences which Rita found embarrassing.

It was unfortunate that they had invited several relations and friends to meet this Catholic girl. Two of them were young men of the smart and rather oily type which Rita had been taught to dislike so much. They talked a good deal of their financial speculations and profits. They were jaunty, self-assured, conceited, and their black-eyed young ladies exchanged smiling glances with them and giggled at secret jokes, and were affected in their conversation with Rita. Max Hoffmann himself was nervous and obviously conscious of Rita's sense of isolation and strangeness in this company. He tried to encourage a general conversation, but there were so many subjects that had to be avoided between the daughter of General von Falckenstein and his own people, that it was all rather stilted and unnatural.

One girl there was not even friendly. Rita was aware of her hostility as soon as they were introduced. She was an opera singer named Rachel Goldstein, and extremely good-looking with big dark eyes and an oval face, like one of Murillo's Madonnas. She did not address a single word to Rita, though for a time they sat next to each other, and Rita was aware of the coldness and contempt and dislike which lurked in this girl's watchful glances. That was when Max Hoffmann led Rita to the other end of the room to talk to his mother, who could find nothing

but the weather as a safe topic. The situation was eased a little when the musician brother arrived—a cheery, good-natured fellow with a shock of curly hair and untidy clothes, who kissed Rita's hand and plunged straightway into a talk about music. He was an artist to his finger-tips, and later in the evening played some of his own compositions with a fire and humour which Rita found delightful.

Once he spoke to her in a whisper when the others were talking among themselves.

"I expect you feel a bit strange here? It's because they are all shy of you. But Max is a dear, isn't he? One of our idealists? . . . How do you like this little dance of mine?"

Max Hoffmann took her home as far as the door step of the house in which her people had a second-floor flat. That was his limit. He had never crossed that frontier which divided him from Rita's family. On the way, as they walked arm in arm, under an umbrella which hid them from the passers-by hurrying down the dark streets while the lamp-light lay in pools on the wet pavements, she asked a frank question of him.

"Max, are your father and mother pleased with this love of ours?"

He hesitated for a moment as though about to prevaricate, and then answered truthfully.

"Not altogether. You see, they are very old-fashioned in their notions and terribly narrow."

"They don't like the idea of your marrying a Catholic girl?"

"This religious intolerance!" he exclaimed ruefully. "It's ghastly—on both sides. My mother's father was killed in a *pogrom* at Riga. She can't forget that. It makes her bitter, poor soul."

"They want you to marry Rachel Goldstein," said Rita.

He was quite startled at those words, and raised his umbrella as he turned to look at her.

"How on earth did you know that? . . . Did anyone tell you?"

"I guessed it," said Rita. "Your mother kept looking at her with a kind of pity. And Rachel Goldstein hates me for taking you away from her."

"I was never hers," said Max Hoffmann. "I've always avoided her. She's too much of the vamp."

Rita dropped her head a little as she walked with her hand on his arm.

"Max, you had much better marry one of your own race. This love of ours will only end in tragedy. Everything is against us. Perhaps even God."

He put his arm about her waist, like a shop assistant with his sweetheart, making love on a wet night, in the darkness.

"I love you—and God is love. I'm not going to let intolerance stand between us. Neither your parents nor mine have any right to interfere between you and me. I don't care the snap of a finger for religious bigotry, political hatred, or social caste. With your love, my dear, I can face life without a qualm of fear. All we need is courage to face poverty together, as now we face it alone. I have my eye on a little flat——"

"I'm a coward," said Rita in a low voice. "I'm afraid of my father and brother. And I'm afraid of your relations. And I'm afraid of all my Catholic friends. It will mean giving up everything in my old life. I shall be an outcast from my own people and a stranger among yours. It's true, I want your love——"

"Nothing else matters," said the young doctor. "Our love! And love is so rare and priceless. . . . In the poorest rooms it would be light enough and warmth enough. . . . It's the only beauty in this ugly old world. There's no squalor when it touches life. It makes everything else seem so petty and negligible. Since I've loved you I see everything in a new aspect. This wet street—how jolly it is with you and I walking arm in arm, under a dripping umbrella! Those lighted windows with their drawn blinds—how cozy inside those rooms if you and I were sitting at the same table in a little home of our own, not bothering about the outside world, envious of no man's wealth whatever our poverty. And you would inspire me to do good work, to be unselfish, and generous in service to poor folk. I would try to live a Christ-like life—Jew as I am, and as far as man can."

"Oh, my love, my dear love!" cried Rita, and she felt the tears wet on her cheeks and pressed the arm of the man whom she loved with a passion which sometimes seemed like sin.

She had called herself a coward, and yet she showed some courage outwardly when she arrived home that evening. Karl von Hahnke had been there with her mother and father and her brother Hans. He had waited for her, said her mother, very much hoping to see her. By the way they looked at her, by some deep and terrible suspicion in their eyes, she knew at once that Karl had told them about the evening when he had seen her alone with Max Hoffmann in that restaurant at the corner of the Kärtnerstrasse.

"Where have you been, my dear?" asked her mother, in a quiet tense voice.

"I went to see some friends of Fräulein Schmidt," she answered, afraid of the tremor in her voice.

There was a silence, and then her brother Hans spoke in a hard tone.

"I happened to meet Fräulein Schmidt this evening. She was dining with Professor Arnholz and his wife. She didn't seem to know that you were going out this evening!"

"No," said Rita. "I arranged it hurriedly. Over the telephone."

It was true that Max had telephoned to her, and yet she was evading the truth, and had a sense of shame and fear.

"Who were these friends of Fräulein Schmidt?" asked her father.

He spoke harshly like a judge examining a prisoner.

"It was a family called Hoffmann," said Rita. "They were very kind."

She heard her mother draw a quick breath and saw her put a hand on her father's sleeve as though to restrain his anger. Her brother was pale and had a sullen mouth.

"Did you dine with a Jew of that name in a public restaurant?" asked her father. "I cannot believe it, but there is some story of the sort. I give you a chance of denying it."

"It is true," said Rita. "Why not, father?"

It was that "why not" which seemed to madden him. She saw a kind of purplish tint creep below his skin. He had risen from his chair, and then sat back again, grasping its arms so tightly that the veins swelled on the backs of his hands.

"You dare to ask me 'why not'?" he asked. "You dine in a public restaurant with a young Jew and you ask me 'why not'? The daughter of General von Falckenstein degrading an honoured name, betraying her family and faith, selling her honour to a Jew, drinking wine with him among harlots, laughing with him in public places—by God—I cannot believe it though you stand there and confess."

"Hush!" said Rita's mother. "Hush, father!"

"He is a doctor," said Rita. "He spends his time doing good to Catholic children. He is very kind and noble."

Rita's father made queer noises in his throat. She thought he was choking. Little red veins appeared about his eyes.

Her brother, Hans, broke in again harshly. She had been his comrade in days of childhood and since, but he forgot all that in his flaming anger.

"You must have gone mad, Rita! What the devil do you mean by it all? Karl says that you've been seen in other places with that Jew

blackguard. A friend of his said he saw you the other night in the Prater, holding hands with a long-nosed Jew like a shop girl on the spree! Karl was so furious that he threatened to bash his friend across the head if he didn't withdraw such a dirty accusation against a lady's honour. But I've not the slightest doubt it's true after what you've confessed already."

"Quite true," said Rita.

She did not speak aggressively or defiantly, but in a quiet, low voice. She had known from the beginning that this scene must happen one day. Now it had come, and she prayed for courage.

"Have you taken leave of your senses, my dear?" asked her mother with a kind of sob in her voice. "If it had been with any Catholic young man it would have been bad enough. You made us think you were going to concerts with Fräulein Schmidt. You deceived your father and me. That would have been hard to forgive, after all our love. But with a Jew! Your father's daughter! Dear God, it's unbelievable. Why have you done it, Rita? Tell us why. Help us to understand."

"Because I love him," said Rita, in that quiet, low voice of hers.

It was as though she had stricken them dumb for a little while.

General von Falckenstein stared at his daughter with a kind of horror in his eyes; Frau von Falckenstein became very pale so that there was no colour even in her lips. She seemed to shrink in her chair. Hans stood up and walked to the window and kicked a hassock out of his way, and then stayed rigid as though turned to stone.

It was Hans who broke this frightful silence at last. "God in heaven! You have the nerve to say you love a Jew? . . . I thought you were a good Catholic like the rest of us. Didn't you want to be a nun once? Weren't you brought up in a convent school? Don't you go to Mass every morning? I wonder Christ doesn't strike you blind or dead. Don't you know that the Jews hate our religion? Don't you know they're plotting for the downfall of Christianity and civilization itself? Aren't you living in Vienna where they've strangled us by getting rich out of our ghastly ruin? Isn't every one of them in league with the Hebrew murderers of Moscow? . . . Let me catch you with your Jew. . . . By God, I'll kill him first and strangle you afterwards."

"Hush!" cried Frau von Falckenstein. "Hans, my son!"

Rita's father leaned forward in his chair and fumbled for his empty pipe.

"Hans speaks with too much violence," he said. "I speak more calmly, with my words well weighed. If Rita will not promise to give up this Jew—he has put some evil spell upon her—and never see him again, I will not let her live here as a daughter of mine. If she loves the Jews, she must live with the Jews, and may God have mercy on her soul!"

He rose solemnly like a judge who has delivered sentence, and walked towards the door to go to his bedroom.

Then suddenly something seemed to break in him, he turned and gave a strange convulsive sob and cried out, "Rita! my little daughter! My little Rita!" and fell into a chair, with his hand clutched to his side, while his eyes glazed and the right side of his face became horribly twisted. It was Rita who ran first to him and put her arms about him with a cry of "Father." . . .

Yet she could not give up Max Hoffmann, not even though her love had nearly killed her father. All but lovers will blame her for that. None but a lover will understand her weakness as well as her strength. Her mother marvelled at her obstinacy and thought she must be possessed by the devil because she refused to give that promise which her father desired.

"How can I give up my love?" she said. "How can I break the heart of a man who is so kind and noble and unselfish? He is a Jew, yes, but the best Christian I have met. Christ-like, mother! He doesn't want to kill his enemies, like Hans does. He hates cruelty, and loves children and beauty and good work. I cannot give him up."

That was her strength, her obstinacy. Her weakness was hidden—those nights of tears, those hours of surrender to forces stronger for a time than love—social, religious, racial. Karl von Hahnke was willing to marry her in spite of that episode with Max Hoffmann. He belonged to her own caste. He believed in her own faith. He was good-looking, good-natured, well-to-do because of his business in Germany. His relatives would welcome her because of her name and quality. If she married him she would give great joy to her own family and wipe out all this tragedy, perhaps straighten her father's twisted face and restore the speech he had lost after that dreadful stroke. It would be so easy and so pleasant to marry Karl von Hahnke—if she didn't love Max Hoffmann, the Jew, whose people disliked her, who refused to believe in the divinity of Christ, who drudged as a doctor on miserable pay in the Children's Clinic in Vienna. With him she would be an outcast from her own folk, a stranger among his, as she told him one night with tears. She shrank in terror from the prospect—that sacrifice—with a clear vision of its tragedy. And yet she knew that this love of hers could not be surrendered without greater tragedy. Max Hoffmann's first kiss upon her lips had sealed them in a compact which only death could break.

Fräulein Schmidt was her accomplice and her go-between. This plump, sweet-natured, calm-eyed woman had no sympathy with the anti-Semite prejudice of the *Hakenkreuz*. "Love between two human souls," she said, "is above all racial or religious prejudice. . . . Anyhow, I'm all for Max Hoffmann. He's a dear! It's not his fault that he was born a Jew. Besides, I suppose God made the Jews as well as the Christians, and the Buddhists and Mohammedans, they're very good people. Some of them are more Christian than the Christians. And—good heavens—we're not living in the Middle Ages! Anyhow, my chicken, he's coming to tea this afternoon, and I've blind eyes and deaf ears when lovers meet in my rooms. As a fat old Mädchen, I'm incurably sentimental."

She was not only incurably sentimental, but wonderfully self-sacrificing in the cause of the Jews, and several times she pretended to receive sudden calls to other parts of the school building so that Rita might be left alone with Max Hoffmann.

The young Jewish doctor took advantage of those precious minutes. His arms were about Rita before the door was shut upon them. It was in one of those quarters of an hour that he urged her to marry him without delay.

"Next week!" he said. "When the school holidays begin. . . . We'll have a honeymoon in some beauty spot. Then we'll come back to that little flat I have my eye on. It's not large but it's cheap, and we can make it happier than if we had a palace. We'll furnish it with laughter and love. We'll hang it with tapestries of dreams. There'll be kisses for our bouquets. . . . Little Rita, what do you say?"

"I'm afraid," she cried.

And yet she screwed up her courage. She would slip out of her father's flat and meet this lover of hers outside the Stephankirche. Fräulein Schmidt would be there, and Max's brother David. It would be the end of one tragedy—and the beginning of the next, as she knew in spite of her love.

On the Saturday evening before the Monday when she was to make this flight from those who had been most dear to her in life—before she had met Max Hoffmann—her brother came into her bedroom where she was packing a few clothes into a hand-bag for that adventure—that journey to a new life from which she could never turn back. She was weeping a little over the thought of that, and tried to hide her tears when Hans tapped at her door and came in without waiting for an answer.

He had a military tunic over his arm—his old uniform without badges and shoulder-straps which he had worn in the War. He did not seem to notice her tear-stained face, and spoke in his old brotherly way, as though he had forgotten and forgiven the cause of the quarrel that had estranged them so bitterly.

"Sorry to bother you, but do a little job of sewing for me, will you? Mother is lying down."

"Have you torn something?" asked Rita.

She felt tears in her heart rather than in her eyes, because this would be the last bit of sewing she could ever do for this brother of hers, who had been her best comrade.

"It's this arm band," said Hans. "The *Hakenkreuz*. I want you to sew it round my left sleeve so that it won't slip down. We're marching through the city to-morrow, and I'm in the leading company with Karl von Hahnke."

He handed over the armlet, with its red *Hakenkreuz*—the sign of the crooked cross or "Swastika," as it is called in most countries where this oldest charm in the world is still used as a lucky emblem.

Rita picked up her needle and cotton, but for a moment she hesitated to take the armlet. This *Hakenkreuz* in Austria was the badge of the Nationalists. It stood for all that was intolerant and aggressive—Pan-Germanism, militarism, hatred of Socialists, hatred of Jews. At one time it was the sign of her own faith, but now she disliked it. It symbolized the hatred of her family for Max Hoffmann, whom she was going to marry on Monday.

"How high up?" she asked. And Hans put his finger on the sleeve of his tunic and said: "Just about there."

He watched her while she sewed the thing on, and there was a little smile about his lips, as though it amused him to see her doing this work.

"It's going to be a great show!" he said. "Ten thousand *Hakenkreuzler*! Your Jew friends will feel a bit nervous, I'm thinking."

Rita pricked her finger with her needle and stared at the little drop of blood.

"Hans!" she cried. "Is it Christian, all this hatred? Can't you leave the Jews alone? What have they done to you?"

"I'm a Catholic," he said—"as you used to be, old girl. If we don't get the better of the Jews, life won't be worth living in Austria or anywhere else. They're a pestilential race. They ought to be stamped out. Anyhow, we're going to show them a thing or two to-morrow. They'll see that we have the strength to defend ourselves."

"I pray to God there'll be no violence," said Rita. "Austria has suffered so much. After all our agony, can't we have peace among ourselves?"

"There'll be no disorder on our side," said Hans. "But if anybody asks for trouble he's going to get it all right! . . . Let's see how the armlet looks."

He took off his jacket and slipped into his tunic and displayed the *Hakenkreuz*.

"That's good," he said, and then suddenly took his sister's arm and pulled her towards him and kissed her.

"Forget that damned Jew of yours," he said. "Young Karl is pining to marry you."

She did not answer, but turned away to hide the tears which sprang into her eyes again, while Hans went out of the room, whistling, with his jacket over his arm. . . .

Reports differ as to the cause of the riot which happened on that Sunday when the *Hakenkreuzler* marched through the streets of Vienna with bands playing and banners flying. There were dense crowds on the sidewalks, but not many Jews among them according to some accounts. It was at the corner of the Kärtnerstrasse that the first encounter took place. The correspondent of the *Neue Freie Presse* insists that some of the *Hakenkreuzler* fell on a party of Jews without provocation and set about them with heavy cudgels. Other reporters are equally insistent that this Jewish crowd started the trouble by booing, and laughing, and shouting out insulting remarks. There was a fierce fight, which lasted until the police intervened and made numerous arrests on both sides—not before a young Jew had been killed and many wounded. The *Hakenkreuzler* also had some casualties, but none mortal.

Among those most seriously injured was Dr. Max Hoffmann, and he was too ill to attend the police enquiry, which opened amidst great public excitement. David Hoffmann, the well-known musician, swore that he was standing with his brother quite quietly on the sidewalk when the procession was passing. They were talking to a lady whom they had just met in the crowd.

"What lady?" asked the judge. "We shall need her evidence."

David Hoffmann hesitated, and the judge asked his question again.

"What was the lady's name?"

"Fräulein Rita von Falckenstein," said David Hoffmann. "She has been called as a witness, sir."

There was a stir among the people in court, hushed quickly as David Hoffmann continued his evidence.

He was standing on tiptoe to see the procession over the heads of the crowd, when he became aware of a tumult close to where he was standing with his brother. He heard shouting and screams, and saw a number of *Hakenkreuzler* slashing about them with their heavy sticks. Dr. Max Hoffmann pressed forward. He was very much distressed. Quite suddenly the two brothers, and the young lady with them, found themselves alone on the edge of the pavement, the rest of the crowd at that point having fallen back panic-stricken. A young man lay on the roadside bleeding from a scalp wound. It was one of the *Hakenkreuzler*, and the brother of the young lady whose name had been given. Dr. Max Hoffmann gave a cry of pity and rushed towards the wounded man to give him medical attention. But as he did so other members of the *Hakenkreuz* fell upon him savagely and slashed him about the head and body. In attempting to rescue his brother, David Hoffmann had also been badly bruised, as the Court could see. . . .

"We must have the evidence of Fräulein von Falckenstein," said the judge. "The story we have just heard is totally at variance with that of previous witnesses."

It was when Rita von Falckenstein took her place at the witness stand that public excitement became most tense, as though the slim, pale figure of this Catholic girl symbolized the conflict between the Jews and Christians. It was clear that the Jewish part of the public in court regarded her as a hostile witness, and there was the sound of hissing as she took her oath.

The judge bowed to her courteously. He was a friend of her father, and, like General von Falckenstein, belonged to one of the old Catholic families of Austria.

"The previous witness," said the Judge, "has stated that you were standing beside him—between himself and his brother—on the morning of the *Hakenkreuz* procession."

"Yes," said Rita timidly.

"Did you know Dr. Max Hoffmann?" asked the judge.

For a moment Rita von Falckenstein seemed to hesitate and a wave of colour swept into her pale face. Then she raised her head slightly and spoke clearly:

"He is my lover."

The silence of the court was broken by people whispering excitedly, and then by a loud hissing noise from the crowded galleries. It was not the Jewish element that hissed this time, but the members of the *Hakenkreuz* and their friends.

The Judge leaned back in his seat and stared at Rita von Falckenstein, whose hands clasped the rail of the witness-stand.

“You have a Jew for your lover?” he asked with a kind of stupefaction.

“We were going to be married on the Monday following the *Hakenkreuz* procession,” said Rita simply, and she began to weep a little.

The sound of hissing broke out again. There were cries of “Shame!” from the gallery.

The Judge gave a stern warning to the public that he would clear the court if there were any disorder. Then he addressed Rita again.

“What you have just told the Court may affect the value of your evidence somewhat. I am bound to take note of your pro-Jewish sympathies, extraordinary as they may seem from the daughter of General von Falckenstein.”

“I wish to tell the truth,” said Rita in a low voice.

She faltered a little as she spoke, though emotion strengthened her voice after a few words.

“The *Hakenkreuz* made an unprovoked attack. . . . It was just murderous hatred which seemed to make them mad. . . . When my dear lover ran out into the roadway it was with mercy in his heart, to help my brother who was wounded. . . . He is a Jew, yes, but more Christian than the Christians. . . . They battered him with their sticks. . . . They kicked him when he lay unconscious. . . . Oh, it was beast-like. . . . The *Hakenkreuz* is not a symbol of Christian charity. . . . It was my lover who was Christ-like on that Sunday morning.”

Those words, in that girlish faltering voice, thrilling with emotion and nervous exaltation, made a deep sensation in court. For several minutes there was a tumult of cheering, booing, and shouting until, white with anger, the Judge cleared the court and suspended the sitting.

Rita von Falckenstein had to be protected by the police as she left the precincts of the court. There was an ugly scene, not to the credit of women who were most hysterical and hostile.

Rita von Falckenstein went straight from the court to the hospital where her lover lay, and it was noted by the reporters that she was accompanied by her brother whose head was heavily bandaged. The sister of the ward in which the patient lay put her finger to her lips as Rita and Hans went to the bedside.

“He is getting back to consciousness,” she said. “Before the end comes.”

Dr. Max Hoffmann moaned slightly as Rita leaned over him. His head was turned sideways, showing his finely cut profile as she had seen it first under a street lamp. The back of his head was wrapped round in linen and cotton wool. It was where a heavy cudgel had made a deep and almost mortal wound.

Suddenly he turned his head and opened his eyes and saw Rita there. For a moment he may have thought that he was dreaming, for he made no sign. But presently a smile lighted up his eyes, and he tried to say something.

Rita bent lower and said: “Oh, my dear, my dear!”

He whispered to her and she heard his words:

“Tell them I forgive. . . .”

Before he died he said: “*Auf wiedersehen*,” as when he had stood in the wet darkness of Vienna nights on her father’s doorstep across which he could not pass because he did not belong to her faith or caste.

THE SHOCK OF SUCCESS

Jasper was frightened by his good fortune. He was staggered by the sudden shock of it, so that when the first revelation of its greatness came to him in clear cold figures his haggard, thought-lined face became extremely white as though he had been accused of murder.

He was conscious of annoyance as well as fear. It was utterly preposterous! The novel he had written as a "pot-boiler," so ashamed of its sentimentality and style that he had published it under another name—"Mark Fisher"—was romping through editions as fast as it could be printed. The books he had written with love and art, with ruthless sincerity, with agony and sweat of mind, had been dismal failures. Some of the critics had praised them, but the big public had left them unread. They had never earned enough to give him a decent income. He had had a hard fight to keep out of debt and had denied himself the little luxuries and graces of life—holidays abroad, the English countryside, good clothes, his favourite brand of tobacco, theatres. He had strained the loyalty of the girl to whom he had been engaged for three years without the slightest chance of providing a decent home for her. Now fortune had come with this rubbishy novel, as he thought it—"The Curse of Poverty," by "Mark Fisher."

His literary agent, a smartly dressed young man named Mr. Pratt, revealed the staggering figures. He sat in Paul Jasper's bed-sitting-room on the first floor of the lodging-house in Royal Avenue, Chelsea, talking miracles.

"It's sweeping the United States like a tidal wave. From New York to San Francisco. The women are crazy about it. The clergy are making it the text for sermons. It has reached two hundred thousand copies up to the end of March. Magnificent!"

"How much will that amount to in money?" asked Jasper, looking more scared than any man who has been favoured by fortune, but trying to keep his voice steady.

The literary agent, an enthusiastic young man with a bright, business-like manner and a silver-knobbed stick as a symbol of success, made a mental calculation.

"Let's see . . . two hundred thousand at fifteen per cent, on the published price, less our commission . . . roughly, ten thousand pounds."

"Good heavens!" said Paul Jasper faintly.

He had been sitting in a cane chair with his nervous-looking hands clasped about his thin knees, with his trousers pulled up so that the literary agent was aware of their frayed ends. Now he fidgeted in his chair and pulled out an old briar pipe through a hole in the lining of his jacket and puffed it without tobacco in the bowl.

"With the British Empire rights plus the film rights—they ought to be pretty big—and translation rights, you ought to make twenty thousand pounds out of this book. More, very likely."

"Incredible!" said Jasper.

"Then there's your next book," said Mr. Pratt brightly. "All the publishers are after it like hounds in full scent. Of course we shall hold out for a big sum in advance."

Jasper made a little noise in his throat, and tapped his teeth with the stem of his pipe.

"Look here," he said, after a moment's silence. "I suppose you're not pulling my leg or anything? Those figures rather scare me—take my breath away. I'm not used to thinking in thousands."

He glanced round his bed-sitting-room with sudden puckers about his eyes and lips. The literary agent followed his glance and gave a sympathetic smile. The room was not luxurious. The bed in the corner by the fireplace was covered with a rather dirty counterpane. The red cloth on a table by the window was ink-splashed. The bookshelves, stuffed with old volumes, looked hand-made, and were cheaply stained. On the walls were some rather good etchings in black frames, but the wall-paper had begun to peel.

"You'll be moving to different quarters," said Mr. Pratt. "As the author of the world's best seller this little room is hardly good enough."

"It's not too bad," answered Jasper. "I've grown fond of it. I like my fellow-lodgers. They're poor but friendly."

Mr. Pratt smiled and showed his white teeth.

"Your next address will be somewhere nearer Knightsbridge. The Albany, perhaps. Delightful for a single man. Well, my warmest congratulations, Mr. Jasper. That novel of yours is a giddy masterpiece. I love every word of it."

"It's trash," said Jasper. "The worst thing I've ever written. Thank heaven I didn't put it under my own name."

He spoke irritably, thinking of all those other books of his which he had written with a sense of art, for which he had lived a life of self-denial, poverty-stricken, despised by his own people as the failure of the family, with an utter refusal in his soul to pander to popular taste . . . until that "shocker" when he had hauled down his flag for once.

Mr. Pratt looked surprised by the author's contempt for his own work—surprised and amused.

"It's great stuff—believe me. Human and big. Anyhow, 'Mark Fisher' is a famous man! I'm being pestered for interviews with you."

"I won't see a soul," said Jasper, looking frightened again. "I rely on you not to give me away."

Mr. Pratt laughed and was more amused.

"That's all right! A little mystery will help to keep up interest. Most people think you're a woman."

"Idiots!" growled the author of "The Curse of Poverty."

He jerked out a sudden question.

"When can I touch some of that money? Just to know it's real."

Mr. Pratt looked thoughtful.

"Strictly speaking, the accounts are settled in July up to the previous March. But of course if you want something now we can arrange that—easily. You can draw on us. I quite understand."

He glanced round the bed-sitting-room again as though that explained everything.

"I could do with a little," said Jasper nervously. "Would fifty pounds be too much? At once, I mean."

"Five hundred, if you like," replied Mr. Pratt, as though he owned all the wealth of the world.

He rose and leaned on his silver-knobbed stick.

"I'll have a cheque made out. Also the contract for the new novel. Delighted to look after your interests, Mr. Jasper. We're going to do big business with your work."

He shook hands heartily and Jasper went to the door with him and watched him go down the uncarpeted stairs, and heard his brisk steps down the little hall and the sharp bang of the front door.

The author of "The Curse of Poverty" closed his own door quietly. He stood motionless for a time on a threadbare patch in the centre of his carpet. His thin hands clutched the lapels of his old blue-serge jacket. His head with its disorderly hair—a little bald on top—was slightly raised

and he stared out of the window across the room, not seeing the black chimney-pots over the way but some vision of life, past or to come. Presently he raised his arms above his head at full length and spoke to himself in a loud harsh whisper.

"Success . . . wealth . . . fame . . . the beauty of life . . . love and marriage . . . the power to pay back, to give, to be generous. . . . Almighty luck . . . and a home for Edna."

He laughed to himself, and spoke aloud again, as men do who lead lonely lives.

"It's devilish funny! . . . 'The failure of the family,' that's what they called me—all my prosperous relatives, my selfish sisters with their rich, fat husbands, my father with his hatred of art, his contempt for my work and ideals. 'A failure!' 'Poor old Paul, with his ink-stained fingers and shabby clothes, and his lodging somewhere in the slums. Why doesn't he get a decent job, instead of writing trashy novels which nobody reads? So silly of him! So pigheaded!' . . . Well, I'm rich, disgustingly rich, out of a trashy novel which I hate like hell. That's the irony of it. Rich! And I'm scared stiff at the thought of it. I shall get fat-headed and lose my soul. I'm ruined for ever as an artist. They'll want me to write another shocker. I shall have to dress like a tailor's dummy, and go to receptions, and get lionized, and sign my autograph in ladies' albums, and see my ugly mug in the picture papers. . . . No, I'm damned if I do!"

There was a tap at the door, and Jasper flushed nervously—a rotten habit talking to oneself—and called "Come in!"

It was a girl who came in, rather breathlessly. She had a pretty, pale face with big eyes, and looked as though she had been crying. She was in her outdoor clothes, neat but rather shabby, and she began pulling off her gloves in a petulant way as she sat down in Jasper's old armchair.

Jasper smiled at her with a look of comradeship.

"What's the matter, Peggy?"

"Everything!" said the girl. "What a life! What beasts men are! What devils!"

She tugged at her hat—a little thing of black straw with a red rose at the brim—and let it drop on the floor by her side, and pushed her fair fluffy hair off her forehead as though her head ached.

Jasper's thin lips twisted into a curve of irony.

"That's rather sweeping, isn't it? I happen to be a man, and I may be a beast. But I'm not a devil."

"You're different," said the girl. "That's why I've come to tell you. . . . Oh, Paul!"

She burst into tears and put her face in her hands.

Paul Jasper was distressed, and because of his incurable shyness he was horribly embarrassed. And he had a great affection for Peggy Sheldon, who lived in a bed-sitting-room on the floor above. He admired her courage, her gaiety, her frankness of speech, her plucky fight with poverty. He was grateful to her too. In spite of long hours in a city office, she found time to mend his socks, and sew on his buttons—made a joke of it, as she did of most things. They often dined together at a cheap little restaurant in the King's Road, Chelsea, and her shrewd comments on life amused him.

"I say!" he pleaded feebly. "Peggy, my dear! It isn't like you to give way like that."

She gave a little howl into her handkerchief, and dabbed her eyes, and then attempted to laugh through her sobs.

"Sorry, Paul. I can't help it just for once. My pluck's gone. I'm down and out this time."

"What's happened?" he asked anxiously. "They haven't given you the sack, have they?"

He knew that it would be serious if she lost her job in that city office—the Amalgamated Society of Metal Importers, Fenchurch Street—where she earned three pounds a week as typist-secretary. Out of that she not only kept herself in the bed-sitting-room upstairs but sent a pound a week to a shell-shocked brother with a wife and family.

"I've given myself the sack," said Peggy. "I'll never go to that office again. I'd rather starve to death."

Jasper raised his eyebrows and stroked his long chin with a look of perplexity.

"I thought they were so kind to you? That chief of yours—he seemed such a decent sort from what you told me."

Peggy Sheldon's face flushed vividly.

"I thought him decent. I thought his kindness was—just kindness. But it wasn't. It was vileness. He began hinting things, touching me, trying to kiss my hands. I put up with it for some time, because of my salary. . . . This evening he asked me to go away with him. There was a horrible scene. I had to hit him with the office ruler."

She made a sound that was half a sob and half a laugh.

"I gave him a jolly good whack! Thank goodness for that. It hurt him."

"Scoundrel!" said Jasper. "Damned scoundrel!"

He clenched his hands as though he would like to strangle that manager of a city office.

"So bang goes three pounds a week!" remarked Peggy. "If I don't get another job I don't know what will happen to poor old Dick."

Dick was her shell-shocked brother, as Jasper knew. At the thought of him her eyes filled with tears again.

Jasper was silent for a time. He sat on the edge of his bed looking moodily at Peggy Sheldon, thinking what a shame it was that girls like that should have to submit to such indignities for bread and butter's sake. It was damnable. It made his blood boil with rage.

"Look here," he said, "you needn't worry about that other job. You'll get one all right—with your experience. Meanwhile I'm going to lend you some money—just to tide things over."

Peggy Sheldon was not the girl to accept his offer.

"Good heavens, no! You're just as poverty-stricken as I am, Paul. I'm not going to sponge on you, of all men."

"I've had a bit of luck," he said nervously. "One of my books has made a big hit."

He could see that she didn't believe him. He knew by her smile that she remembered the ghastly failure of the last novel he had published under his own name. It had failed to earn any royalties. It had died the death.

"If you could turn your heart into gold——" she said mockingly.

"I've had a most amazing stroke of luck," he assured her.

She laughed at him.

"You can't take me in like that, Paul! I'm not going to let you throw any money at me, while you stint and scrape to make both ends meet. I've a little pride left."

"I'm rich," he said. "Extravagantly rich. I'm just wallowing in wealth."

She thought this a very good joke and rewarded it with satirical laughter.

He would have proved the truth of it, or tried to, but the story of his miracle was interrupted by another visitor. It was Vicary Brent, a film actor, when he happened to get a job. He was a young man who walked stiffly with his right leg because of a German machine-gun bullet. Jasper had known the time when he walked the streets of London with despair in his heart because he could not find any kind of work available for a flying man who had taken off his wings.

To-night he stumped into Jasper's room cheerily.

"Hullo, old bird! I've just drawn my first week's pay for 'The Secret of a Woman's Soul.' Six quidlets of the very best! So now I can settle that debt of mine, with any amount of thanks."

From his waistcoat pocket he pulled out a little wad of one-pound notes and made them crinkle between his fingers as though the sound held all the music of life.

It was only then that he saw Peggy Sheldon sitting in the old armchair, and his face flushed because he had given away the secret of his loan from Jasper.

"Don't mind me, Mr. Brent," said Peggy. "I like to hear the rustle of that money."

"Yes, a merry sound, i' faith!" said the film actor with an attempt at jauntiness. Then he recovered his composure and laughed good-humouredly.

"I'm feeling as rich as Crœsus. As a matter of fact I'm feeling so elaborately well-to-do that I've bought a few little things for distribution among kind friends—in expectation of favours to come."

He fumbled in his pockets and pulled out a packet of tobacco and laid it down on Jasper's ink-stained tablecloth with two of his pound notes underneath—the payment of his loan.

"Your special brand, old pal! Smoke it when you're thinking out a new plot."

Jasper looked at the packet and the pound notes with a queer uneasy smile.

"It's devilish kind of you. But I wish you wouldn't pay back that money. I'm not in need of it. Hang on to it for a bit."

"Better take it now!" laughed young Brent. "I can't keep money without spending it. Look here, this is for you, Miss Sheldon. In token of my high esteem."

He held out a little black pig made of Irish bog oak.

"A lucky charm," he said. "Infallible!"

Peggy Sheldon thought it adorable.

Vicary Brent produced another little parcel from his jacket pocket.

"This is the most important thing. Our combined gift to poor old Bessie Belmont. Our birthday offering. I shall have to touch my fellow-lodgers for five bob apiece. No hurry, of course!"

"What's all that?" asked Jasper. "It's the first I've heard of it."

Peggy Sheldon gave a laughing glance at young Brent and then at Jasper.

"It's a lodging-house secret. And we didn't want to sponge on you, Paul. Those five shillings mount up, and you've done quite enough in standing us that dinner the other night."

She saw that he looked annoyed and distressed, and she put a hand on his shoulder with a caressing touch.

"I won't be left out," he grumbled. "Do you think I can't afford five shillings for poor old Bessie's birthday? Good heavens!"

He gave a queer explosive laugh, thinking of "The Curse of Poverty" and all the money it was making. They wanted to spare his five shillings!

Young Brent undid a piece of tissue paper and produced a little heart of thin gold.

"Symbolical, eh?" he remarked, regarding the trinket in the palm of his hand. "A token of affection to the greatest comedienne on the music-hall stage. Twenty years ago. Before our time, but according to the chronicles."

"Poor old dear!" said Peggy. "It will make her as happy as a child. She likes to think she's still remembered."

"I'm getting Mrs. Meggs and the Colonel to join us in the deputation," explained young Brent. "They're waiting for us now. It's going to be a rare joke."

He opened Jasper's door and called over the kitchen stairs to the landlady.

"Mrs. Meggs. . . . Are you ready? . . . Bring Mollie with you. The more the merrier!"

Mrs. Meggs came upstairs, wiping some flour off her hands with a damp cloth. She was unlike the typical London landlady, being a rosy-faced little woman with a gift of laughter, and so easy-going that she treated her lodgers like adopted children and could not bear to worry them when they were behindhand with their rent. As a girl she had been in the Gaiety chorus, and it had given her a fellow-feeling with actors, authors, and out-of-works. Her daughter, Mollie, was a pretty slip of a girl, desperately in love, as Jasper knew, with Vicary Brent, who sometimes took her to the pictures or for a ride on the top of a country omnibus.

"You mustn't keep me long," said Mrs. Meggs. "I'm just getting the supper ready, and the apple-pie is not in the oven yet."

"Five minutes won't make any difference, mother," cried Mollie. "Let's have a bit of fun for once."

"Where's the Colonel?" asked Brent.

"Here!" said a voice at the top of the staircase.

It was Colonel Richard Compton, late of the Indian Cavalry—twenty years late—and now behindhand with his rent to Mrs. Meggs, who could not bear to turn him out because of his noble manners, his white moustache, and his reminiscences of King Edward when Prince of Wales. She thrilled when this old lodger spoke of his great days as a friend of Royalty.

. . ." 'Compton,' said the Prince, 'that's a damn fine woman over there! She seems to be giving you the "come hither," you rascal!' "

Or . . . " 'Compton,' said the Prince, 'if you want to make a bit to-day, put your shirt on "Merry Widow." '" . . .

Standing on the top of the staircase, the Colonel looked a distinguished figure as usual, and quite sober, which was unusual. He gave a gracious greeting to the little company on the stairs, these "Companions of the Most Honourable Order of Poverty," as he called them in his facetious moments.

"This is a great occasion," he said in his courtly voice. "I'm delighted to join in this presentation to a very dear lady for whom I have a high regard."

Young Brent winked at Jasper, and whispered behind his hand:

"I'll have to dun him for that five bob!"

Then he tapped at a door at the end of the landing and a rich voice called, "Come in!"

The girl Mollie had a laughing fit and hid her face behind young Brent.

"Pull yourself together," he said.

Inside the room, so small that a bed and table took up most of it, sat a remarkable lady in a wheeled chair. She had bright yellow hair and a full round face with bright blue eyes and the pink-and-white complexion of a new-born babe. In her flowered kimono she overflowed the wheeled chair in curves and billows. It was twenty years since Bessie Belmont had sung her naughty little songs at the old Pavilion and played Principal Boy in Drury Lane pantomimes. Now for five years she had lived in this little room stricken with dropsy, with only a glimpse through

the window curtains of the world in which she had been the Queen of Mirth. In the gilded mirror over her mantel-shelf were stuck photographs of ballet dancers and comic actors, inscribed to "dearest Bessie," and one to "Bessie Belmont, most winsome of witches, from her devoted Dan Leno."

Enormous, over-painted, helpless in her chair, she was no longer "winsome," but her voice still had the rich chuckle which had delighted the gallery boys.

"What in the world's all this?" she asked. "Come in, anyhow. There's heaps of room if you'll sit on the blooming old bed! Colonel, you're looking vastly important this evening! What's on your chest, old dear?"

Colonel Compton, late of the Indian Cavalry, cleared his throat and made a little speech.

"Miss Belmont, your fellow-lodgers have asked me to convey their birthday wishes to a lady whose fame and beauty remain as a precious memory in their hearts and as an immortal tradition in English history."

"Hear, hear!" cheered young Brent. "Well spoken, sir!"

He winked at Mollie, who stuffed a pocket handkerchief to her lips.

"Perhaps," continued the Colonel, "there are not many of this younger generation who, like myself, have had the privilege of seeing you in the time of your success, who remember the storms of applause that swept up to your feet above the footlights, who are still haunted by the magic of your songs, by the laughter in your eyes, by the exquisite grace of your dancing, by the spirit of mirth that put a spell upon the millions who adored you."

"Bravo!" cried Mrs. Meggs with shrill enthusiasm.

The old Colonel hesitated, forgot the speech he had learnt by heart, stammered a little and then dropped abruptly from the heights of oratory.

"Bessie, old girl, as a young spark I used to worship the ground you trod on. Those wicked little songs of yours, eh? We all used to whistle 'em. My boys went singing 'em, on the way to fight the Afghans. . . .

'*Alas and alack!*
She came back
With a naughty little twinkle in her eye!' . . ."

The Colonel gave out the old chorus in a quavery voice which was broken by a cough.

"Well, my dear," he said, "we've come to wish you a happy birthday, and many of them. And we want to show our love by a small gift in which we've all had a share, or will have when we've paid up. Nothing very much—this is Poverty Hall, you know—but just a little token of affection and esteem. Not the gift but the givers! What, what? . . . Mr. Brent, produce the trinket, if you please."

In the best style of film romance young Brent made a low and sweeping bow, dropped stiffly on one knee—his wounded knee—and presented the heart of thin gold.

Bessie Belmont's baby complexion was suffused with a purple tint, and her blue eyes filled with tears.

"You dears!" she said. "All as poor as church mice but mighty generous to a fat old ruin. . . . Why, damn it, I want to cry my eyes out, just because you've made me so happy."

Jasper slipped away from the company in Bessie Belmont's room. Among these people of "Poverty Hall," as the Colonel had called it, he felt a fraud with all that money waiting for him. He had the guilty conscience of a profiteer or *nouveau riche* hiding his wealth from people who believed him to be as poverty-stricken as themselves. Well, he would share his luck with them. . . .

He left the lodging-house in Royal Avenue and walked to South Kensington. His first duty, after all, was to the girl who had waited for him so long, so loyally. Lately she had lost heart a little. He had been so long in making good. She had waited nearly three years for him, resisting the pressure of her well-to-do relatives to break her engagement with a man who could not provide her with a decent home. Now, at last, he could bring her good tidings. The amazing success of his worst novel had altered all things. He could say to her, "My dear, we needn't wait any longer. Let's be quick and make that home of ours. I'm rich!"

Jasper was emotional at that thought. Indeed, the shock of success had emotionalized his whole nature, usually so quiet and calm. He was a little dazed by it, like a man under the spell of some enchantment. He was in his shabbiest clothes, having forgotten to change into a more respectable suit for this visit to his fiancée in her people's big house in Ennismore Gardens. Also he was not conscious of the time, and when he strode up the steps and rang the bell he was aware of the grave displeasure of the butler who opened the door.

"The family is at dinner, sir. They are entertaining guests."

"Oh!" said Jasper, looking rather crushed. "Well, I'll wait in the billiard-room. Tell Miss Marsh I'm there. No hurry, you know."

"The family is in evening dress, sir," said the butler, glancing with disapproval at Jasper's shabby suit.

Jasper's face flushed slightly, but he concealed his annoyance at this rebuke.

"That's all right, Hodgson. Tell Miss Marsh that I have something particular to say."

The butler bowed slightly, and made way for Jasper to pass into the hall. He took his visitor's hat and stick—an old felt hat much the worse for wear—as though he hated to soil his hands with them.

"The family will have finished dinner in about half an hour," he remarked with grave condescension.

Jasper waited that half-hour in the billiard-room. He could hear the voices of "the Family" in the next room. They were laughing and talking. He could picture them there: his future father-in-law, bald-headed, slightly flushed with good wine, garrulous about the iniquities of the Labour Government and the Income Tax; Edna's brother Herbert, elegantly dressed, supercilious, cynical; the two younger brothers just down from Oxford, good-looking, fresh, with the arrogance of youth, intolerant of men like Jasper who looked as though they slept in their clothes; Edna's mother, stately, wearing jewels in her hair, keeping a sharp eye on the servants, inattentive to the conversation. And the guests . . . prosperous, fashionable, fond of golf, owners of expensive motor-cars. Not Jasper's crowd. He felt ill at ease with them. There was no intellectual bridge between his world and theirs.

It was more than half an hour before Edna came into the billiard-room. She looked beautiful in her evening gown of green silk, showing her arms and neck. For a moment she stood in the doorway looking at him with a faint smile on her lips. She seemed pale, he thought, and worried.

"How shabby you are, Paul!" she remarked, rather fretfully. "You might have made yourself look more respectable."

"Sorry," he answered meekly. "I didn't know you had a dinner-party."

"I can't possibly ask you to join us," said Edna. "You look like a tramp. Besides——"

She hesitated, and gave a nervous laugh.

"That's all right," said Jasper; "I won't disgrace your drawing-room. I've come to tell you something. Something—tremendous."

"Tell me," she answered, "but don't take too long. I can't leave the guests."

Jasper drew a deep breath. He felt excited. This was the moment for which he had been striving for years, for nearly three years.

"You'll hardly believe it, my dear. I can hardly believe it myself. . . . We can be married as soon as you like! Next week. The quicker the better. I've had a wonderful stroke of luck."

He noticed that a wave of colour swept under her pale skin. She did not look interested in his luck. She did not even ask him the meaning of it.

"Paul," she said in a low voice, "I've been meaning to tell you something for ever so long. But I couldn't screw up courage. Archie Hunt and I——Didn't you guess? . . . Haven't you noticed anything?"

"Guess what?" he asked in a dazed way. "Noticed what?"

She dropped her head and laughed nervously again.

"Archie has made me love him. We've been together such a lot. He's here to-night. I promised him I would tell you."

Jasper's face was twisted into a painful smile.

"Is that so?" he asked quietly.

The girl held out her hand with a little gesture of appeal.

"I tried to be loyal to you. . . . My people wanted me to break with you ages ago."

"Yes," said Jasper; "I was no catch for you. They saw that!"

He spoke with irony, but not angrily.

"I'm frightfully sorry, Paul," said the girl. "I shall always remember our friendship. Your ideals and all that."

Jasper answered with a kind of quiet violence.

"Oh, damn my ideal! I wanted your love. I worked for it."

"You kept me waiting such a long time!" said Edna Marsh. "I was growing old waiting for you. Twenty-four—twenty-five—twenty-six! And of course your books never pay. They never will pay, poor old Paul! You'll always be poor—and I hate poverty. I haven't the courage for it. It's so squalid. Archie Hunt——"

"Archie Hunt is a rich man," said Jasper. "Well, of course I understand. He can afford to give you a nice home and all that. As you say, my books never will pay."

The line of his lips curved into a smile, but his eyes were moody.

"They're too quiet and 'high-brow,' " said Edna. "If you wrote something thrilling, like that book by Mark Fisher——"

" 'The Curse of Poverty'?" asked Jasper, drawing a quick breath.

"Yes, it's wonderful—and making heaps of money, I'm told."

"It would," said Jasper. "The sort of trash people like."

"It's splendid," said Edna. "Archie gave it to me the other day and we spoke of you, and said, 'Why doesn't poor old Paul write something like that?' "

"That was kind of you," said Jasper. "Especially kind of Archie Hunt!"

He seemed very much amused.

"Supposing I *had* written it?" he asked. "Supposing I came to you to-night, like this, in shabby clothes, and said, 'I've made a pot of money. I can afford to make a decent home for you. I can give you fame, wealth, love'—what then? What would be your answer?"

She put her hand on his sleeve.

"Paul! I know it's cruel. I feel a little beast. But let me off, won't you? It's not your poverty that frightens me away. Not altogether. It's Archie. We've found out that we're made for each other. I'm desperately sorry."

There was a noise of voices outside the room. The guests were going upstairs. The girl glanced towards the door uneasily. Jasper heard Archie's voice, laughing.

"Yes," he said, "you ought to be going back to them. I'm in the way. I called—too late."

He stood with his head bowed, rather broken, and the girl looked at his shabby figure with pity in her eyes.

"Here's the ring you gave me," she said in a low voice. "It's hateful to give it back. The little ring which cost you so much."

"It cost part of my soul," he said. "All the profits of my best book which nobody read. Not even you!"

She slipped the ring off her finger and held it out to him, her eyes swept with tears for a moment, and he took it and let it drop on the carpet at her feet.

"Kiss me," she said. "For the last time, Paul."

She came close and held her face up to him but he took her hand and raised it to his lips. Then he gave a kind of hard sob, and strode out of the room and into the hall.

"Your hat and stick, sir," said the butler.

Yes, to be sure. He might as well take his hat and stick. They were too shabby to leave about in a rich man's house.

He walked up Ennismore Gardens with two words singing through his brain. "Too late . . . Too late . . ." Success had mocked at him. It had come with his worst book, and in gaining a fortune he had lost a wife. One of life's little ironies, and damned funny!

He laughed mirthlessly at the humour of it. Presently he felt rather faint, so that he swayed a little and was nearly run over by a taxi-cab. Perhaps the shock of success had been too much for him. Or perhaps he was merely hungry! He smiled again at that thought. Hunger was stronger than sentiment, and he hadn't eaten a thing since breakfast. . . . He felt in his pocket and found eighteen pence. The author of "The Curse of Poverty" had no more than that in ready cash. Well, it was enough to get a meal, and he turned into a cheap-looking restaurant near Knightsbridge, and after a careful study of the menu ordered liver and bacon. He could just afford that, with twopence for the waiter.

At the next table to his sat a nice-looking girl reading a novel while she dined alone. Sometimes she forgot her food while her eyes devoured the printed page, with her fork poised over her plate. Jasper glanced over her shoulder and read the title. It was "The Curse of Poverty." The sight of it took his appetite away. Why didn't the girl get on with her food instead of reading that nonsense? It made the liver and bacon taste bad in his mouth. If only she had been reading one of his other novels, into which he had put all his best. Nobody read them. Not even the critics.

Perhaps the liver and bacon *was* bad. Or perhaps the shock of success, or love's failure, or wounded pride, had poisoned his system. He awakened in bed that night with a touch of fever. By the next night he was delirious, and a doctor called in by Vicary Brent spoke the words "Ptomaine poisoning."

"He'll want a nurse," said the doctor. "I'll send one round."

He was a doctor in a poor district, and not doing well himself. A hint of anxiety came into his eyes as he glanced round Jasper's bed-sitting-room and asked a question of young Brent.

"I suppose he can afford a nurse's fees?"

"His people are well-to-do," said Brent. "I'll let them know."

Before the nurse came Peggy Sheldon took turns with Vicary Brent at Jasper's bedside. There was nothing to do except watch his flushed face and listen to his wild delirious talk. In his delirium he was possessed with the fixed idea that he had become very rich and famous. He conjured up visions of all the splendid things he was going to do with his money. He was magnificent in generosity, especially to his friends in this lodging-house. Peggy heard her name mentioned many times, though he did not recognize her standing beside his bed.

"Peggy needn't get anxious about another job. Tell her not to worry. I want her to come with me for a long holiday. Young Brent, too, and the Colonel. A merry party, eh? Companions of the Most Honourable Order of Poverty—painting things red, regardless of expense. First-class hotels everywhere, *trains de luxe*, generous tipping to poor devils of waiters. Oh, you needn't be afraid! I'm paying. A thousand pounds? Oh, that's nothing! I'm disgustingly rich. Let's go to Venice—that hotel on the Lido. That's where the profiteers stay. Better than the King's Road, Chelsea, isn't it? The beauty of life, music, the blue sea! We've been starved of beauty. That was the hardest thing to bear. Now that I'm rich I'm going to buy all the beauty of the world and give it to my friends. Not to my well-to-do family. No, not a bean. And not to Edna's supercilious crowd. I hate them all. I'm going to share my luck with poor old Bessie Belmont, and young Brent, and Peggy. Don't you know I'm rich? Didn't I tell you? It came quite suddenly. Heaps of money. More than I can reckon up. Frightening! And funny, too. Damned funny! It makes me laugh."

It made him laugh then. He sat up in bed, clutching at the torn old counterpane, and laughed with shrill mirth. Then he began all over again, issuing invitations, buying rich presents for Peggy, and Mrs. Meggs, and Mollie, and young Brent, and Colonel Compton. He was going to buy the world for them, the blue sea, the stars, the open fields, the charm and joy of life.

"It's easy," he said. "I'm rich. I'm enormously rich!"

He chuckled at that thought.

"It's extraordinarily comic," he said. "After years of failure, success embraces me like a beautiful woman. 'You've got an ugly old mug,' says Success, 'but I'm going to marry you. You needn't be frightened. Nobody knows!' Yes, that's the best joke of all. Nobody knows. They won't believe it! I keep on telling them, but they won't believe. Peggy doesn't believe a word of it! Well, it's true. I'm rich! I'm disgustingly rich!"

When the nurse came, a quiet, matter-of-fact little woman, Peggy Sheldon slipped out of the room and found Vicary Brent outside, listening anxiously.

"He's talking his head off," said young Brent. "What's it all about?"

Peggy looked frightened, and there was no colour in her cheeks.

"He's frightfully delirious. He thinks he's rich."

"Poor old Jasper!" said Vicary. "It's a happy kind of delirium, anyway. I wish I had ptomaine poisoning!"

Peggy burst into tears.

"He has always been so kind to me . . . my best friend."

Colonel Compton came out of his room smelling strongly of whisky, and Mrs. Meggs came up from the basement.

They both asked anxiously after the health of the patient.

"High fever," said young Brent. "Pretty bad, I should say."

Poor old Bessie Belmont sent down a message by Mollie.

If Mr. Jasper needed any little comfort in the way of chicken broth, would they put it down to her account? If she could have moved her old carcase about she would have offered to nurse him.

The Colonel expressed his appreciation of Bessie Belmont's offer. He ventured to second it. Whatever poor dear Jasper needed must certainly be provided regardless of expense. They owed him a debt of gratitude for his good comradeship, his sterling qualities of character, his nobility of soul.

"As far as my credit goes," said the Colonel in his magnificent way, "I shall be glad to contribute to any expense."

He forgot for the moment that his credit did not go as far as the wine and spirits shop at the corner of Sloane Square, which had refused to supply another bottle of whisky until his account was settled.

Mrs. Meggs was equally generous, and on a firmer basis of actuality.

"Whatever the doctor orders, that he shall have, poor dear. I'd work my fingers to the bone for him."

Vicary Brent rang up Paul Jasper's family and was answered by a woman's voice, rather hard and unsympathetic.

"Paul Jasper? Yes, that's my brother. What's the matter?"

"Ptomaine poisoning. He's rather bad, I'm afraid."

"Have you sent for a doctor?"

"Yes, he's here now."

"Oh, well, that's all right. Perhaps you will ring up again and let me know how he's getting on."

"He's very ill," said Vicary Brent. He wanted to say, "He may be dying or dead before I ring up again." There was something in that cold woman's voice which enraged him.

"It's a chill, perhaps," was the answer. "Such dreadful weather!"

Vicary Brent banged down the receiver and said, "So much for one's rich relations! They don't care a damn. They don't lift a little finger when one's down and out."

That night the doctor called twice and stayed a long time. Upstairs none of the lodgers went to bed, but gathered in Bessie Belmont's room where she made tea for them. They spoke in whispers because of the shadow of death in the house. It was as bad as that, according to the nurse. "The fever is burning him up," she said. "If we can't get his temperature down he'll be gone before the night's out." They could hear his voice talking, talking incessantly. Peggy Sheldon, wan-faced and red-eyed, slipped out of the room from time to time to listen on the landing or to get a hurried word from the nurse when she went to get water from the bathroom. Peggy could only keep her nerves under control by smoking cigarettes, one after another, so that, with Vicary Brent doing the same thing, Bessie Belmont's room was filled with the reek of smoke. Once while Peggy was out of the room, listening on the landing, the old music-hall star spoke to Mrs. Meggs about her.

"That girl is suffering torture, poor dear. She'll break her little heart if he's taken from us. She loves the ground under his feet."

"You don't say so!" said Mrs. Meggs, drawing a deep breath. "How do you know that, Mrs. Belmont?"

"I've eyes," said Bessie Belmont. "And I know what love is. Lord, I've had more experience than most, though I says so as shouldn't."

"We all know it," said the Colonel. "Love was another name for Bessie Belmont—in the 'nineties, when men knew how to love and life was good."

"Well," said Bessie Belmont, with a blush mantling her large moon-like face, "we won't tell old tales, Colonel. Not to-night, with that poor

boy lying at death's door. It don't seem decent, though I'm glad of my memories."

"Well, he's happy, anyhow," said Mrs. Meggs tearfully. "If one must be delirious, it's nice to believe oneself rich."

Vicary Brent spoke some quiet words.

"It will make the waking rather tragic . . . if he gets well again. I shall hate to tell him that all his dreams are false."

That was what happened. That was what saddened the friends of Paul Jasper when the delirium passed from him and he was out of danger. For ten days afterwards he was very weak and could not lift a hand from his counterpane, though he was tranquil and cheerful and spoke quietly to these friends who came into the room to keep him company. But they were distressed because the idea which had possessed him in his delirium did not leave him in convalescence. It was not so wildly expressed, but it was even more pathetic because of his quiet cheerfulness. They hated to disillusion him.

It was to Vicary Brent that he first spoke of financial matters.

"I'm afraid this illness of mine must have cost a pretty penny. Chicken, champagne, all sorts of luxuries, to say nothing of the nurse. Who has been paying for them?"

"That's all right," said Brent hurriedly. "We made a little whip round among the lodgers. You needn't worry about it in the slightest degree."

"I'm not worrying about myself," said Jasper. "I can afford it now that I've made so much money. But I can't sponge on all you good friends while I'm waiting for all that ill-gotten gold of mine."

Vicary Brent was silent. How could he break the dreadful news to this poor fellow that there had been no truth in all his dreams?

Jasper saw the troubled look on his face.

"I told you, didn't I?" he said feebly. "I'm the author of that book 'The Curse of Poverty.' It's made a pile of money. Too much. But it will help me to pay back for all your friendship. I want to share my luck with all my pals."

Vicary Brent said, "That's all right, old man," and then was silent again.

He wondered whether Jasper's illness had permanently affected his brain. This was a new delusion about "The Curse of Poverty." Perhaps he had read the book just before his illness. A jolly good book too! A million times better than anything poor old Jasper could write. What a pathetic idea! How cold and sad would be the awakening to truth!

To Peggy also he spoke of his good luck. Being out of a job, she was able to spend much time with him after the nurse had gone, and indeed took the woman's place, and was more comforting to the patient. For hours she sat at his bedside while he held her hand, and sometimes caressed it feebly, and spoke now and then.

"Peggy," he said one day, "I've been turned down by that girl of mine. You remember? I told you I was engaged."

"Yes," said Peggy, veiling her eyes with her long lashes.

"She was tired of waiting for a failure. It looked as if I could never provide her with a decent home. There was another fellow—Archie Hunt—who was more attractive and quite well off. Well, I don't blame her. And perhaps it was a lucky escape for both of us. I wasn't her sort, really. Nor she mine, now I come to think of it—after this illness. But it was queer that she turned me down just as success came. Ironical, that! On the very night when I knew that I was going to be a rich man!"

Peggy Sheldon was silent, as young Brent had been. She was glad, strangely and wonderfully glad, that Jasper was no longer engaged. But she was frightened by that harking back to delirium . . . to that fixed idea of being rich.

He perceived all this disbelief at last, and made no further effort to convince them. He even gave up his claim to be the author of "The Curse of Poverty," and asked Peggy to read it out to him. But he could not stand more than a few chapters, and was restive while she read, interrupting her by peevish exclamations.

"Oh Lord, this is ghastly stuff! Sheer melodrama! . . . That fellow, Mark Fisher, must have the brain of a cod-fish. . . . Oh, my sainted aunt! Did you ever hear such piffle?"

"I think it's splendid," said Peggy. "But of course, if it worries you——"

"It does. Read something else, Peggy. I love the sound of your voice. . . . I'd no idea it was so jolly to be ill and weak!"

When he was stronger he took a cab to the city and opened a bank account with a cheque for five hundred pounds which had lain unopened in its envelope during the first part of his illness. But he said nothing to his fellow-lodgers about that marvellous event in the history of an author. They were rather surprised when he made a number of expeditions in taxi-cabs, and believed that his family must have sent him money at last. They were also a little distressed when he left the lodging-house for a week without letting them know his whereabouts. After all their sympathy it seemed unkind and secretive. Even Peggy felt hurt, and during his week of absence went about with a white face and sombre eyes. She had answered some advertisements for typist-secretaries, and at the end of the week was offered a position with a firm of merchants in Leadenhall Street at a few shillings less than her old salary.

"I've got a new job," she told Jasper when he came back that evening, looking more like his old self, and with a brighter light in his eyes.

"I wouldn't take it if I were you," he said quietly. "I've found a much better billet for you. In the country. With a friend of mine. An author-fellow who has a nice old house and a wonderful garden with clipped hedges and all the flowers that Shakespeare loved. He wants someone to help him with his work, and play tennis with him when he gets bored, and water the flowers now and then. He's a queer sort of fellow with an ugly mug, but easy-going and quite tame."

"It sounds wonderful," said Peggy. "I adore the country . . . but all the same——"

She did not tell him that she would hate to leave the lodging-house and lose his company.

"We might jog down to-morrow and have a look at it," he said casually. "A kind friend has put a car at my disposal. A four-seater. We'll take poor old Bessie for a drive—she hasn't left her room for eighteen months."

There was quite an excitement in Royal Avenue, Chelsea, when the four-seater appeared outside the lodging-house and when Mrs. Meggs and young Brent lifted Bessie Belmont out of her wheeled chair and put her in the back seat next to Peggy.

Jasper sat next to the driver, who seemed to be a friend of his, having served with him in the Great War. On the way out of London they talked of the old days in the trenches, and exchanged reminiscences about the places in which they had been most frightened. In the back seat Bessie Belmont sat looking very like a Royal Duchess of extra large size, squeezing Peggy Sheldon into a narrow space so that she could hardly be seen. The spirit of youth came back to the old lady at the sight of green fields and leafy lanes, and wild flowers in the hedgerows. She startled some passing rustics by bursting into song in a rich contralto. It was a song that had been very popular in the nineties, when Bessie Belmont was Queen of the Music-hall Stage.

"*Daisy, Daisy,*
Give me your answer, do,
For I'm half crazy
All for the love of you!

It won't be a stylish marriage,
For we can't afford a carriage,
But you'd look sweet upon the seat
Of a bicycle made for two!"

Jasper was somewhat embarrassed by this departure from conventional behaviour in a four-seater car and begged Miss Belmont to restrain her happiness on the outskirts of the next village.

"We've got to try and look respectable here," he remarked. "This is where my friend lives, and where I hope Peggy will get a job she likes."

They drove through an old-fashioned gateway, with a little white lodge on one side of the carriage drive.

"If only I could end my days in a place like that!" said Bessie Belmont. "Look at that wistaria over the porch! It's like the cottage in 'The Babes in the Wood' when I played Principal Boy at Birmingham. I'd sit at the window and make love to the birds. As happy as the day's long."

Big tears began to drop down her rouged cheeks at the thought of the cramped little room which caged her soul in Royal Avenue.

"I wouldn't be surprised if I could arrange it for you," said Jasper. "It's empty now, and that friend of mine hasn't any use for it. He'd love to have you there."

Bessie Belmont was unbelieving.

"The man's crazy!" she cried. "He's stuffing us up with fairy-tales. Well, let's make believe until we get back. Peggy, my dear, that's my little cottage. I want you to come to tea with me. There's honey and fresh-made bread, and strawberries from the garden. Knock at the door and pull the latch, and come straight in!"

The car swung up the drive, and stopped outside a little old house with a low roof and white plastered walls through which old beams showed black. There was honey-suckle outside the porch, and below the mullioned windows there was a riot of old-fashioned flowers.

"Elizabethan," said Jasper. "Think of all the dear folk who lived here and crossed this threshold. . . . Do you like the look of it, Peggy?"

Peggy Sheldon thought it too beautiful for words. But she was nervous because of that author who wanted a typist-secretary and someone to play tennis with him. He might be horrible.

Jasper led her inside the house while Bessie Belmont sat in the car waiting for them. It seemed that the owner of the house was not at home yet. Jasper seemed to know his way about. He went into every room, pointing out the old beams, the inglenooks, the low ceilings, the casement windows, the old oak furniture, the grandfather clock.

Every now and then he turned to Peggy and said, "How do you like it?"

She loved it. She thought it all enchanting. But it was queer the owner was not at home. Didn't he expect them? Jasper hadn't told her the author's name. Was he a famous man?

Paul Jasper revealed a secret.

"It's the author of that ridiculous novel 'The Curse of Poverty.' You know! By Mark Fisher. The man who ought to have been shot for writing such piffle."

Peggy Sheldon laughed at him.

"You're prejudiced! . . . You're jealous of him! I think he must be a fine man. Only a good man could write a book like that."

"He's an ugly devil, anyhow," said Jasper.

He looked at Peggy with a strange twisted smile.

"Peggy," he said quietly, "I'm sorry you like that book. It's bad art. But I'm glad you like the mind behind it. It happens to be my mind, and this house is mine, and the little cottage by the gateway, and that old garden which looks so pretty through the casement windows. I'm going to give the cottage to Bessie Belmont. I'd like to see her there making love to the birds. They'll think she's the setting sun. And if you want a job in life, this house is yours, and all my love. We could make life a good game together in that garden out there . . . and forget 'The Curse of Poverty!' . . . Don't you believe me?"

No, she didn't believe him, even then. It seemed too good to be true. It was the dream of delirium still haunting him. Things don't happen like that in real life—except now and then. But it happened to Peggy.

THE END

[The end of *Out of the Ruins* by Philip Gibbs]