

# Captivity eBook

## Captivity

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# Page 1

## TO E. J. R-S.

You have often said that you could never write a book. You have written this one just as surely as Beatrice wrote the Vita Nuova for Dante. Until I talked with you I did not know that our lives are the pathway for God's feet; I had not realized that Trinity of body, brain and spirit; and it had never come to me before how, for each other's sake, we must set a censor, very strong and austere, upon our secret thoughts. I have learnt these things from you; the gold of your thoughts has passed through the crucible of my experience to make a book. Perhaps a little of the gold has been left clinging to the crucible—and for that I have to thank you, my dear.

Margaret Leonora Eyles.

Bexhill-on-Sea, *1st February, 1920.*

"Man comes into life to seek and find his sufficient beauty, to serve it, to win and increase it, to fight for it; to face anything and dare anything for it, counting death as nothing so long as the dying eyes still turn to it. And fear and dulness and indolence and appetite—which, indeed, are no more than fear's three crippled brothers who make ambushes and creep by night—are against him, to delay him, to hold him off, to hamper and beguile and kill him in that quest."

H. G. Wells ("The History of Mr. Polly").

## Captivity

### CHAPTER I

As long as Marcella could remember, the old farm-house had lain in shadows, without and within.

Behind it rose the great height of Ben Grief, with his gaunt face gashed here by glowering groups of conifers, there by burns that ran down to the River Nagar like tears down a wrinkled old face. Marcella had read in poetry books about burns that sang and laughing waters that clattered to the sea for all the world like happy children running home from school. But the waters on Ben Grief neither laughed nor sang. Sometimes they ran violently, as though Ben Grief were in a rage of passionate weeping; sometimes they went sullenly as though he sulked.

It was upon Ben Grief that Marcella looked when she went to bed at night and when she wakened in the morning in her little stark room at the back of the house. There was another window in the room from which she could have seen the sea, but Aunt Janet



had had a great mahogany wardrobe placed right across it, and only the sound of the sea, creeping sometimes, lashing most often, came to her as she lay in bed, reminding her that the sea was there all the time.

In front of the house rose Lashnagar, the home of desolation, a billowing waste of sand rising to about a thousand feet at the crest. Curlews called and sea-gulls screamed over Lashnagar; heather grew upon it, purple and olive-green; fennel and cooch and henbane sprang side by side with dwarfed stink-nettles, stunted by the salt sand in which they were rooted. But the soil was not deep enough for trees or bushes to take root.

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In Marcella's lifetime men had been lost on Lashnagar, and sheep and dogs, adventuring too far, had never come back. Legend had it that hundreds of years ago Lashnagar had been a quiet little village nestling round Castle Lashcairn, the home of Marcella's folks. That was in the year before Flodden Field, a hot, dry time that began with Lady Day and lasted till the Feast of All Souls without rain or storm. In that hot summer a witch-woman, very beautiful, had come to Lashnagar to win the soul of Andrew Lashcairn, winning with his soul his bed and his board. A wild wooing it was, and a wilder wedding. All the wooing had been done by the woman—as was the way of the Lashcairn women ever afterwards—in the dry heat of that unnatural summer when the sap dried in the trees and the marrow in men's bones, while the heated blood surged through their veins more quickly than ever before. On the Feast of All Souls, the wedding day, a copper sun rose in a sky of blood and lead, and all the folks of Lashnagar drank deeply to drive away impending horror. That night, after they slept, while Andrew Lashcairn lay awake in the witch-woman's arms, a great wind came in from the sea, sweeping before it the salt sand of the dunes, covering the village and the castle and the old feet of Ben Grief where sheep and cattle fed. The witch-woman, with her lord and a few servants, fought and battled a way through the storm of sand and stones to settle where the last of the wind-blown desert piled on the knees of Ben Grief. The next year Andrew rode away to the fight at Flodden Field. Unknown to him, the witch-woman who loved him rode close to his heels.

There his pennant, with its sun in splendour and its flaunting "By myself I stand," went down. When the hush of death fell on the noise of battle the witch-woman crawled by night among the dead to find her lord lying with one arm thrown carelessly over his dead horse's neck. It was there, companioned only by the dead, that the witch-woman's twins—a boy and a girl—were born. And it pleased their mother's grim humour to creep about the battlefield in the darkness until she found banners and trappings of the Southrons, whom she hated, to act as birth-clothes for her son and daughter when she carried them back mile after mile to brooding Lashnagar. It was the boy who was Marcella's ancestor.

Lashnagar was her nursery. On Lashnagar she had seen queer things. One night, when everyone was asleep and the path of the full moon lay shining across the sea, she went up on to Lashnagar with the shadows of the flowering henbane clean-cut and inky about her feet. Half-way up a great jagged hole lay gashed. Peering into it—she had never seen it before—she could distinguish the crumbling turret of a church, the roof of a house and the stiff tops of trees buried partly in a soft sea of sand in the middle of which was a depression. The heathery ground on which she kneeled began to crack very gently, and, with beating heart, she started back, realizing that the hillside was hollow, formed here of rotted trees thinly overgrown with turf and sand. Next morning she heard that a shepherd was missing, and then she guessed with horror the meaning of the chasm and the soft depression.



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Next day she went back to gaze fascinated at the hole, only to find that already the dry sand had almost filled it, quite covering the cracked place where she had kneeled, the turret and the roof. She told no one but Hunchback Wullie, an old man who tended the green-wood fires in the huts on the beach, where fish were cured. Excepting her mother, he was Marcella's only friend—he it was who had soaked her mind in the legends of Lashnagar and the hills around; he it was who had taught her the beautiful things learnt by those who grow near to the earth and humble living things.

She ran down the hillside to him that day, her eyes—the blue-grey eyes of her people—wide with horror, her long, straight, fair hair, that she wore in two Marguerite plaits, loosened and swinging in the wind. Hunchback Wullie was in the first hut, threading the herrings through their gills on the long strings that went from side to side high up under the roof. His ruddy brown beard glistened with the shining scales of the fish, for he had a habit of standing by the hut door looking out to sea and stroking his beard, when another man would have smoked and rested.

“Things never come tae an ending, lassie,” he said, his little red-brown eyes looking out over the grey water. “Either for good or for ill they're always gaun on. They may be quiet like Lashnagar for years, an' then something crops out—like yon crumbling last night that killed young Colin. But it's not always evil that crops out, mind ye.”

Marcella did not go on Lashnagar again for months. The next time Wullie was with her, and half-way up the incline they found apple blossom growing about one foot from the ground on a little sapling with a crabbed, thick trunk.

“Why, look at that little apple tree, Wullie—how brave of it! I'm going to root it up and take it to my garden. It can never live here in the sand and the wind.”

Wullie sat down and watched her, smiling a little and stroking his beard as she dug with her hands in the friable soil. For a long time she dug, but the sapling went deeper and deeper, and at last she sat down hot and tired.

“D'ye ken what ye're daein', lassie?” he said, looking at the pink and white bloom reflectively. “Ye're diggin' doon intae death! Yon flooer's the reaping of a seedtime many a hundred years gone by. If ye was tae dig doon an' doon all the day ye'd find yon apple tree buried deep i' th' sand. The last time it fruited was afore Flodden, when Lashcairns were kings—”

“What, Wullie, a poor old tree buried all those years, pushing up to light like this? How could it?” said Marcella, staring at it fascinated.

“I've tauld ye afore, Marcella. There's no ending tae things! Sometimes the evil comes cropping oot, like when men get caught an' buried on Lashnagar. Sometimes it's something bonny, like yon flooer. Yon apple was meant to live an' bear fruit; the bonny



apple's juist the makeweight. It's the seed that matters all the time—the life that slides along the tree's life. Yon tree was buried before its seedtime, and all these years it struggled, up an' up, till it broke through into the light of the sun. Like God strugglin' at the end through a man's flesh—"

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Marcella stared at him: Wullie often talked like this, and she only understood very vaguely what he meant. But she could grasp the idea of something trying to struggle through desperately, and looked pityingly at the little frail plume of blossom.

“And after all these years, to struggle through on this bleak hill! Poor little tree!” she said.

“That happens often to folk’s lives. They come struggling through tae something very rough and hard. But it’s the struggling that matters. Yon tree may only have one fruit that will seed. And so life goes on—”

He stroked his beard and stared over the sea to where the brown-sailed herring boats of his brother and his nephew were coming in through the morning sunlight.

“It’s a bit sad, isn’t it?” Marcella said dreamily. “It seems hard on the tree somehow, Wullie. Just as if the poor tree was only a path for the new tree to walk along—”

“Well, that’s all life is—a path for other life to walk along.”

“I wish you’d explain better, Wullie,” she said, staring from him to the plant.

“Explaining’s never any use, lassie. Folks have to live things to find them out.” He stood up slowly. “There’s the boats comin’ in, an’ I must get on back to the huts. Ye’ll learn, Marcella—ye’ll come tae it some day that ye’re only a path yerself for things to walk along—”

“Wullie—*what* things?” she demanded.

“Other folks, maybe. Maybe God,” he said, and went off to the huts.

Overcome by the pathos of the little hopeful tree, Marcella carried baskets of soil from the farm and pots of water to lay them round about it. She planted stakes round it to keep off the force of the wind. But that year the flowering bore no fruit. And Wullie smiled at her attempts to help the tree.

“The roots are doon too deep, lassie,” he said. “Sae deep ye canna reach them. There’s little ye can dae for tree or man, Marcella, but juist not hinder them. All we can do, the best of us, is to put a bit of soil an’ watter half-way up a tree trunk an’ hope we’re feeding the roots—”

“Then what can anyone do?” she said, looking at the pitiful little tree, stripped now of its leaves in the autumn chill.

“I tauld ye—juist not hinder. An’ lie as quiet as ye can because ye’re a path—”

It was in this way that Marcella got her education. Most of the time Wullie talked above her head save when he told her of the habits of animals and plants, of the winds and the seasons. Her mother, before she was too ill, had taught her to read and that was all. Even her mother, drawn in upon herself with pain, talked above her head most of the time, too. The girl turned herself loose in the big room at the farm where books were stored and there she spent days on end when the weather was too wild to be braved. It was a queer collection of books. All Scott's novels were there; she found in them an enchanted land.

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She lived them, she fed on them. She never read herself into the woman's part in them. Only Jeannie Deans really met her requirements as a "part" and she left much to be desired in the way of romance and beauty. Most often she was young Lochinvar or Rob Roy; sometimes Coeur de Lion led her on full-blooded adventure. There were quaint old books of Norse and Keltic legend, musty, leather-bound books with wood-cut illustrations and long "s's" in the printing. There was Fox's Book of Martyrs: there were many tales of the Covenanters, things hard, austere and chill.

One summer a young student came to the farm for the harvest. He was a peasant lad, a penniless bursary student at Edinburgh University. In the Long Vacation, he worked at his native farming, reading voraciously all the time and feeding sparingly, saving his wages against the coming bleak winter in his fireless attic in an Edinburgh wynd. He talked to Marcella, dogmatically, prodigiously, unanswerably. On her legends and fairy-tales and poetry he poured contempt. He read the "Riddle of the Universe" and the "Kritic of Pure Reason," orating them to Marcella as they worked together in the harvest field. She did not even understand their terminology. He had a quite unreasoning belief in the stolidly utilitarian of German philosophers and laid siege to Marcella's mysticism, but after he went back one day she discovered a box of her mother's poetry books and so Tennyson, Shelley and Keats shone into her life and, reading an ancient copy of "David and Bethsaibe," she gathered that the Bible Aunt Janet read sourly had quite human possibilities. This box of books was her first glimpse of a world that was not a long tale of stern fights; it was her first glimpse of something softly sensuous instead of austere and natural and passionate.

Marcella never knew quite how her folks came to live at the farm; it had happened when she was three years old and she took for granted her world of crumbling, decayed splendours. Hunchback Wullie had told her that the old grey house on Ben Grief used to be her home, and that the lands all about had belonged to her father. But they were his no longer and she was forbidden to pass the old grey house, or even to speak of it.

Andrew Lashcairn, Aunt Janet, two women servants and a man who never seemed to have any wages for their work lived with Marcella at the farm. The man and Aunt Janet planted things in the garden, but on the poor land, among the winds they never grew very well. Oats grew, thin and tough, in the fields, and were ground to make the daily porridge; sometimes one of the skinny fowls that picked and pecked its hungry way through life round about the cattle pen and the back door was killed for a meal; sometimes Marcella ran miles away up Ben Grief when one of the lean pigs screamed its life out in a stream of blood in the yard. She used to feel sorry for the beasts about the farm; the cows seemed to have such huge,

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gaunt bodies and looked at her with such mournful eyes when she went through the croft in which they were eating the scanty grass. The two old horses who did the ploughing and the harvesting had ribs that she could count, that felt sharp when she stroked their patient sides. The cows lowed a great deal—very plaintively and deep; the pigs squealed hungrily every time a pail clattered in the kitchen or steps passed their sty door.

One dreadful day they squealed all the time while Marcella's little English mother lay on her couch in the window that looked over Lashnagar, and cried. She had lain on this couch for nearly two years now, whiter and thinner every day. Marcella adored her and used to kiss her white, transparent hands, and call her by the names of queens and goddesses in the legends she had read, trying to stretch her own ten years of experience to match her mother's thirty-five so that she could be her friend. And this day when Rose Lashcairn cried because the beasts were crying with hunger and there was no food for them, Marcella thought of Jeannie Deans and Coeur de Lion and Sir Galahad. Buckling on her armour in the shape of an old coat made of the family plaid, and a Tam o' Shanter, she went out to do battle for the helpless creatures who were hungry, and stop her mother's tears.

It was a three-mile walk to the little town. There was a corn factor's shop there at which her father dealt. She walked in proudly. It was market day and the place was full of people.

"Andrew Lashcairn says ye'll please to be sending up a sack of meal and a sack of corn the day," she said calmly to the factor who looked at her between narrowing eyes. The factor was a man imported to the district: he had not the feudal habit of respect for decayed lordship.

"Indeed he does? And why disna Andrew Lashcairn come tae dae his own begging?"

Marcella stared at him and her eyes flashed with indignation though her knees were trembling.

"He is not begging, Mr. Braid. But the beasts are crying for food and he's needin' the corn the night."

The people in the shop stopped talking about prices and listened greedily. They knew what Marcella did not.

"Then ye'll tell him tae go on needin'. When he's paid for the last sack, an' the one afore that, he'll be gettin' more."



“But of course he’ll pay,” she cried. “My father is busy, and he can’t mind things always. If you ask him, he’ll pay.”

The man laughed.

“He will, fine he will! No, Mistress Marcella, ye can tell yer father not tae go sendin’ children beggin’ for credit whiles he hugs his bar’l. The corn’s here safe enough when he chooses to pay for’t.”

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Marcella went homewards, her mind a maelstrom of conflict. She knew nothing about money; it had never occurred to her that her father had none, and the cryptic allusion to the “bar’l” was even more puzzling. She knew that her father was a man to be feared, but he had always been the same; she expected nothing else of him, or of fathers generally. She knew that he lived most of his time in the little room looking out on Lashnagar and she had certainly seen the “bar’l”—a thirty-six gallon barrel being taken into that room. She did not know that it held whisky; if she had known, it would have conveyed nothing to her. She knew that the green baize door leading to the passage from which her father’s room opened must never be approached; she knew that her father had frequent fits of Berserk rage when the little English mother cowered and fainted and things were smashed to splinters. In one such rage, when Marcella was seven years old, he had seen her staring and frowning at him, and the rage he always felt against her because she, the last of his race, was a girl and not a boy, had crystallized. That time he had flung her across the room, breaking her thin little arm. She remembered ever afterwards how he had picked her up, suddenly quietened, and set and bandaged the arm without the suspicion of tenderness or apology or shame, but with cool skill. All the time she heard his teeth grinding, and watched his red-rimmed grey eyes blazing. She gathered that he considered his women-folk belonged to him, and that he could break their arms at will.

Other things she remembered, too—cries in the night from her mother’s room when she had been a tiny mite and thought they were the cries of banshees or ghosts; she remembered a terrible time nearly three years ago when she must not sit on her mother’s knee and lay her head on her breast because of cruel pain there; she remembered the frightening scene there had been when surgeons had come and stayed in her mother’s room for hours; how they had gone past her where she cowered in the passage, smelling a queer, sweet, choking smell that came out when they opened the door. In the book room she had heard raised voices when the Edinburgh surgeon had said, “In my opinion it was caused by a blow—it cannot have come in that particular position except by injury—a blow, Mr. Lashcairn.”

There had been a Berserk rage then, and violence before which the doctors had been driven away.

All these things Marcella remembered during her lonely three-mile walk in the winter twilight, and for the first time they co-ordinated with other things, broke through her mist of dream and legend and stood out stark like the summit of Ben Grief.

That night she was more than usually tender to her mother. Kneeling beside her bed, she put her strong young arms under the bedclothes and held her very tight. Through her nightgown she felt very frail—Marcella could touch the sharp bones, and thought of the poor starved cows.





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"My queen, my beautiful," she whispered in her mother's ear. "I'm going to be Siegfried and save you from the dragon—I'm going to take you away, darling—pick you right up in my arms and run away with you—"

She stopped, choked by her intensity, while her mother stroked her ruffled hair and smiled faintly.

"You can't take people up in your arms and snatch them out of life, childie," she said. And then they kissed good night.

As she went to her little cold room Marcella heard the padding of feet outside in the croft, and grunts and squeals. The hungry beasts, as a last resort, had been turned loose to pick up some food in the frost-stiffened grass; incredulous of the neglect they haunted the farm-house, the pigs lively and protestant, the cows solemn and pathetic and patient. Marcella had taken her piece of oatcake and cheese at supper-time out to the door. But it was no use to the beasts. The little black pig gobbled it in a mouthful and squealed for more. In her agony of pity something dawned on her.

"I suppose," she said to herself, as she stood shivering, looking over rimed Lashnagar, "that Jesus was as sorry for His disciples as I am for these poor beasts. He knew they'd be so hungry when He had gone away from them. So He gave them His body and blood—it was all He had to give."

She got into bed, but the thought stayed with her. It was to come back again many years afterwards, illuminating.

That night she heard steps about the house—her father's heavy steps—but she felt tired, and fell asleep. It was midnight when her father opened her door and came into the room.

"Marcella, are you asleep?" he said in his beautiful voice that always made her wish he would let her love him.

"No," she said, starting to wakefulness.

"You've no mother now, Marcella," he said, and turned away. She heard him stalk heavily up the passage.

When she ran along after him Aunt Janet was holding a hand-mirror over her mother's mouth and looking at it carefully. She had red-rimmed eyes. Marcella stood still, staring, and thought how white her mother's ear was against the faded blue of her old flannel jacket over which her long black hair lay in two long plaits. Then her father came in and sent her down to the village for the old woman who attended to the births and deaths of people. She went over the croft, among the hungry cows that stared at her, one after one as she passed. Later, when the woman had gone, and the two servant

women were crying in the kitchen while they drank scalding tea and spilt it down their aprons from trembling hands, Andrew Lashcairn and Aunt Janet sat in the book-room with all Rose Lashcairn's papers spread out before them. Marcella sat for a while watching.

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There were letters, smelling of the lavender and rue that lay among them. They were tied in little bundles with lavender ribbons. There were little thin books of poetry, a few pressed flowers, a few ribbons that had decked Baby Marcella, a tiny shirt of hers, a little shoe, a Confirmation book. All these they threw into the fire, and read some big crackling papers with seals and stamps upon them. Then Marcella crept away along the passages through which the wind whistled while the rats, hungry as everything else about Lashnagar, scuttled behind the wainscotings.

She opened her mother's door. A candle was burning on the table by the bedside. A sheet covered the bed. Underneath it she could trace the outline of her mother's body. As she came across the room, walking softly, as she always did, to avoid the loose board that had so often jerked her mother back to wakefulness and pain, it seemed to her that all the loving kindness of the world had gone from her. From then until her mother was buried she never left her.

## CHAPTER II

After his wife's death Andrew Lashcairn was harder, colder. Fits of glowering depression took the place of rage, and he never went behind the green baize door, though the barrel stayed there. He seemed to have conceived the idea of making Marcella strong; perhaps he was afraid that she would be frail as her mother had been; perhaps he tried to persuade himself that her mother's illness and death were constitutional frailty rather than traumatic, and in pursuance of this self-deception he tried to suggest that Marcella had inherited her delicacy and must be hardened. Divorced from his den and his barrel by his own will-power he had to find something to do. And he undertook Marcella as an interest in life.

Things were going a little better at the farm because of Rose Lashcairn's money: more cows came, and sacks of meal and corn replenished the empty coffers in the granary. Marcella still divided her time when she could between the book-room, Lashnagar and Wullie's smoking-hut; but every morning Andrew Lashcairn tore her out of bed at five o'clock and went with her through snows and frosts, and, later, through the fresh spring mornings to teach her to swim in the wild breakers of the North Sea. Many a girl would have died; Marcella proved herself more a child of the Lashcairns than of her little English mother by living and thriving on it. Her father sent her to work in the fields with the men, but forbade her to speak to any of the village women who worked there, telling her to remember that her folks were kings when theirs were slaves. One night, when the snow drifted in from Lashnagar on to her bed, she closed her window, and he, with a half return of the old fury, pushed it out, window-frame and all. Ever after that Marcella slept in a cave of winds. It never occurred to her to rebel against her father. She accepted the things done to her body with complete docility. Over the things that happened to her mind her father could have no control.

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But his Spartan training had a queer effect upon her. Always meagrely fed, always knowing the very minimum of comfort, she became oblivious to food or comfort for herself; she became unconscious, independent of her body save as a means of locomotion, but she cared immensely for other people's. She shivered to think of Wullie's brother Tammis and his son Jock out fishing in the night with icy salt water pouring over chafed hands, soaking through their oilskins; she cried after a savagely silent meal of herrings and oatcake when she had not noticed what she was eating, to think of the villagers with nothing but herrings and oatcakes. She hated to think of things hungry, things in pain. She even felt a great, inarticulate pity for her father. For all his striding autocracy and high-handedness there was something naive and childish about him that clutched at her heart. He was like Ben Grief, alone and bare when the winds tore.

He was thorough, was Andrew Lashcairn. Finding the young student's "Riddle of the Universe" in the book-room one day he read it idly. It started him on a course of philosophy in which he determined to include Marcella. From Edinburgh came boxes of books—and a queer assortment of books they were. Locke and Berkeley, James' "Natural Religion," Renan's "Life of Christ," a very bad translation of Lucretius; Frazer's "Golden Bough," a good deal of Huxley and Darwin, and many of the modern writers. They were something amazingly new to him, and Marcella used to watch him sitting in the fireless book-room with a candle flickering while the wind soughed round the house and in through every chink in the worn walls. His fine grey eyes were deep sunken; when he looked up suddenly there was sometimes a little light of madness in them that made her recoil instinctively; his thick hair was greyish, whitening over the temples; his high Keltic cheekbones were gaunter than ever, his forehead and mouth lined with past rages. He had never held a religion—the Lashcairn religion had been a jumble of superstition, ancestor-worship and paganism on which a Puritan woman marrying a Lashcairn in the middle seventeenth century had grafted her dour faith. It had flourished—something hard and dictatorial about it found good soil on the Lashcairn stock.

So modern Rationalism had a stern fight with Andrew, struggling with the madness of the Kelt, the dourness of the Puritan. It held him for a year and no more, for a thing unemotional could not grip a thing so excitable. In that year Marcella was bidden read all the books her father read, and believe them. When she evaded them she was forced to read them aloud, with a dictionary at her side, and discuss them intelligently with him. If she answered at random, with her heart and her eyes away at the huts with Wullie, he would throw at her head the nearest thing that came to his hand—a book, a faggot of wood, a cup of tea—or order her to bed without any food. Marcella had to follow him on these

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excursions into philosophic doubt, sacrificing her pet calf of legend and poetry every day in the temple of Rimmon, handcuffed to him as she did it. But Andrew Lashcairn did everything with such thoroughness that he seemed to use up a certain set of cells in his brain exhaustively, and thus procure revulsion. A man who can drink half a gallon of whisky a day for years consistently, and stop without a moment's notice, can do most things. Andrew took Rationalism as he took whisky; he forced it upon his household.

In all this time her chief joy was to be found in writing long letters to her dead mother, whom she imagined to be living somewhere between the sunshine and the rain, an immanent presence. These letters she burnt usually, though sometimes she made little boats of them and floated them out to sea, and sometimes she pushed them into the shifting sands through fissures on Lashnagar. They comforted her strangely; they were adoration and love crystallized. Her only friendliness came from Hunchback Wullie, when she could escape from the book-room and run down to his hut.

It was a hard winter, this winter of philosophic doubt for souls and bodies both. The wild gales kept the fishing-boats at home; the wild weather had played havoc with the harvests, and often Marcella knew that Wullie was hungry, though he never told her so. Whenever she went to the hut she would manage to be absent from a meal beforehand, and going to Jean, would ask for her ration of whatever was going. Down in the hut she and Wullie would sit round the fire of driftwood, reaching down dried herrings from the roof and toasting them on spits of wood for their feast. And they would talk while the sea crept up and down outside whispering, or dashed almost at the door shrieking.

One night as they sat toasting their fish and watching the salt driftwood splutter and crackle with blue flames, Marcella asked Wullie what he thought of philosophic doubt.

"I've been reading a book to father to-day, Wullie, that says we are all unreal—that we are not here really, but only a dream."

Wullie sat back a little, turned the fish on his spit without speaking, and then said:

"Well, maybe we are. Maybe all life's a dream. But all the same it is a dream dreamed by God."

"I think that's what the book says, but they use such hard words."

"I wouldna fash, lassie. There's not much we do understand, any of us. That's where I think books fall short—they explain things just as far as the writer understands. And whiles he doesna understand very far, but he's got a trick of putting things nicely. Most things you know without understanding: you do them blindly and someday you see they've been right. That's what I mean about God making us a pathway. I feel that He

has been walking along my life; I couldna prove it to ye, Marcella. But one day He'll suddenly turn round when He gets to the end of me and smile and thank me for carrying Him along a bit."

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"I like to know things beforehand," she objected.

"Ye winna. Right at the end ye'll be able to look down yer life and see the shining marks of His feet all over ye. An' the more ye struggle and fuss the less He can take hold of ye, and get a grup on ye with His feet—"

"I'd like to feel sure they were God's, and not any other sort of feet," she said slowly, leaving her fish to go cold, though she was very hungry.

"Ye'll find, at the end, Marcella, that there's no feet but God's can make shining marks on your life. Other things will walk over ye. They may leave marks of mud, or scars. But the footsteps of God will burn them all off in the end. I canna prove it, Marcella. But ye'll see it some day. D'ye mind yon apple that came flooring up through Lashnagar?"

Marcella nodded. It had borne fruit two years now.

"It knew nothing: it was just still and quiet when something told it to push on. And then life came along it—like a path. If it had known, it couldna help the life any—"

She nodded again. She felt she understood now.

At the end of the year things began to go badly again at the farm. The money was almost exhausted; the oat crop failed and one of the cows was lost on Lashnagar, where she had been tempted by hunger to find more food. One of the serving women, falling ill, went to Edinburgh to be cured and never came back; paint, blistered and scarred from the doors and window frames by the weather, was not replaced; the holes gnawed and torn by the hungry rats in wainscot and floor were never patched and food was more scarce than ever. Aunt Janet sat, a dourly silent ghost, while Marcella read to Andrew, listening sickly to the beasts clamouring for their scanty meals. And one night, when he had been out alone along Ben Grief and seen his lands and his old grey house, Lashcairn the Landless, as they called him, went back to his barrel.

For three days he lived behind the green baize door. On the fourth he came out with his red-rimmed eyes ablaze, his gaunt face pinched, his hair bedraggled. And that night a little old man, Rose's cousin from Winchester, came to see them. He had never seen the mad family into which his cousin had married; he had not seen her since she was a gentle little thing in pinafores, with a great family of wax dolls. He did not know that she was dead. Aunt Janet made no explanations; his small black eyes took in all the decay and famine of the place; his neat black Sabbatical coat looked queerly out of place in the book-room with its scarred oak refectory table, its hard oak chairs and its dusty banner hung from the ceiling above where Andrew Lashcairn sat. When his host came into the room he pulled himself to his full five feet five and his thin white face went even whiter. Andrew, in his frenzy, cursed him and God and the world, and, in the old Berserk

rage, dashed over the heavy table on which Aunt Janet had set a poor meal for the stranger.



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It was a wild, bizarre picture; the fire, fanned by the fierce winds that swept down the open chimney, kept sending out puffs of smoke that went like grey wraiths about the room; the top of the table rutted by hundreds of years' fierce feeding; the shattered crockery and forlorn-looking mess of food on the floor. Aunt Janet and Marcella shrunk away—her father never got one of his rages but the girl felt old agony in her broken arm—but the little white-faced cousin stood in front of Andrew's gaunt frame, which seemed twice his size.

"What's the matter, Cousin Andrew?" he asked mildly. Then, turning to the others, he said gently: "Go away for a little while. I'll have a talk with Andrew about little Rose."

They went away with Andrew's curses following them along the windy passage. Marcella waited in sympathy with the little man's arms, but after a while a murmur of normal conversation came from the room and went on until two o'clock in the morning. At last the little old cousin came to where Marcella and Aunt Janet shivered in the kitchen, and said simply:

"Andrew has cast his burden on the Lord, and now he can go on his way singing."

Marcella began to cry from sheer nervousness. She had not the faintest idea what the cousin meant, but she was to know it as time went by. For Andrew got religion as he got everything else—very thoroughly—and, just as he had superimposed Rationalism on his house and bent it before his whisky furies, now he tried to religionize it.

After two days the cousin went away and never came again. Almost it seemed as though he had never been, for he wrote not at all, simply going his serene, white-faced way through their lives for two days and two nights and dropping out of them. Marcella, telling Wullie about it, received his explanation.

"It's what I tauld ye afore, lassie. We're not things or people, really. We're juist paths."

"Was it God who came along that night?" asked Marcella doubtfully. Wullie thought it was. But she found her father's religion even more difficult than any of his other obsessions. It made him eager and pathetic. He had never tried to make drunkards of people; Marcella he had impatiently tried to make a rationalist; but now he spent all his time trying to convert them. His household was veneered with evangelism. The kindly desire to save brands from the burning sent him to the village praying and quoting the Word to those who once thought him a king, later a terror, and now could not understand him. Men coming from the fields and the boats were asked questions about their peace with God, and in the little chapel where once the Covenanters had met, Andrew Lashcairn's voice was raised in prayers and exhortations so long and so burning that he often emptied the place even of zealots before he had tired himself and God.

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All the time Marcella ached with pity for him now that she feared him no longer. He seemed so naive, so wistful to her, this strange father whom she could never understand, but who seemed like a child very keen on a game of make-believe. Things went from bad to worse, but they sat down to their meal of oatcake and milk uncomplaining, after a long grace. It was never the way of the Lashcairns to notice overmuch the demands of the body. And now they sat by the almost bare refectory table, and none of them would mention hunger; Andrew did not feel it. His zeal fed him. Marcella, however, took to going down oftener to the huts and always Wullie, who sensed these things, toasted fish—three or four at a time—over the embers, and roasted potatoes in the bed of ashes.

It was in the summer following this last obsession that Andrew was taken suddenly ill. One evening, praying with blazing ardour for the souls of the whole world, consciousness of unbearable weight came upon him. Standing in the little chapel he felt that he was being pressed to his knees and there, with a terrible voice, he cried:

“Yes, Lord, put all the weight of Thy cross upon me, Thy poor servant—Thy Simon of Cyrene who so untimely, so unhelpfully hath found Thee.”

Those watching believed that they saw the black shadow of a cross laid over his bowed shoulders. But then, like Andrew, they were Kelts who could see with eyes that were not apparent. Andrew was carried home to his bed, and Dr. Angus, the same doctor he had driven forth in violence from his wife’s sickness, came to him.

Thorough in body as in soul, Andrew seemed called upon to bear all the woes of the world. Sometimes, watching him lying there with closed eyes and lips that moved faintly as he prayed for courage, Marcella wished she could see him once again come tearing into the room in a passion of destruction. His gentleness, his pathos, and the way he talked so quietly to God with his beautiful voice, almost tore her in two with pity.

Many nights his illness made it impossible for him to lie down, and then he would stand, wrapped in a blanket—for his dressing-gown had long since been torn to shreds—his hands clutching the post of his ancient bed, his eyes gazing deeply at the faded sun in splendour on the tapestry back of the bed while he read slowly the old boastful motto, “By myself I stand.” And the girl, lying on a little couch where she took turns with Aunt Janet in nursing him through the night, would hear him talking to God by the hour.

“Not by myself, O Lord, but in Thy might. Thou art my Rock and my Fortress, my Defence on my right hand, my strong shield in whom I trust—”

Silence—except for the grating of rats in the ceiling as they tried to gnaw the beams, and the moaning of the wind. Then the musical voice would say, with infinite tenderness:

“He hath said thy foot shall not be moved. Thy keeper shall never, never slumber nor sleep. O Lord, I am not asking Thee a very great thing, for already Thou hast done wondrous things for me. This is a little thing, O Thou that never sleepest! Give me ten minutes’ rest, ten minutes’ sleep. To Thee a thousand years are but as yesterday. To me, O Lord, in this weariness, a night is as a thousand years.”

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Helped by Marcella he would clamber into bed again, shutting his eyes, waiting on the Lord, only to start up as the pumping of his worn-out, strained heart almost choked him. And then, leaning back on heaped pillows he would look out through the dark window and say, very humbly:

“Most patient hast Thou been with me, Oh Lord, when Thou wast seeking me so far. Most patient must I be with Thee—I, who have no claim upon Thy mercy save Thy own most holy kindness to me.”

And so the night would wear on; sometimes he would talk to God, sometimes to Marcella, telling her how he had hated her because she was not a boy and seemed, to his great strength, too much like her frail English mother to be of any use in the world.

“We’re a great folk, we Lashcairns, Marcella,” he would say, his sunken eyes brightening. “A great name, Marcella. I wanted you Janet, for there has always been a Janet Lashcairn since the wild woman came to Lashnagar. But Rose would have you Marcella—a foreign name to us,” and he sighed heavily. “I hated you, Marcella, because I wanted a boy to win back everything we have lost. Lashcairn the Landless whose lands stretched once from—Marcella, what am I saying? O Lord, Thou knowest that in nothing do I glory save in the Cross of Jesus Christ. O Lord, Simon of Cyrene, Thy cross-bearer, has naught to boast save only the burden Thy grace has laid upon him. Be patient with me, O Lord—very hardly dies the vanity of the flesh.”

Andrew was always glad when it was Marcella’s turn to stay with him at night, for he liked her to read to him; she read the epistles of Paul especially and F.W.H. Myers’ “St. Paul” until she knew them almost by heart. In St. Paul Andrew saw much of himself: especially could he see himself on the Damascus road when a blinding light came down.

Three of the five cows were sold to buy the medicines and the patent foods he did not seem to notice. Duncan, the farm man who never got any wages, went out at night to work with Jock and Tammis in their boat, and at every month end he handed to Aunt Janet the money he got to buy things for his master. Though he was on his bed Andrew did not forget his proselytising and Duncan and Jean were brought into the bedroom every night while Marcella read the New Testament, and her father prayed. He prayed for her soul and the souls of Duncan and Jean; Marcella would kneel between the two of them, with the smell of the fish from Duncan and the scent of the byres from Jean’s shoes and her clothes stealing round her while her father prayed. She was bewildered by him: very often, when he prayed long and she was falling asleep after her wakeful night, she would feel impatient with him, especially when he prayed loud and long that she might be brought to a conviction of sin. He puzzled her unendurably; sometimes her old docility to his autocracy made her feel that she really must be the miserable sinner he pictured her. Sometimes her common sense told her she could not be. Then, on top of the impatience and revolt, would come aching pity for his weakness, his

tenderness to God, the apologies he made for God who was so hard, so just in His dealings with him.

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He seemed often to resent his illness bitterly; he had never known anything but an almost savage strength. Now he lay watching his illness with a curious mixture of fierce resentment and proprietorial pride. He spent a good deal of his time trying to think of ways in which he could circumvent the choking sensation that often came to him. Marcella brought some comfort by placing the kitchen ironing board across the bed, resting on the backs of two chairs so that he could lean forward on it. Sometimes he slept so, his grey head jerking forward and backward in his weariness.

One night, when he could not sleep, he got out of bed and, leaning on Marcella's shoulders, began to walk about. The moon was rising desolately over Lashnagar, and he stood for a long time in the window looking at the dead waste of it all. Suddenly he shivered.

"Father, ye're cold," said Marcella quickly. "Let me put on your socks. It's a shame of me to let you stand barefoot so long."

He sat down on the deep window-seat, and the moonlight streamed in upon his feet as she knelt beside him.

"Why, you are getting fat, father," she said. "I can hardly get your socks on! And I thought your face looked thinner to-day. What a good thing—if you get fat."

"Fat, Marcella?" he said in a strange, faint voice. "That's what the doctor's been expecting. It's the last lap!"

"What do you mean, father? Isn't it better for you to be getting fat now?"

He smiled a little and, bending down, pressed his fingers on the swollen ankle. The indentations stayed there. She thought of the soft depression on Lashnagar where the young shepherd had gone down.

"We'll just walk about a bit, Marcella," he said, his hand pressing heavily on her shoulder. "I thought my legs felt very tired and heavy. This is the last lap of the race. When my hands get fat like that my heart will be drowned, Marcella."

"Father, what *do* you mean?" she cried frantically, but he told her nothing. There were no medical books in the house which she could read. She had to be content, as Wullie had said, to go on to the end knowing nothing, while things trod along her life.

"It's a damned sort of death, Marcella, for a Lashcairn. Lying in bed—getting stiffer and heavier—and in the end drowned. We like to go out fighting, Marcella, killing and being killed. Did I ever tell you of Tammash Lashcairn and how he tore a wolf to pieces in the old grey house on Ben Grief?"

He talked quickly and strangely, disjointed talk out of which she wove wild tales of the deaths of her people in the past.

After he had got back into bed and she stooped over him, trying to chafe warmth into his cold feet, he looked at her more kindly than he had ever looked before.

“All my life I have cursed you because you were a girl. I cursed your mother because she gave me no son. And now I thank God that you are not a man, to carry on the old name.”

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"Why, father?" she asked, her eyes frightened and puzzled.

"The Lord deals righteously. I shall sleep now," was all he said.

It was Wullie who told her what her father had meant. They were up on Ben Grief watching the swollen streams overflowing with melted snow and storm-water. Marcella looked wan and tired; her eyes were ringed with black shadows. As usual she was hungry, but Wullie had left potatoes buried under the green-wood fire, and they would feast when they got back.

"Why is it father is glad I'm not a boy?" she asked him.

It was a long time before he told her.

"The Lashcairns are a wild lot, lassie—especially the men folk. They kill and they rule others and they drink. It's drink that's ruined them, because drink is the only thing they canna rule. That's the men folk I'm talking of. Your great-grandfather lost all his lands that lie about Carllossie. The old grey house and the fields all about Ben Grief and Lashnagar were lost by your father. All he's got now is Lashnagar and the farm-house. And Lashnagar canna be sold because it hasna any value. Else he'd have sold it, to put it in his bar'l."

She said nothing. Her tired eyes looked out over the farm and the desolate hill, her hair, streaming in the wind, suddenly wrapped her face, blinding her. As she struggled with it, light came, and she turned to Wullie.

"It was the barrel, then, that made father ill?"

"It was so."

"And grandfather, and his father—did they get ill, too, through the barrel?"

He shook his head, and she snatched at his arm roughly.

"Wullie, ye're to tell me. I'm telling ye ye're to tell me, Wullie. I never heard of them. How did they die? I shall ask father if you don't tell me."

"Your great-grandfather killed his son in a quarrel, when your father was a bit laddie of four. The next day he was found dead beside his bar'l in the cellar."

The storm-water went swirling down by their feet, brown and frothing. It went down and down as though Ben Grief were crying hopelessly for this wild people he had cradled.

"I see, now, why he's glad I'm not a boy. Wullie—do all the Lashcairns die—like that?" and she pictured again her father waiting, as he put it, to be drowned in his bed while a



procession of killed and killing ancestors seemed to glide before her eyes over the rushing water.

“The men folk, yes. They canna rule themselves.”

“And the women?” she said sharply, realizing that she and Aunt Janet were all that were left.

“They keep away from the bar’l.”

“Yes, I couldn’t imagine Aunt Janet doing that,” she said, smiling faintly. “Or me.”

“Some of the women rule themselves,” he said tentatively. “There was the witch-woman first—and later there was the Puritan woman. They seem to mother your women between them. There’s never any telling which it’ll be.”

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"Aunt Janet—" began Marcella.

"She's ruled herself. Some of the Lashcairn women wouldna think of ruling themselves. Then they go after the man they need, like the witch-woman. And—take him."

Marcella frowned.

"It sends them on strange roads sometimes," said Wullie, and would say no more.

It was Marcella's rest night, and tired as she was, she lay thinking long in the silence. It was a strangely windless night, but her thoughts went whirling as though on wings of wind. Thoughts of fate, thoughts of scepticism jostled each other: pictures came; she saw the apple tree breaking through Lashnagar; she saw a landslide many years ago on Ben Grief that had torn bare strange coloured rocks in the escarpment. Just as she fell asleep, worn out, she thought that perhaps something beautiful might outcrop from her family, something different, something transforming. And then she was too tired to think any more and went to sleep.

## CHAPTER III

The "last lap" was not a very long one; it grew in distress as the days went on. The worn-out heart that the Edinburgh doctor had graphically described as a frail glass bubble, in his attempt to make Andrew Lashcairn nurse his weakness, played cruel tricks with its owner. It choked him so that he could not lie down; it weakened him so that he could not stand up. He would gasp and struggle out of bed, leaning on Marcella so heavily that she felt she could not bear his weight for more than another instant. But the weight would go on, and somehow from somewhere she would summon strength to bear it. But after a while his frail strength would be exhausted, and he would have to fall back on the bed, fighting for breath and with every struggle increasing the sense of suffocation. But all the time, when his breath would let him, he would pray for courage—as time went on he prayed more for courage to bear his burden than for alleviation of it, though sometimes a Gethsemane prayer would be wrung from him.

"O Lord," he would whisper, his trembling hand gripping the girl's arm until it bruised the flesh, "I am the work of Thy hands. Break me if Thou wilt. But give me courage not to cry out at the breaking."

One night when it became impossible, because of the stiffness and heaviness of his swollen legs, for him to walk about, he prayed for death, and Marcella, forced to her knees by his passionately pleading eyes, sobbed at his words.

"Lord, I am trying hard to be patient with Thee," he gasped. "But I am man and Thou art God. I cannot match Thy patience with mine. I am trying so hard not to cry out beneath

Thy hand. But give me more courage—more courage, O Lord, or I must play the coward. Take Thy cup from me until to-morrow, when I shall have more strength to lift it to my lips—or let me die, Lord, rather than crack like this.”

Then, after a pause, words were wrung from his lips.

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“Justice—not mercy. I would not take mercy even from Thee. The full rigour of Thy law  
—”

There was no alleviation, and Marcella, kneeling there, wished that she and her father could die together. The horror of helplessness was searing her soul.

Next day came agonizing pain which made every movement a death. But the Edinburgh doctor who came brought relief for the pain, and, talking with Dr. Angus, the Carlrossie doctor, mentioned, among other technicalities, the name of a drug—“digitalis.” That afternoon Marcella went back in the doctor’s trap to get the new medicine, and it gave relief. Whenever, after that, the choking came back, Andrew would cry out for digitalis, which seemed to him the elixir of life. Sometimes he would pray for courage; sometimes, cracking suddenly, he would pray for digitalis and send Marcella often at midnight with a pleading note to the doctor to give him the drug and a little soothing for his heart that was running away with him.

Now that he could not move about he still thought of the souls of the people in the village, and sent a message to them, pleading with them to come and see him. And they, remembering him as the laird, with a sort of feudal obedience, came and stood about his bed, to be stormed at or prayed with according to Andrew’s mood. But always after one of these missionary efforts he would suffer agonies of suffocation when he had forgotten, for a while, that his heart was a bubble of glass.

It was an unreal world, this shadowed world of the old farm. It centred round Andrew Lashcairn’s bed—he was its sun, its king, its autocrat still. But things material had slipped from him—or rather, material interests were all centralized in his tortured body. At first during his illness he had worried about the farm, sending messages to Duncan much more than he had done during the days when he was shut behind the green baize door. But now all the farm had slipped from him. He was alone with his body and his soul and God. Most often his soul cried out. Sometimes his body broke through and showed its pains and the strength of old desires.

As he grew weaker he tried to grasp out at strength. Aunt Janet, who had “ruled herself” to nervelessness, had nothing of the mother, the nurse in her make-up; there was no tenderness in what she did for him. It was not that she had any spirit of getting her own back on Andrew for his tyranny, his impoverishment, his ill-usage of her in the past. She would have given him her last crumb of food if she had thought of it. But a thing atrophied as she was could not think or feel, and so he went without the small tendernesses that would have come to him had Rose, the soft little Englishwoman, lived. She sat up with him night after night patiently. She gave him milk, and she and Marcella went without it that he should have enough. She gave him the inevitable porridge and broth, but he turned away from the things he had eaten all his life in disgust.

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"Is there any sort of thing I could have to put a little grip into me, doctor?" he asked, and was ordered beef-tea, various patent foods and eggs, all things very difficult to come by on the stern hillside.

"It seems to me, Janet, if I could have some of these foods and drugs they advertise so much I might get some strength to bear it," he said. So she got him half a dozen of the different well-advertised things to try. He had them arrayed on a table by his bed, and took immense pleasure in reminding her or Marcella when it was time for them. The doctor, who guessed that money was scarce, suggested that Aunt Janet should sell some of the old oak furniture, and to her surprise a man from London thought it worth while, from her description, to come all the way to Lashnagar to look at it. She loved it because it enshrined the family story; the scratches on the refectory table showed where heavy-clad feet had been planted as Lashcairns of old had pledged each other in fiery bowls. The heavy oak chairs had each a name and a history, but until the man from London came Aunt Janet had not realized their value. So they went away, taken quietly and stealthily out of the house for fear Andrew should know. In the book-room only a few books were left to keep the dusty pennant a melancholy companionship.

But the patent foods and drugs did no good; they reminded Marcella irresistibly of the soil and water she had laid hopefully round the bursting apple tree. As he lay once, with all the wheels of life running at half rate after a sedative, he said to Marcella, who had been reading to him:

"I feel as if I'm not in my body, Marcella. Oh, Marcella, help me to get a grip on my body! I can't make it do what I'm tellin' it to do! Look!" and he held up one gaunt arm feebly, to let it drop a minute later. "Look! Marcella—once I could break men with my hands!"

She stared at him, choking. There was nothing she could think to say. In her mother's weakness her lips had overflowed with tendernesses; for her father she could only feel a terrified, inarticulate pity. It was not sympathy. She could not understand enough to sympathize. It was the same sort of hungry, brooding pity she used to feel for the hungry beasts on the farm.

"Marcella, do you think if I were to eat a lot of meat I'd be stronger?" he asked hopefully. "Oh, make me stronger!—give me something," and suddenly raising himself in bed, he threw his arms about her and, with his grey head on her shoulder, sobbed desolately. She held him, stroking his head, aching to find words, but utterly dumb with terror. And when, later, they got him the food he craved, he could not eat it. Turning from it in disgust, he prayed:

"There is nothing left, but only Thou, O Lord. No longer art Thou my shield and buckler, for no longer can I fight. Thou hast laid me very low, O Lord. Thou hast made me too

weak to fight longer; Thou hast bruised me so that I cannot live save in pain; Thou hast laid me very low."

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There was a long silence. His eyes, faded from the bright blue-grey that used to flash with fire, were dull and almost colourless as he lay looking at the faded tapestry of the bed canopy.

“When I pray for courage, Lord, Thou givest pain—Thou givest weakness. When I pray for strength Thou givest a great hunger and a sinking into the depths. And then in Thy loving kindness Thou givest Thy body and blood—for my comfort.”

The room grew darker. The fire flickered and sputtered as the salt dried out of the driftwood and burnt in blue tongues of flame. Marcella shivered, listening to the distant beat of the sea. The house was very silent, with that dead silence that falls on houses where many of the rooms are unfurnished. The stir and clamour of the beasts outside had gone forever. Outside now was only one old cow, kept to give milk for Andrew. The barren fields lay untended, for Duncan went to the fishing to bring a little handful of coins to the master he feared and loved, and Jean went softly about the kitchen in the shadows.

Suddenly Andrew spoke, and Marcella started, drawing a little nearer to him.

“Do ye mind, Marcella, when we read yon books from Edinburgh—and you used to be such an idiot, and make me so mad?”

“I mind it,” she nodded, thinking painfully of those hard books.

“There was something in one of them that I seized on with a bitter scorn. It was explaining how the idea of the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ had grown up. It said how savages, when they saw one of the tribe better than themselves, would kill him and eat him to make themselves as good as he. I liked that fine, Marcella. I was bitter in those days.”

“Horrible!” said Marcella with a shiver. “I like to think of the Last Supper, and the Holy Grail—mother used to read about it all to me—she used to tell me all about Parsifal and the Love Feast.”

“Yes, little Rose was wiser than those books. Ye see, Marcella, it seems to me there is a time when ye’re led by something inside ye to do things. Like Christ was led to preach, though perhaps he didn’t quite know why. The word was taken out of his mouth—and like I was led to yon barrel. Things come out of you, right out of deep inside you. Maybe they’re God, maybe they’re a beast deep down.” He paused, and moved impatiently. “It’s hard to piece thoughts together when you’re weak. Can you finish my thought for me, Marcella? It’s getting muddled—down under sand and stones like Castle Lashcairn under Lashnagar.”

Marcella hesitated. Then she told him Wullie’s idea about the path.

“He says other things beside God walk along our lives, but in the end God’s footmarks burn out all the rest.”

Andrew nodded again and again.

“I suppose Christ was a pathway. I remember reading something about that. ‘My humanity is the path whereby men must travel to God,’ but I’m too tired to piece it all out.”



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“Yes. It says that in the Bible, of course. ‘I am the Way—’ Only I suppose there comes a time when God has got to the end of you, and then you’re not a path any longer. And all that’s left then is to give your body and blood and get out of the way of others.”

“Yes. I can grasp that. I feel that God has walked along me and all the other footmarks have gone. Now, when I am weak, and hungering for strength, He gives His body and blood. Yes, I think I understand that—in a glass darkly. Some day I’ll come to it more clearly.”

That night, when he held out his hand for a cup of milk, Marcella noticed that it was swollen like his feet; the left hand was bony and flexible and still a little brown. The right hand was thick and puffed and very white. When he stretched his fingers to take the cup she saw that they were stiff and difficult to move. He shook his head and dropped his hand on to the sheet, looking at it reflectively.

“The last lap is nearly done, Marcella. This poor old heart of mine will be drowned very soon, now.”

Marcella began to cry and her father looked at her as though surprised. Suddenly he leaned over and stroked her hair. She cried all the more; it was the first tender thing she could remember his doing to her, the first caress he had ever given her.

“I wish I’d been good to ye, Marcella—I think often, now, of that poor wee broken arm, and how ye used to cower away from me! I wish I’d got a grip on myself sooner.”

“Oh, if you make me love you any more, father, I’ll be torn in bits,” she cried, and sobbed, and could not be comforted. It was her only break from inarticulateness—it surprised herself and her father almost as though she had said something indecent.

When he knew, quite definitely, that he was dying and need not conserve his strength, some of the old tyranny came back to Andrew Lashcairn. But it was a kindly, rather splendid tyranny, the sort of tyranny that makes religious zealots send unbelievers to the stake, killing the body for the soul’s sake. Much of the evangelism the little white-faced cousin had superimposed upon his mind that night of wild passions had gone now, burnt up as he drew nearer to simple, beautiful, essential things.

As the Feast of All Souls, the time when ghosts thronged on Lashnagar, drew near he brooded in silence for hours. Through one of his choking attacks he lay passive, scarcely fighting for breath; only once did he turn supplicating eyes on Aunt Janet, mutely demanding the drug that soothed. And when he was able to speak again, he told them what he had been thinking.

“I want to tell people,” he said, speaking very rapidly. “The mantle of prophecy has fallen upon me.”

“Ye’ve tauld us, Andrew—and that’s enough,” said Aunt Janet, who had no patience with his frequent swift rushes towards a climax.

“I’m going to tell the others. I’m going to testify to the power of His might,” he said just as grimly, gripping his stiff, cold hands together.

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"Yell be getting upset, Andrew, an' then we'll be having a time with ye," said Aunt Janet.

"I'll not be getting upset. I'll just be dying," he said gravely, and, calling Marcella, sent her to the village, summoning all the people to come up to the farm on All Souls' Night at seven o'clock.

"I must tell them, Marcella," he said passionately, pleading for her understanding which she could not give, for she could not understand in the least. "I have never done anything for anyone. I must do something."

"I'm afraid you'll be worse for it, father," she said, hesitant. "And so is Aunt Janet—poor Aunt Janet. She's so anxious about you, and she's so tired, you know."

He shook that thought off impatiently.

"I'll be master in my own house," he cried, with some little return to the old Andrew. "I know it will make me worse! I know I'm dying! There, I ought not to frighten you, Marcella! I've frightened you enough in my life. But surely when I've lived for myself I can die for others."

And she knew that it was no use talking to him. Indeed, she would not have dared to cross his will. In the night he prayed about it.

"Lord, I must tell these others how I set beasts in Thy way when Thou wouldn't have made my life Thy path. I must tell them how I never knew liberty till Thou hadst made me Thy slave, how I never knew lightness till I carried Thy cross, how I was hungering and thirsting until I was fed with Thy Body and Blood—"

He broke off and talked to Marcella, words that seemed eerie and terrible to her.

"To-morrow, Marcella, is the day when the ruin came on Lashnagar. To-morrow I shall die—"

"Oh, father!" she cried helplessly.

"I was once His enemy, Marcella. I must let them see me at His feet now, kissing His hand—His man—the King's man—"

He brooded for an hour, gasping for breath. Marcella felt worn out mentally and physically. Her eyes ached for want of sleep, she felt the oppression and burden of the atmosphere that seemed full of ghosts and fears, and to add to her misery she was having her first taste of pain in a crazing attack of neuralgia. Anniversaries, to a mind stored with legend and superstition, have immense signification. She felt that her father's prediction of his death on All Souls' Day was quite reasonable. But none the

less fear was penetrating through her mists of weariness and fatalism, hand in hand with overwhelming pity.

"I shall die to-morrow, Marcella. He gave His body and blood. In the end that is all one can do."

In the afternoon she went to bed, worn out. Jean had made some sort of burning plaster with brown paper and something that smelt pleasantly aromatic. It eased the pain of her face and sent her to sleep. Her father had told her calmly that he was going to be dressed and meet the villagers downstairs. He seemed almost himself as he ordered her to take his old worn clothes from the press and lay them on a chair by his bed. She did not expostulate; no one thought of expostulating with Andrew Lashcairn.

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It was dark when she wakened and dressed hurriedly. Running down to the kitchen to tell Jean the pleasant effects of her plaster she found it was half-past six.

“Andrew Lashcairn’s doon,” said Jean, looking scared.

“Who helped him?” asked Marcella, lifting the lid of the teapot that stood on the hearth. She poured into it some water from the singing kettle, and after a minute poured a cup of weak tea, which she drank thirstily.

“He wasna helpit—not with han’s. The mistress was frettin’, wonderin’ what she’d be tellin’ him aboot the furniture i’ th’ book-room. An’ he juist cam’ in, luikit roond, and laught. I lighted a fire i’ there for him, for it’s cauld. But he went off doon the passage, grupp’in’ his stick.”

“Is he lying down? Oh dear, I wish I hadn’t slept so long! It would have been better for him if I’d been there with him.”

“No, he isna to his bed. He’s gone through the green baize door. An’ it’s a’ that dusty! I havena bin in tae clean sin’ the day he tuik tae his bed. Always the mistress has said I maun leav’ it. An’ noo the master’s gaun in.”

“Never mind, Jean, he won’t notice,” said Marcella, feeling a little incredulous that Jean should be caring about dust now. It seemed as much out of place as her worrying about the mark the plaster had made on her face. “I’m going to get him out. He’ll be frozen in there.”

“He cam’ in tae me and said that the folks was tae have meat and drink! Meat and drink! An’ whaur’s it tae come frae?” asked Jean in despair.

Marcella flushed a little then and said quickly:

“I expect he was back in the past, Jean. But perhaps he’s more for the folks than meat and drink, really.”

But as she ran along the gusty passage to the green baize door all her pride rose savagely to think that guests should come, bidden autocratically to the house, and go away unfed. And that the servant, the one poor staunch, unpaid servant, should grieve about it. But she soon lost that thought as she knocked at the green baize door and could get no answer.

“Father! Yell be cold in there. Do come out!”

She waited, and at last he answered her steadily and clearly.

“I’m coming at the right time, Marcella. I have my watch.”

“But you’ll be so cold,” she protested.

“I’ll be colder yet, soon,” he said calmly, and she was forced to go away. She guessed that Andrew’s sense of dramatic fitness made him wish to make his last entry on the stage alone. So she went back to her room and stood looking out over Lashnagar, where the autumn mists stalked and mowed at each other and fluttered and jostled and fought.

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Before seven o'clock the book-room was full of people, soaked through with the mist. They were the people Marcella had known all her life—fisher-folk, farm labourers, crofters—and she felt a momentary exultant pride to think that, at a word from her father, they had thronged to his house. There seemed something fitting in their coming on All Souls' Night into this bare room with the tattered pennant and the crackling wood fire that flickered on their weather-beaten faces. Their coming obediently to be talked to by her father for the good of their souls gave her a sense of savage exaltation for the moment. Then she saw Hunchback Wullie and Tammis and Jock, and went across to talk to them.

"Is the Lashcairn better, then?" asked Wullie. She shook her head.

"He says he's going to die to-night, Wullie—All Souls' Night," she said in a low voice.

Wullie nodded comprehension.

Aunt Janet came into the room, her thin face set and grim, her rusty dress of old black satin all cracking, and her great cairngorm brooch marking her from the rest in capes and homespun. They drew away from her; she had never tried to associate with them; in her detachment she had never been human to them as Andrew had been in his wildness and his weakness, and now she walked silently across the room and sat down. The firelight shone out fiercely as she savagely poked the logs, and with a motion ordered young Jock, who stood near, to throw more wood to the flames. It shone on gnarled hands gripping gnarled sticks, on rugged, ruddy faces, on white and sandy hair, on bright blue eyes, old and young. And then the door opened sharply and Andrew Lashcairn stood there, leaning on his stick.

Everyone but Aunt Janet stared at him as the firelight flamed up to blue and purple flame, lighting his gaunt face. But Aunt Janet, like a fate, sat gazing up the misty side of Lashnagar through the uncovered window. Andrew stood still, looking from one to the other. Then he took two steps forward.

"Jamie Mactavish and Andrew Gray are not here," he said sternly, as though he were a schoolmaster calling the roll. Explanations of the absence murmured out and he came inside, pushing the door to.

Marcella, standing by Wullie, was shivering with nervous dread, and suddenly noting his red-rimmed eyes, blazing and wild, she clutched Wullie's arm.

"Wullie—look at him!" she whispered.

"He's been at the bar'l," muttered Wullie, and with a cry she started forward. But Wullie caught her back gently.

“He knows what he’s daein’, lassie,” he whispered, watching Andrew’s face expectantly, and the girl stood petrified beside him. It came to her very certainly that her father had realized he had not strength to make what he called his allegiance to God, and that at the last he had sought the momentary strength of the whisky that he knew would shatter his glass heart.

“That’s why he knew he would die to-day,” her voice whispered, choked in tears. She felt that she was in the grip of things that were bending and breaking her life as they liked.



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And then her father spoke, letting his stick clatter to the ground, and lifting his swollen white hands.

“Friends,” he said loudly, “ye have all known me in the old days. I asked ye here to-night to tell ye how I went along the Damascus road and cast my burden on the Lord.... He is not hard to deal with.... There’s beasts in us, all of us. They lift their heads out of us and jabber and clamour at us; they tear at us with their claws, but if we throw ourselves on God’s strength He crushes the life out of the beasts. We can do nothing till we stop fighting and lean on Him. He is kinder than all our hopes, kinder than all our fears—”

His voice stopped with shot-like suddenness and his hands fell to his side as he swayed. Marcella, Wullie and several others rushed to his side. He fell, dragging the hunchback with him. His eyes, not blazing now, but dimming as quickly as though veils had been drawn across them, sought Marcella as he struggled for breath.

“Father—dear,” she said, putting her arm under his grey head as Aunt Janet walked across the room. “Dear—” she whispered, almost shyly, for it was a word that she never used except in whispers to her mother.

“I knew we’d have a doing with ye, Andrew,” said Aunt Janet, bending stiffly in her satin frock. He could not hear. He looked at her and turned to Marcella again.

“If ye—” he began, and suddenly felt very heavy on the girl’s supporting arm.

The people crept away talking quietly then. It seemed right that Andrew Lashcairn had died in the midst of them all on All Souls’ Night.

## CHAPTER IV

After her father’s death Marcella had more time to become aware of the really tangible shadows about the farm. In fact, she wakened to a general awareness about the time of her eighteenth birthday, rather later than most girls.

She was extraordinarily young; she was inevitably romantic. Living what amounted to the life of a recluse, it was only to be expected that she should live her illusions and dreams. Her mind was a storehouse of folklore, romance, poetry and religion; her rationalistic readings had not in any way become part of her, though facts and ratiocinations, by mere feat of memory, were stored in her mind as irrelevances and unrealities that came elbowing their way through her dreams just as fantastic thoughts come as one falls asleep.

Never, in all her life, had she known what physical pleasure was; her bed was hard and very thinly covered—one night her father had taken away and locked up a blanket



because he said she must be hardened. It had never occurred to her that food could be a pleasure; it was just something that happened, a recurrence of potatoes, porridge, oatcake and broth. Only when she had been swimming in the fierce waves or battling in the winds on Ben Grief with Wullie did she realize the pleasure of hunger, and that was easily satisfied in the smoking hut when the Hunchback raked aside the ashes and brought out roast potatoes or toasted fish that he took down from the roof.

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Not knowing other girls she had no one to talk to her about clothes. Before Rose Lashcairn was ill she had taken great pleasure in dressing her little girl; soft things, woven of silk and wool, came from London for her, soft shoes and stockings and frocks of fine texture and beautiful colour that seemed strange and exotic on Lashnagar. But these were worn out and never replaced—except for her mother's funeral she never wore shoes, summer or winter. Her feet and legs were brown and quite invulnerable to stones or brambles. Her father did not realize that she needed clothes; her aunt was too much sunk in shadows to notice the child's appearance. And, reading her legends and romances, it was natural that Marcella should live them and dress them. In a press in her mother's room were clothes brought from the old grey house, the accumulation of days when fabrics were made as heirlooms. There were plaids and brocades and silks: there was lace from Valenciennes and linen from Cambrai, yellow with age. There were muslins that a Lashcairn had brought when he adventured to India with Clive. Rose often wept over them. Several times Marcella's dreams nearly cost her her life, for, living them so utterly, she became detached from the physical world. One time, when a stormy golden sun went down behind black clouds, shining on an ancient pile of grey stones that stood on a little spit of land near the bar of the river, she was reminded of Tennyson's "Morte d'Arthur." She heard the ripples lapping on the reeds and, with an imaginary Sir Bedivere at her elbow, hurried back to the farm to dress herself as a Scottish edition of King Arthur in kilts that had belonged to her grandfather. She worshipped the shine of the moon on the great jewel at her breast as she stepped into the little frail boat, very tired after a long day's wandering on Ben Grief without food. To a Kelt death is a thing so interpenetrating life that thought of it brought no fear; there was a sort of adventurous anticipation about it. She cast a stick—her sword Excalibur—into midstream and waited for the arm "clad in white samite, mystic, wonderful." That it did not appear meant very little to her. It certainly did not mean that it was not there. Rather it meant that she could not see it. So she lay in the little boat and quite certainly she saw the grave Queens at the head, leading her to the Island Valley of Avilion. Watching the moonlight glittering on her jewel she was hypnotized to sleep, rocked by the soft motion of the little boat. The current of the stream took her out to sea, the turn of the tide washed her back again, and she wakened at dawn famished with hunger, drenched with the icy water the little boat had shipped. She was too good a swimmer to drown and, after a valiant struggle, she came to land two miles from home.

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Her romance was never killed by misadventures. The very next day she climbed Ben Grief and lighted a ring of fire round his wrinkled brow by carrying up loads of dried heather and grass through which she fought her way to the rescue of a dream Brunnhilde, sleeping within the fire. She reached home that night with scorched clothes and hair, and smoke-smarting eyes. But such mishaps were only part of the adventure, as inevitable as storms in winter and wounds in battle. These dreams were in the days before her father's Rationalism kept her chained indoors: his evangelism sowed seeds that took root and flowered into a desire that she might be a wild-eyed, flame-tongued John the Baptist, making straight the way of the Lord. When this dream came to her it transmuted all the other dreams; from so deep down inside her that it seemed a voice of someone autocratic standing beside her came the conviction that to be a John the Baptist meant to be a martyr and an anchorite. For days after her father's death she wandered on the hills, preaching deliverance to the screaming gulls, who would not be quiet like St. Francis' birds when he preached. Many days she took food with her and deliberately refused to eat it, walking miles after she was worn out in a considered attempt at the subjection of the flesh, after the manner of saints of old. Sometimes she preached peace to the desolate ghosts on Lashnagar, but they did not seem to listen.

Then, just after this, several things happened to bring her thoughts away from dreams to a realization of herself as a concrete, circumscribed being. Wullie had warned her of this.

"Ye're up in the clouds, now, Marcella, like a wraith. Some day ye'll come down to airth. And it'll be with sic' a bang that ye'll find ye're very solid." She had not understood him.

For six weeks after her father's funeral she had almost maddening neuralgia. One day, meeting Dr. Angus in the village she stopped to speak to him. Indeed, it was impossible to pass him, for he had bought Rose Lashcairn's little mare who, even after six years, remembered Marcella and stood with eager, soft eyes while the girl stroked her velvet nose and satin sides. This was the first time the doctor had seen Marcella since the funeral and she had been weighing on his mind: he guessed at more than the Lashcairns would ever have told him of their circumstances; he had sent in no bill for Andrew's illness and, out of his own pocket, had paid the Edinburgh specialist. Marcella knew nothing of this—if she thought of it at all, she would have thought that the doctor just happened, as everything else in her life, by chance.

"Marcella, you're not looking the thing," he said. "Hop up beside me. I've not seen you for ages. Let us have a talk. I've to drive along to Pitleathy and I'll drop you here on my way back."

She sprang in beside him and told him about the neuralgia.

“I had it first when I used to sit up with father. Now I have it all the time—and dreadful headaches. I never knew what aches meant before. I’m afraid when Jean used to say she had the headache I wasn’t so kind to her as I expect her to be to me.”

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"We never are," said the doctor bluntly. "But have you not told Aunt Janet about the headaches?"

"Oh no—she'd think it was silly."

"Then I'd tell Jean, Marcella," said the doctor hurriedly. "If you're not feeling well, just tell Jean, and maybe she'll be bringing you along to see me." Then he added. "But to-night I'll send the lad along with medicine for the neuralgia."

They talked about her father, then, and presently she surprised him by saying earnestly:

"Doctor, why is it that people get ill?"

He laughed and chuckled at her puzzled frown.

"Well! There's a question to ask a man after his dinner. Do you know it took me the best part of seven years at the hospital to learn the answer? And even now my knowledge is not what you might call exhaustive."

"It seems so queer—mother being ill, and father; then Jean's headaches and my neuralgia. And Wullie all twisted up."

The doctor let the reins drop on the horse's neck and lighted a very old pipe. He had very little chance of a talk, and was glad to talk, even to a girl.

"Just in those people you've mentioned, Marcella, you've almost every cause of illness." He paused, puffed at the pipe and went on, "Wullie—he was born like it."

"Yes. I know. It seems all wrong."

"It is wrong. It's a mistake," said the doctor slowly.

"Whose mistake?" she asked quickly.

"Ah, there you have me, Marcella. It was to answer questions like that that men invented the devil, I believe; they like to say he put the grit in the machine that turned out Wullie, and made him like that out of perversity."

"But what do you say?" she said, looking into his face.

"I don't know. I think several things. For one thing, I like to imagine that God, or Nature, whichever you like to call it—isn't a perfect machine yet, and that we human beings can step in to help a bit."

“But how?”

“Wullie’s father, I’ve heard, was drowned before he was born, and his mother was too proud to tell when she was hungry. She used to go out every night and take his place with the fishing boats, rowing, sitting cramped, drawing the nets. We can help there by stopping that sort of thing.”

Marcella watched him, wide-eyed. She was completely mystified but so full of questions that she could not find which one to ask first.

“That’s what I’d have said when I was at the hospital, a young man. In those days I dealt much more with cells and bodies than—than I do now. Queer thing, Marcella— youngsters go for physiology mostly. When they get older they see that there’s more in psychology. I’m old now. Maybe I’m more foolish, but I’ve a feeling, right down at my marrow, that I’m wiser. I like to think that Wullie’s an example of the law of compensation and, by losing physical strength and beauty, has gained a beautiful soul. But for the Lord’s sake don’t go telling anyone I—a doctor—talked such arrant nonsense,” he added with a laugh as he puffed at his pipe.

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"It seems wrong to me," said Marcella slowly. "I can't see why a beautiful mind and body shouldn't be part of each other."

"You've never been introduced to your body yet, Marcella, nor shaken hands with it. It's never popped up and made faces at you. When it does you'll find folks like Wullie have a good deal to be thankful for. Your father, for instance—"

He stopped short, coughed loudly and pulled up the horse to a sharp trot.

"Yes. The barrel," she said gravely.

"Who's been telling you that?"

"Wullie. I asked him."

"I wouldn't have told you, yet. But it's right you should know. You saw how it was with your father. Whisky ruled him. It rules all your menfolk like that. It wasn't till his body grew weak with sickness—and sickness, mind you, caused by the whisky—that he got it in hand. Then, you see, it was too late. He conquered a wounded foe. And, of course, he died. If he'd got religion earlier, perhaps—and, after all, that's only another obsession."

"Poor father," she whispered.

"If your father, without religion or anything, could have conquered, Marcella, he'd have been a very heroic figure. He'd have left footprints in the sand of time, as the poet said."

Marcella nodded. This was the first time the idea of conscious heroism came to her. She said rather breathlessly:

"But are bodies *wicked*, doctor? Lots of people seem to think so. Aunt Janet thinks people's bodies are *wrong*. All saints seem to think that too."

"They're very splendid and bonny if you can keep them in hand. Christ taught that bodies—Humanity, that is—are the veils of God. It's only when bodies get out of hand that they go wrong and put a man in hell. I expect the idea of Trinity-worship that we get in most religions was an unconscious aiming at this truth, that to be a perfect human being you must be the Trinity—body, brain and spirit. But we're not up to that Trinity yet, lassie, by a long chalk."

"When I used to read those scientific books, and those queer philosophies to father, it seemed to me that bodies were all that mattered. That was when I was reading biology books and lectures. It seemed so useless to me—just living, and handing on life, and living no more."



“That was the idea when I was at the hospital. At a hospital, of course, bodies do count tremendously. But in my day more than now because we were in the reactionary stage from blood-letting, incantations and so on. I remember how Biology came to me with a sense of crystal precision and inevitability in those days.”

He paused. Marcella asked rather doubtfully:

“But do you think that Biology is wrong?”

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“Oh, Marcella, your ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’ are so funny, if you only knew it! You might as well say, ‘Is fire wrong?’ It’s there. There’s no getting away from it. When I was a wee laddie at home I had to write copy-book lessons on Saturday afternoons to keep me out of mischief. One I wrote so often that it keeps coming into my mind in the most foolish way often. ‘Fire is a good servant but a bad master.’ That was the sentence. The times I’ve written it, thick down strokes, thin upstrokes! Well, that’s like any of these ologies—biology especially. It’s a good teacher. You don’t have to let it be a taskmaster.”

“I’d like to learn ologies, doctor. I’d like to learn to the roots of things. All the things I know—legends, history, poetry, haven’t any roots at all. Professor Kraill’s a biologist, isn’t he?”

“Well, yes—rather a heterodox one, but he’s getting believed now. But how on earth did you know?” he said, turning on her in surprise.

“There was an advertisement of a book of his lectures. It was called ‘Questing Cells’ and father got it. I had to read it to him—with a dictionary at almost every line, because I didn’t understand it. It showed me that, though I am muddled now, there is such a thing as clearness in the world. It seemed to me that if I knew all the things Professor Kraill knows things might be like a crystal ball—all the things in the world, you know, beautifully clear and rounded off. I read a lot of books to father after that and got muddled again. But I never lost the feel of Professor Kraill’s book. I couldn’t tell you a word of it now, but it’s like the memory of a most beautiful music. I love him. I’d love to hear him—to see him. He’s the wisest man in the world.”

“Heaven forbid!” said the doctor, laughing a little.

“Why? Don’t you admire him?”

“Immensely, though he’s heterodox. But he’s just what I was saying to you just now—an example of a man who isn’t the Trinity. Being a biologist, he’s run all to body and brain. He’s let his spirit get famished a bit. Queer things—one hears, too—inevitable things.”

“How do you mean?” she cried, quick to defend her hero, but eager with curiosity about him.

“Oh, things you wouldn’t understand. He’s given up his chair at the University.”

There was a long silence. Then Marcella said definitely:

“Anyway, he’s splendid. I love him.” The doctor laughed and told her it was a good thing she wasn’t a student if she fell in love with professors from their lectures.

“Well, go on with what you were saying,” she said imperiously, and the doctor began to think that he had not quite reckoned with Marcella’s passion for getting to the roots of things. But he expounded his theory to her, telling her that before many years things that were miracles in the time of Christ would be scientific bagatelles in the hospitals.

“We’ve been having a materialistic time, Marcella, ever since Huxley and Darwin. Now we’re coming to the swing of the pendulum. The body and its appetites have got very strong. Soon we’ll have them beat by the mind.”

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There was a long silence. Then, with a suddenness that disconcerted the doctor, she asked him what Wullie had meant by saying that the Lashcairn women took the man they needed, and went on strange roads.

He filled and lit his pipe before he answered her.

"If I told you you wouldn't understand. You'll come to it in time. When you do, remember what I said to you. If you don't keep your body in hand it's going to run away with you, like it ran away with your father into yon barrel. See?"

"No," she said doubtfully. "Do you mean be like Aunt Janet?"

"God forbid! No, not like Aunt Janet. You'll see when you come to it, Marcella. But remember that the nearest most of us ever get to the perfect Trinity is a thing of shreds and patches. People don't manage to be perfect."

"Christ?" ventured Marcella.

"No. He was brain and spirit without a body."

"Why, doctor, how about when He fasted in the wilderness—and the pain on the cross?"

"Bodily pain is much easier to bear than bodily desire, Marcella. Your poor father would have found it easier to be crucified than to bear his longing for whisky. And Aunt Janet—ask her."

"She wouldn't tell me."

"No, I suppose she wouldn't. When she was young she saw a man she wanted. And he was a man she couldn't have. Until she got dead as she is now I expect she'd have thought crucifixion a thing easier to bear. No, there's no one perfect. All we are, any of us, is either a soul or a body or a brain developed at the expense of all the rest. We get great holes torn in us, just as if wolves had been clawing at us. And it's the body that makes the most dreadful tears. Most people don't see this. You see, the body's hungers are the most appeasable—and being the most appeasable one can't see why they shouldn't be yielded to."

He stopped talking as they drove into the main street of Pitleathy, and while he was with his patient at a little house in the middle of the street Marcella sat thinking. Loose ends of his talk floated about in her grasping mind and she collected them to make him fasten them down when he came back.

"Do you know, doctor, you've muddled me," she said as they turned homewards in the teeth of the wind.

"I'm sorry for that, Marcella. You'd better forget what I've said. Sitting alone so much I talk to myself, and I forgot I was talking to a bit lassie like you. Forget things you don't understand."

"And then get more puzzled later on, when they crop up?" she said. "No. I want you to tell me, now. I want to know, now, why mother was ill—and why Jean and I have headaches."

"Your mother was ill through an accident," he said gravely. "I don't wish to talk about that. And as for Jean and you—well, it's what we expect of women. Man has made his women-folk invalids."

"Doctor!" she gasped.

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"Women are always getting ill more or less. Their natural place in the scheme of things makes them weaker. In the beginning of things they were in a dangerous world; as the vehicle of the new life it was not well that they should take their place amidst the same dangers as the men. Otherwise the race might have died out. So they were adapted by nature to a softer life. Their brains are smaller, their nerves more sensitive. If they'd been made as strong as men, physically, nothing would have kept them from fighting and exploring and getting killed."

"But—but—how awful! And you mean I'll have headaches and things always because I'm a woman?"

"Because you're a woman and, to quote your Professor, biologically important. Important to the race, that is—not intrinsically important. To keep you out of dangers and hardships—and mischief," he said, chuckling as he watched her indignant face.

"Well, then I won't be a woman! Coddled! I never heard anything so disgusting! Doctor, I'm going to be a Siegfried, a John the Baptist! I'm going to be a man!"

The doctor laughed loudly and told her to wait awhile, when she would laugh at this Marcella who was so eager, so impatient now.

## CHAPTER V

That conversation marked an epoch for Marcella. To use the doctor's phrase, it made her shake hands with her body. His medicine cured the neuralgia, though it would probably have cured itself now that the strain of her father's illness was over. But the headaches persisted right on until the springtime, bringing gusts of impatience and strange demands and urgencies that made her begin to get tired of the farm and Lashnagar and set her feet longing to be away on strange roads.

One sunny dawn she came down to the beach and, throwing off her clothes, ran across the strip of shingle, and then, with rapture in the softness of the air after the sharp bite of winter and spring mornings, she flew as if on wings over the yellow sand and into the water that was sliding in gently, almost motionlessly. She danced in the little lazy waves. They seemed playmates to-day, though usually they fought and buffeted her; she had her usual swim out to the islet where the fishermen kept their nets and it seemed very splendid just to be alive. Then she swam back to the shore where her clothes lay in a little heap, and it occurred to her that she had brought no towel.

"I'll have to dry like washing does—in the sun," she laughed, wringing her hair in her hand as she stood in a motionless little rock pool. The drops sparkled round her and, looking down at their little splashes, she caught sight of her reflection in the pool as she stooped forward to shake her hair. For a moment she stared, as Narcissus once

stared. But unlike Narcissus she did not fall in love with herself. From the reflection she let her eyes travel over her body, and noticed that curves and roundnesses were taking the place of boyish slimness.

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"Oh—how *horrible!*" she cried and dimly realized that the change in her appearance had something to do with the doctor's prediction of physical disability. She loathed and resented it immediately. Suddenly conscious of her bare legs she ran home, horrified at the tightness of her frock that showed the roundness of her figure. As she passed the Mactavish cottage the mother sat in the doorway, suckling the newest baby. Instead of staying to talk as usual Marcella flew by, her cheeks crimson. As soon as she reached home she ran up to her mother's room to find a frock that was not so tight; tearing an old linen sheet into strips she wound it round her body like a mummy wrap, so tightly that she could scarcely breathe, and then, putting on a blouse of her mother's that was still too tight to please her, she surveyed herself in the mirror with supreme dissatisfaction.

"I look *horrible!* It's beastly for people's bodies to *show* like that," she cried, and, sitting down on the floor, put on the shoes and stockings she had had for her father's funeral, that hurt her feet. She ran down to the beach to discuss it with Wullie. Half-way there she discovered that she could not possibly mention it to anyone. This puzzled her. She could not understand things one could not mention.

"We're very grand the day, Marcella," he said, watching her curiously. "Where are ye gaun?"

"I've come to see you," she said, sitting down in a shadowy corner.

"Have ye had breakfast? I saw ye, hours ago, swimming oot by the nets. There's seed cake in yon box that Jock's wife's sent doon, and buttermilk in the can."

Even indignation with her figure could not conquer her appetite, and she divided the cake between them, eating her share before she spoke.

"Seed cake's the nicest thing in the world," she said at last. "I love the wee blacks in it, don't you, Wullie? Wullie, when I'm dying I'll come here and Bessie shall make seed cake. Then I shall never die. I love the smell of it, too—it makes me think of the Queen of Sheba bringing spices and gold to King Solomon."

"Ye seem to be having a fine queer lot of thoughts the day, Marcella," said Wullie, eating slowly and looking at her.

She flushed and looked away from him.

"I have, Wullie, horrible thoughts. About getting old."

"So old, lassie—ye're nearly a woman now," he said gently.



“Wullie, I won’t be a woman! I hate it! The doctor’s been telling me disgusting things about being a woman. And so has Jean. Why should they be weak and get ill? Oh, I won’t! I’ll do as I like.”

“Ye’re too young tae understand yet,” began Wullie.

“I’m not. I’m not too young to understand that I won’t be weak—tied down. The doctor said women were all weaker than men, and I thought perhaps most women might be. But not me. And then—Wullie, I want to be like a lion or a tiger, and kill things that get in the way, and—oh, I’ll hate being a human being with a body that gets in the way.”

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“My poor old carcass has always been in the way,” said Wullie wistfully, and she ran out of the hut, unable to bear the pity of that, right up on Ben Grief. But before she reached the top she had to take off the tight bandages, for she found she could scarcely breathe, much less climb in them, and her shoes and stockings she hid under a bush until she came back, for they crippled her feet.

For three days she did not bathe and undressed in the dark every night. But after that the water called her insistently, and she went back to it, swimming in a deliberately unconscious way, as though she had promised someone she would not notice herself any more.

But insensibly her dreams changed; instead of being a Deliverer now she dreamed, in spite of herself, of a Deliverer with whom she could go hand in hand; as the mild May days drew along to a hot June the dreams varied strangely. Up on Ben Grief all alone in the wind, hungry and blown about she would see herself preaching in the wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey, clad in the roughest sheep-skins. At home, or on Lashnagar, or in the water she saw herself like Britomart in armour—always in armour—while a knight rode at her side. When they came to dragons or giants she was always a few paces in front—she never troubled to question whether the knight objected to this arrangement or not. At feasts in the palace, or when homage was being done by vast assembled throngs of rescued people, he and she were together, and together when they played. She had definitely dismissed the doctor’s talk of natural weakness. Not realizing all its implications she had nevertheless quite deliberately taken on the man’s part.

Then came a gipsy to the kitchen door one morning when Jean was in the byre. It was a good thing Jean was not there or she would have driven her away as a spaewife. She asked for water. Marcella gave her oatcake and milk and stood looking at her olive skin, her flashing eyes, her bright shawl curiously.

As she drank and ate slowly she watched Marcella without a word. At last she said in a hoarse voice:

“You will go on strange roads.”

“I wish I could,” said Marcella, flushed with eagerness. “This place is—”

“You will go on strange roads and take the man you need,” said the gipsy again.

Marcella glimpsed her splendid knight riding in at the gate with her, and the farm-yard ceased to be muddy and dirty and decayed; it became a palace courtyard, with glittering courtiers thronging round. It did not occur to her that the gipsy had heard the Lashcairn legend in the village—the most natural thing for a legend-loving gipsy to hear—she was

accustomed to believing anything she was told, and that the gipsy's words confirmed her own longings made them seem true.

"I'm afraid there's not much chance of strange roads for me," she said, looking out over the sea with beating heart to where a distant ribbon of smoke on the horizon showed a ship bound for far ports.

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"When were you born?"

Marcella told her and, taking a little stick from under her shawl, the gipsy scratched strange signs in the mud.

"You were born under the protection of Virgo," said the gipsy, and Marcella's eyes grew round and big. "You will go by strange paths and take the man you need. There will be many to hurt you. Fire and flood shall be your companions; in wounding you will heal, in losing you will gain; your body will be a battle-ground."

"Oh, but how can you know?" cried Marcella, and suddenly all those stern Rationalists she had read, Huxley and Frazer, Hegel and Kraill, all very bearded and elderly, all very much muddled together, passed before her eyes. "It seems so silly to think you can see from those scratchy marks what I am going to do in years and years and years."

But as the gipsy went away, smiling wisely, and asking none of the usual pieces of silver, all the Kelt in Marcella, which believed things had no roots, came rushing to the surface and sent her indoors to write down the gipsy's prophecy. Later, with a sense of mischievous amusement she rummaged in the book-room to find one of the Rationalist books. But they had been sold, most of them. Professor Kraill's "Questing Cells" was there and she copied the prophecy into it, on the fly-leaf.

"Talk about a battle-ground!" she said, smiling reflectively. "Professor Kraill and a gipsy!"

She turned several pages, and once more got the feel of the book, though still much of it was Greek to her. Then she got down from the window seat, for her aunt was calling her to tea, and she was hungry.

There was an unusual pot of jam on the table. She looked at it in surprise as she sat down.

"That is some of Mrs. Mactavish's bramble jelly that she sent up for the funeral; I thought we'd not be needing it just then. But now I see it's beginning to get mildewed. So it'll need to be eaten before it's wasted," said Aunt Janet, peeling off the top layer of furry green mould and handing the pot to Marcella.

"Oh I do love bramble jelly," she cried, passing it to Jean, who always ate with them in the good old feudal fashion, right at the foot of the long table. Jean took a small helping and so did Aunt Janet. After a while Marcella peered into the pot again.

"Shall we finish it up, Aunt?" she asked, and Aunt Janet shrugged her shoulders.

"To-day or to-morrow, what's the difference? Do you really like it so much as that?" she added, watching the girl curiously.



"I love it! Bramble jelly and seed cake! What do you think, Aunt? When I get very old and die, Mrs. Mactavish and Jock's wife will be in heaven already, brought for the purpose by the Angel Gabriel, and they'll make bramble jelly and seed cake for the love feast for me!" she said, eating a spoonful without spreading it on oatcake, encouraged by her aunt's unwonted extravagance. "I can't be philosophical about bramble jelly!"

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Aunt Janet watched the girl as though she could not believe in anything so sincere as this love of sweet things. Then she said a little sadly:

“There’s not a thing on earth that I want or love.”

“Because you’ve ruled yourself out of everything! I love to want things because always they may be just round the corner. And if they aren’t, there’s the fun of thinking they are. And always there’s another corner after the last one. I’d rather *die* of hungriness than never be hungry.”

“Oh, you’ll die of hungriness, I expect. That is, if you’re lucky,” said Aunt Janet. “I shall just drop out of life some day.”

Suddenly time gave a sharp leap forward and Marcella saw herself sitting there as Aunt Janet was sitting, a dead soul in a dulled body, waiting to drop out of life. The words of Wullie and the gipsy slid into her mind—“they go on strange roads”—and she got a swift vision of herself in armour riding out gaily along a strange road with her knight beside her. Elbowing that out came something she had seen that had amazed her a few days ago. In the evenings she and Aunt Janet sat in the book-room, into which they had taken a little table of Rose’s and a few chairs. Beside the fire-place had been one of those ancient presses in which the old farmer had kept his whisky, his pipes and his account books. When the man from Christy’s came to buy the furniture he had noticed the beautifully carved oak doors of the press and offered such a tempting sum for them that Aunt Janet had let them go, nailing a piece of old crested tapestry across the press to hide her books and needlework inside. They usually sat there together, Marcella reading or dreaming, Aunt Janet sewing or sitting listless, not even dreaming. But into Marcella’s dreams had come frequent movements of her aunt’s hand going in behind the curtain. Several times when she had spoken to her, Aunt Janet had waited a few seconds before answering, and then had spoken in a queerly muffled voice. One day, looking in the cupboard for needle and cotton, Marcella had seen a big paper bag full of sweets—a thing she had not seen at the farm since her mother died. They were acid drops; she took one or two and meant to ask her aunt for some in the evening when they sat together. But she forgot until, falling into one of her dreams and staring in the fire, she noticed her aunt take something almost slyly from the cupboard and put in her mouth behind the cover of her book, glancing at her furtively as she did so. The amazing fact that she was eating the acid drops secretly came into her mind and she sat trying to reason it out for some minutes.

“Mean thing—she doesn’t want me to have any,” was her first thought which she dismissed a moment later as she remembered certain very distinct occasions when her aunt had been anything but mean, times when she had deliberately stayed away from a scanty meal that the others should have more—little sacrifices that Marcella was only just beginning to understand.

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"I don't believe she's mean—anyway, I *know* she isn't. I believe she doesn't have half enough to eat and these sweets make up for it! Or else—she likes sweets frightfully and doesn't want me to know she's so—so kiddish."

Quick tears had sprung into Marcella's eyes, tears of pity and of impotence as she wondered what on earth she could do for Aunt Janet. After a while, when she was quite sure the acid drop was swallowed, and no other had taken its place, she knelt down on the hearth and, after a minute, shyly drew herself over to her aunt's side.

"Aunt Janet," she said, taking one of the thin blue-veined hands in hers, "Auntie—"

"What is it, Marcella?"

"I—I don't know. Oh, Aunt Janet, I do wish there was something I could do for you."

"Marcella!" cried her aunt, almost shocked.

"Oh dear, you make me cry, Aunt Janet, to see you sitting here so lonely and so still. You seem like father—there's a wall all round you that I can't get inside. Oh and I do love you! I'm simply *miserable* because I want to do something nice for you."

She stared at her aunt with swimming eyes, and Aunt Janet, quite at a loss to understand the outbreak, could not get outside her wall.

"You will find it's much better to rule love out, Marcella," said Aunt Janet gently, holding the girl's hand in hers, which was cold. "It is better not to pity anyone or love anyone. Oh yes, I know you pity me, child. But love and pity have exactly doubled the pain of the world, because, in addition to the tragedy of the person you love is your own tragic desire to do something for them. You take my advice, Marcella—don't love. Rule love out—"

"Oh my goodness—acid drops," whispered Marcella to herself as she sat down to think out this astonishing heresy.

From that day she had been filled with a choked pity for Aunt Janet—and now, suddenly, as she sat with the jam spoon full, poised over her plate she saw herself getting like that—slyly eating acid drops because she was ashamed to admit so small, so amiable a weakness, having conquered all the big ones.

She dropped the spoon with a clatter and pushed the pot away from her.

"Acid drops," she whispered to herself.

"You may as well eat it up, Marcella. It only means you won't have any to-morrow. Neither Jean nor I want it—and the pot can be washed and put away then."



“No—no. I don’t want it,” cried the girl passionately. “Aunt Janet, I want to go away.”

Her eyes were sparkling, her breath coming fast and short.

“Go away?”

“Yes. I can’t stay here. What’s to happen to me if I do? Oh what’s to happen to me?”

“You’ll be happier staying here till you drop out of life,” said the woman, looking at her intently.

“Oh no—no! I’d rather be smashed up and killed—like grandfather was,” cried Marcella passionately.



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"Yes, I suppose one would—at eighteen," Aunt Janet mused reminiscently. "But where can you go?"

"Oh anywhere—I don't care. I'll go anywhere—now—to-night. Aunt, I'm not cruel and unkind, am I, to want to go away? I'll come back to you. I'll be kinder when I come back," she cried anxiously. "I can't stop here and be petrified."

For two days Aunt Janet thought and pondered while Marcella raged about Ben Grief with the wings of all the swifts and swallows on earth in her feet. She faced many things these two days—she planned many things. She was like a generalissimo arranging details of the taking of the enemy's entrenchments before ever the recruiting for his army had begun. She was full of thoughts and intentions as ungraspable and spacious as the Milky Way. She was not quite sure, up there with the winds lashing her face with her hair, whether she was going to save the world from whisky, materialism or dreams; she was not quite sure whether she was going to save women from having smaller brains and weaker bodies than men, or whether she was going to train herself out of being a woman. At any rate, she was going out on the battle-path, glittering in armour. As long as her eyes were on the stars and her hair streaming in the wind it did not seem to matter much where her feet were. They would, she felt sure, follow her eyes.

And then Aunt Janet announced, at the end of two days, that she should write to Australia, to a brother of Rose Lashcairn's who lived in Victoria on a big sheep run. He had written at Rose's death, offering to have the child—one little girl more or less on his many acres would not count. But Andrew had refused stiffly, insolently, and there the matter had dropped. Now Aunt Janet sat down, and, quite characteristically bridging six years of silence and rather rude neglect, stated that Andrew was dead, the farm was not prospering, and she was sending Marcella out to him, as he had expressed a wish for her before. She did not ask if this would be convenient. It did not occur to her that Uncle Philip might be dead, or have left Wooratonga; with Lashcairn high-handedness—to quote Wullie—she expected all the world to do her bidding.

She did not mention the letter to Marcella until it was written; she lived so much inside her wall that the interest the letter must necessarily have for the girl did not occur to her until she called her downstairs and put it into her hand.

"You'll need to take this letter to Carlossie, Marcella. Jean is too busy to-day. And ask about the postage to Australia. I believe it's only a penny."

"Who do we know in Australia?" asked Marcella.

"Your mother's brother Philip. I've written to tell him you'll be coming to him. He wrote when your mother died saying he would have you, but your father refused then. I've

told him you'll be coming shortly, so we'll need to cable when we've looked up the boats and everything."

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Marcella stared at her aunt in dead silence. She did not in the least resent this way of disposing of her. She was used to it—she would have disposed of herself in just the same high-handed fashion if it had occurred to her. But she was stricken silent with inarticulate joy at the prospect of going away—especially of going across the sea just as far as possible without getting over the edge of the world.

“But do you think he’ll have me?” she said tremulously when she could speak again.

“He’ll need to,” said her aunt calmly.

“Anyway, if he doesn’t someone else will,” said Marcella casually. To her hitherto the world had meant Lashnagar, Pitleathy and Carlrossie. She had never been as far as Edinburgh. She had lived in a world of friends—a world that knew her, barefoot and hungry as she was, for the last of the Lashcairns, a world that had open doors for her everywhere. And Aunt Janet knew about as much of life outside the wall that held her own smouldering personality as Marcella knew.

It was only years afterwards that Marcella wondered where her aunt got the money to buy her the clothes that came from Edinburgh—not many of them, but things severely plain and severely expensive. She knew that the man from Christy’s came again—she knew that two great oak chests, one from the landing and one from her mother’s room, went away. Later she missed the old weapons that used to be in the armoury at the old grey house and that had lain in her father’s bedroom where he could see them ever since they came to the farm—great-swords and dirks and battle-axes—that had rung out a clear message of defiance on many a battlefield. But she did not associate their going with her own until she was out in mid-ocean, and then she felt sickened to think what it must have cost Aunt Janet to part from them.

In the midst of her preparations Jean told her one day that she was going away soon.

“Going away?” she cried. “Then what will Aunt Janet do? Why, Jean, I never thought you’d leave her,” she added reproachfully.

“Ye’re leavin’ her yersel’,” said Jean grimly. “But I’m not gaun of ma ain accoont. The mistress hersel’ was tellun me she’ll not be needin’ me ony mair.”

“Well! but what’s she going to do, then?” said Marcella, arrested in her careful tidying of her father’s old books on the shelves. “I’m going straight away to ask her.”

But her aunt simply told her that it was no concern of hers, but that she was going to live very quietly now.

“But who’ll look after you? Who’ll do the work? What will you live on?”

"I am not accustomed to being cross-questioned," said Aunt Janet in a definite way that forbade questions. But Marcella lay awake worrying very late during her last few nights at the farm, picturing her aunt all alone, without Jean, without her, without even the beasts, for a butcher from Carlossie had come and slaughtered the last old tottery cow, Hoodie.

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"What is she going to do?" the girl asked herself again and again as she tossed on her hard bed that night. She tried to imagine Aunt Janet bringing in wood for the fire, breaking the ice of the well in winter, cleaning and cooking as Jean did, and her imagination simply would not stretch so far. Then she saw the nights when she would sit in the big book-room with the ghosts walking about the draughty passages, up and down through the green baize door, looking for their swords and dirks, the beds and tables and chairs that had been sold while the rats scuttered about the wainscoting. And she got a terrible vision of her aunt looking round furtively as her hand went behind the curtain to a paper bag of cheap sweets.

"Oh, I can't leave her!" she cried. "Poor Aunt Janet!"

But even as her lips told her she could not go, her feet tingled like the swallows' wings in September and knew that, whoever suffered for it, she would have to go.

Ghosts and shadows crowded round her next day when she ran down to the beach to say good-bye to Wullie. On the gate of the farm was fixed a notice saying that Miss Lashcairn desired the villagers to come to the house next day if they wished a free joint of beef, as she had no further use for her cattle. "As the beast in question is old," went on the firm, precise writing, "the meat will be tough. But probably it is quite worth consideration by those with large families."

Marcella was crying as she banged open the door of Wullie's hut.

"I thought ye'd be coming, Marcella," he said, looking at her with mournful brown eyes that recalled Hoodie's. "Jock's wife's made ye a seed cake to eat the day, and anither tae pack in yer grip. She says if ye'll pit it intill a bit tin an' fasten it doon tight it'll maybe keep till ye're at Australia. But I'm thenkin' she doesna rightly ken whaur Australia is on the map."

"Oh, Wullie," cried Marcella, flinging herself down on the ground beside him. "I feel as if I can't bear it all. Hoodie killed, and going to be eaten, Jean going to Perth to live, and Aunt Janet all alone in the old farm, living with the rats."

"Ye're awa' yersel', Marcella, mind," said Wullie gravely.

"Wullie, I wish I could explain. I don't want to go, really, but if I don't I'm so afraid I'll get frozen up and dead. Oh, and acid drops," she added frantically.

"Eh?" he asked.

"Oh, that's nothing. Only something I was thinking," she said quickly. "But I've got to go; only I hate to think of things being uprooted here."

“Then dinna think about it. I knew ye’d be awa’ afore long. It’s in ye, juist as it’s in the birds. But ye’ll come flying back like they do.”

“Oh, Wullie, do you think I shall?” she pleaded, watching him as he stroked his beard and looked out across the sea.

“Ye’ll be back, Marcella. Very glad ye’ll be tae come back, an’ ye’ll find me here, juist the same. Things change little. It takes millions of years to change everything save folk’s spirits. I’ll never change, till His hand straightens me oot some day for a buryin’. But ye’ll be changed, Marcella, like Lashnagar—things will have cropped out in ye, and things will have walked over ye.”

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Wullie's words comforted her, gave her a sense of security as she sat at his side toasting fish for the last time and eating the cake that somehow did not taste quite so good as usual. As she said good-bye to him before she went the round of the village bidding everyone good-bye, something impelled her to kiss his brown cheek. The last she saw of him was his bent figure silhouetted in the doorway of the hut with a fire glow behind it, and the setting sun shining on his eyes that were bright with tears.

But that night she was too excited to feel really unhappy as she looked at the boxes ready in the book-room, her little leather case lying open waiting for the last-minute things next morning. When, even, she blundered into the dairy to find rope and caught sight of a horrible red pile of meat that had been Hoodie, she could not cry about it. She was too busy thinking that, out of her adventuring, a day would come when the old place would be warmed and lighted again, and she told this to Aunt Janet, who was sitting, sunk in thought, by the fire in the book-room.

"I wouldn't be dreaming too much, Marcella," she said gently. "Even if dreams come true to some extent, they are very disappointing. A dream that you dreamed in a golden glow comes to pass in a sort of grey twilight, you know. And you'll never bring happiness here. Get the thought out of your head. There are too many ghosts. Could you ever kill the ghost of little Rose lying there with pain inside her, eating her life out? Or your father raging and hungering, like a pine tree in a window-pot?" She shook her head sadly. "No, Marcella, till you've killed thought you'll never be happy—till you've killed feeling—"

"Look here," began Marcella quickly, kneeling beside her aunt and suddenly holding her stiff body in her quick young arms. "Auntie," she said, using the diminutive shyly, and even more shamefacedly adding, "dear—I'm not going to listen to you. So there! I'm going away, and I'm going to come back and simply *dose* you with happiness, like we used to dose the old mare with medicine when she was ill. If you won't take it, I'll drown you in it. Or else what's the use of my going away?"

"You're going away because you feel it in your feet that you've got to go, Marcella," said Aunt Janet calmly. The wind roared down the chimney and sent fitful puffs of smoke out into the room. "If I tried to stop you, you'd go on hungering to be away."

## CHAPTER VI

It was the doctor who saw Marcella on to the *Oriana* at Tilbury. Aunt Janet had not suggested coming with her: it had not occurred to her as the sort of thing that was necessary, nor had Marcella given it a thought. Left to herself, she would have taken train blithely from Carlrossie to Edinburgh and thence to London—imagining London not very much more formidable than a larger Carlrossie. But the doctor made them see that it was quite necessary for someone to see her off safely, and naturally the job fell to him.

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The booking of the passage had caused considerable discussion. Aunt Janet had written to the shipping company asking them to reserve a saloon berth by the first mail-boat after a certain date. That it took nearly all the money she had or was likely to have, as far as she could see, for the rest of her days, did not trouble her in the least. She could live on nothing, she told herself—and it was absolutely necessary that Andrew's child should go away, even though she was going to seek the once-refused charity of a relative, with the maximum of dignity and with flags flying. But the doctor had a talk with her about it. He had had three trips as ship's doctor to Australia on P. and O. steamers, and his imagination reeled at the prospect of Marcella in the average saloon on a long-distance liner.

"You see," he said, trying hard to be tactful, "if Marcella travels first class she'll need many clothes. There are no laundries on most of these ships, and it's a six weeks' trip. In the tropics you need to be changing all day if you care a brass farthing for your appearance." He did not tell her that Marcella's frankness and her lack of conventional training would ostracize her among the first-class passengers, half of whom were Government officials and the like going out to Australia or India, while the rest were self-made Australians going back home after expensive visits to the Old Country. They moved in airtight compartments. The exclusive Government folks would not have accepted a place on a raft that held the self-made colonials even at the risk of losing their lives. The self-made folks, snubbed and a little hurt, were rather inclined to be blatantly loud and assertive in self-defence. Between the two Marcella would be a shuttlecock. But she clinched the discussion herself by remarking airily that she was going in the cheapest possible way.

"You shall go second class," said her aunt. "I quite see Dr. Angus's point about the first-class passengers."

"I'm going third, Aunt. I won't spend money that needn't be spent, and the third-class part of the ship gets there just as fast as the first! I'd be uncomfortable among rich folks. I only know poor people, and Dr. Angus—I'll get on better with third-class people."

The doctor laughed at the implication, and was forced to give in. He told Aunt Janet that the third class was quite comfortable, though he really knew nothing about it. He had never been on an emigrant ship in his life. He arranged for a share in a two-berth cabin quite blithely.

Marcella felt solemn when she finally saw the doctor's machine at the door waiting for her in the grey dawn light; Jean cried, and Tammias and Andrew, who were coming in with the tide, seeing the trap crawling along, ran up a little flag on the masthead to cheer her going. But Aunt Janet did not cry. She kissed the girl unemotionally and went into the house, shutting the heavy door with a hollow, echoing clang.



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They had some hours to spend in Edinburgh, and got lunch in Princes Street. It all seemed amazingly big and busy to Marcella, who could not imagine the use of so many hundreds of people.

"I can't see what they're all here for, doctor," she said as they sat at a very white and sparkling table in a deep window opposite the Scott Monument, and the people went to and fro in the absorbed, uncommunicative Edinburgh way. "They don't seem to be needed."

The doctor laughed.

"Wait till you see London," he said. "You'll wonder more then."

She got up from the table suddenly and stood in the window while the doctor went on eating philosophically and smiling at her as he wished he could go all the way to Australia with her and watch her growing wonderment at the world.

"You know," she said doubtfully, "it seems so queer—all these people, and then that monument. I don't see the connection, somehow."

"I see you standing there, and a lump of congealing mutton on your plate here," said the doctor, and she sat down and ate a mouthful hurriedly.

"But what is the connection? What are they for?"

The doctor watched her in his precise way with his eyes twinkling at her over his glasses, which he wore on the end of his nose.

"I thought you were such a learned biologist, Marcella. Kraill would tell you they were the caskets of questing cells—seeking about for complementary cells that some day will themselves become the caskets of cells."

"Ugh! That reminds me of all the clouds of flies on the dead fish in summer," she said, pushing her plate away. "Flies—then maggots."

"Exactly!" said the doctor, chuckling.

"But—" she began, and broke off, frowning.

"Don't you see any connection between all yon little people and the monument, though? A crawling mass of folks—and one or two stand out. The others show they realize how these big ones stand out by making monuments for them. It infers, I think, that they'd all like to tower if they could."

"Ah, that's better. But so few tower."

“And that, Marcella, is just what I told you yon day we drove to Pitleathy. They’re all patched—or I should say *we’re* all patched. Either bodily, mentally or spiritually there are holes torn in us, and we’ve to be so busy patching them up from collapsing that we’ve no time to grow. As time goes on and we learn better there’ll be less patching. There’ll be more growing up tall and straight—everyone—there’ll be giants in those days, Marcella.”

“Yes,” she said slowly, and saw herself as one of them some day as she drew on her gloves rather awkwardly, for they were the first pair she had ever possessed. “Oh, well—I’m not going to be patched at all, doctor. I simply won’t have things tearing holes in me.”

London, of course, was even more amazing than Edinburgh. They had a day to spend there, and the doctor took her to Regent Street and Bond Street in the morning. He was enjoying himself in a melancholy sort of fashion. Marcella was *tabula rasa*. It was interesting to watch the impressions registered on her surface.

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The shops gave her none of the acquisitive pleasure he had expected. To her they were interesting as museums might have been. She could not, she did not see the use of them. The women thronging the windows and departments of a great store through which they walked roused her to excited comment.

"What are they buying them all for?" she said, looking at the hats and frocks and the purchasers. "They have such nice ones already."

The doctor asked her if she did not think they were very pretty when he had got over his amusement at the idea of women only buying things because they needed them.

"Oh beautiful!" she cried rapturously. "But you couldn't do very much in frocks like that."

"That's the idea, of course," said the doctor, watching her quizzically. "If you only knew it, Marcella, all these shops are built upon a foundation of what your professor calls 'questing cells.' You see—but let's get out into the air. You've started my bee buzzing now."

They faced about and elbowed their way through an eager-eyed, aimless-footed throng by the doorway.

"Now go on," said Marcella when they were in the street, walking down beside Liberty's. She had one eye on the windows and one ear for the doctor.

"You see, all these women here—they're doing something quite unconsciously when they buy pretty clothes and spend so much time and money on making themselves look so bonny," said the doctor, striding along in his Inverness cape, quite oblivious that he was a very unique figure in Regent Street. "They'll worry tremendously about what colour suits them, what style sets off their beauty best. I don't think that it's really because they like to see something bonny every time they look in their mirror. I don't think it's even that they want admiration, or envy. It's simply that they're ruled by the law of reproduction, if they only knew it. Inside them is new life—these same questing cells. These cells can only find separate existence through complementary cells. So they urge these women on to make themselves charming, capturing—married or single, they are the same, deep down, for natural laws take no count of marriage laws, you know. The men are the same, too. They beg and placate—and all the time deep down, they think they are the choosers, the overlords. And the women tempt them and then run away. Last of all they yield. These cells have it ingrained in them that the woman-thing is only ready to yield after a chase. Very few people do this consciously. A few do—people who have been let into the secret of studying natural laws. Then they either do it for the fun of the chase, or else because they're too morally lazy to fight the urge of the cells. That's when they get holes torn in them."

He walked on for a few steps, and then turned to laugh into Marcella's puzzled face.

“All of which, I’d like to point out, I take no credit for, Marcella. I got it out of Kraill’s Edinburgh lectures that have just been published in book form.”

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"I hate that way of talking," said Marcella abruptly. "I like Wullie's way best. He says lives are the pathway of life, just as you do. But he says it's not just life, it's either God or beasts that walk along it and we've to help God kill the beasts so as to leave the pathway clear for Him. It means the same, but your way of saying it is so—so ungodly."

"I know. But there it is. The way I talk is the way Kraill and his school talk. Of course, there's something in it. There would be a great deal in it if we were only aiming at making bodies. All this tricking out—refinement—it may produce the people who tower over others—like the Greeks with their 'pure beauty' you know—"

He stopped speaking suddenly and they walked on in silence while Marcella looked eagerly from shop window to passers-by and back again.

"It's all wrong, doctor," she said at last. "It's too one-sided."

"Yes. And look at the Greeks now—"

She turned to him with a quick, birdlike glance.

"Do you know what I think?" she said.

"Not quite all of it," said the doctor, watching her face, and thinking how incongruous it looked in Regent Street.

"Well, I think biology's one of the beasts we've to kill before God walks along us. So there! Tropical forests—maggots—women," she added, and the doctor laughed outright.

The chief impression she got of London was its aimlessness. It reminded her irresistibly of an ant-hill she had seen disturbed once. Myriads of tiny creatures had scurried passionately, exhaustingly, after each other to and fro, no whence and no whither; the people thronging out of shops and offices at dusk frightened her: there seemed so many of them, and, looking at their tired, strained faces and their unkingly way of hurrying along, uninterested and uninteresting save in getting to their destination, it seemed to her that they were not thinking of ever "towering": when Dr. Angus reminded her that they were so busy keeping alive that they had no time to think how and why they were alive at all, she was plunged into black depression; at home she had only had less than a hundred people and a few beasts about the farm to pity. Now it came to her with sudden force that all these people, so driven by different forces, were to be pitied. But as soon as she saw the crowd of people at Fenchurch Street station and a chalked notice, "Boat train for the R.M.S. *Oriana*," she forgot abstract worries.

There seemed to be a good many children, small groups of five or six with father and mother, and piles of inexpensive-looking luggage; there were several young men who looked very much like the lads who worked about the farm at home; there were groups

of girls and a more or less heterogeneous collection of people who might be passengers, and might be friends seeing passengers off. But what impressed her immensely was a pile of brightly striped deck-chairs with sun-awnings. They looked exotic, tropical on the grey, gloomy platform; they seemed so pleasantly lazy and luxurious among the piles of utilitarian-looking luggage. The doctor bought one for her and put it among her baggage.

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The train was crowded; the doctor stood up to give his seat to a woman and Marcella sprang to her feet, talking incessantly about her impressions and her expectations. She thought London, seen from a railway carriage window, which gave only a view of back gardens, factories, little streets and greyish washing drying, was an appalling place. Three times she said to the doctor, "But what's the use of living at all in such miserable places?" and the second and third time he only smiled at her. The first time he had said:

"Why, either because they don't know there's anything better, or else because they're sure there's something better. Either is a good reason for going on with awful things."

At last they were in the tender, in a drizzling, greyish rain, ploughing through the coffee-coloured water of the Thames towards the *Oriana*, which seemed surprisingly small. She had several surprises during the journey from Fenchurch Street. To begin with, someone trod on her foot and did not apologize; several people elbowed her out of their way in their rush to get to their luggage; no one smiled at her or spoke to her; no one seemed to realize that she was Marcella Lashcairn, or, if they realized it, it made no impression on them.

"Don't people here seem bad tempered?" said she to the doctor. "They don't seem to care about each other in the least."

"There are so many of them, Marcella—at home, you see, there are so few that they are frightfully interesting and friendly and critical of each other. Among all these people nobody matters very much—"

"They matter to me. I want to be friends with them, take them under my wing," she said, looking round at them, most of them people who would not be very likely to be put under anyone's wing at all. "Don't you feel like that?"

"I don't. They come under my wing fast enough without being asked and lots of them come in the night just when I've got in bed," he said. "I'm a bit tired of people, Marcella. I've seen too much of them. I always get two views of 'em, you know—inside and out. And the inside view is very depressing."

He laughed at her grave face, but once again he had a sharp misgiving about letting her go away alone. It seemed dangerous to turn her, practically an anchorite, loose among so many people. He wished, now, that he had let her brave the freezings of the saloon rather than the thawings of the steerage. But she seemed so confident, so eager, that he could say nothing to damp her spirits, only he was very glad, on going with her to look at her cabin, to find that she was to have it to herself. That, at any rate, prevented a too close intimacy that he suddenly felt might be dangerous.

They found very little to say during the twenty minutes he had to spend with her before the tender took him back to the shore. He was feeling very saddened, and at the same time anxious to give her excellent, fatherly advice, for he suddenly realized her abysmal ignorance when he saw her standing smiling with an air of pleased expectancy among all these strangers, waiting, as she had said, to love them all and take them all under her wing. Twice he started nervously to warn her—and each time she interrupted him joyously.



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“Doctor, just come and peep into this door! Look, millions and millions of shiny rods and wheels and things. Oh aren’t engines the most beautiful things on earth? Look at them—not an inch to waste in them! I wish I could be an engineer.”

The next minute the first bell rang to warn visitors to be getting their farewells over, and he started again, shyly and hesitatingly:

“Marcella—I’d be careful.”

He was frightened of women-folk unless they were ill. He could talk to Marcella about impersonal things very interestedly, but suddenly to become fatherly was difficult. His mouth went dry, his face flushed and he wished he had asked Aunt Janet to come with them.

She seized his arm eagerly.

“Oh look at the nice, kind little lifeboats! They’re not much bigger than Tammás’s boat. Doctor, if we’re wrecked isn’t it a good thing I can row and swim? Do you think we might get wrecked? I’d have that nice little neat boat the third along and rescue the women and children! If the boat gets full I’ll hop out and swim—and if sharks come along I’ll tell them what Aunt Janet said about Hoodie. I think I’d be tough, don’t you?”

Her face clouded at mention of her aunt and Hoodie and the second bell rang out.

“Only three more minutes,” called a steward close to Marcella’s side. “All for the shore ready, please!”

“You’ll be looking after Aunt Janet, doctor?” she said gravely. “And Wullie? He’ll miss me—if you’d make it possible to call and have a few words with him at the hut when you’re passing.”

“Yes, Marcella,” said the doctor, and found his voice strangely husky. “And look here, Marcella—you’ll be careful?”

Her eyes were looking into his, very bright with tears as she took his hand in hers and walked towards the gangway with him.

“I couldn’t be careful if I tried,” she said, laughing, though her eyes got even more damp than ever. “Why should I be careful?”

“You—you might get sea-sick,” stammered the doctor despairingly.

“Oh don’t be silly! I’m as much at home on the sea as Tammás. Sea-sick indeed! Whatever next?”

The third bell clanged deafeningly and the siren of the little tender hooted at the doctor's efforts to be fatherly.

"Any more for the shore, please?" called one of the ship's officers who stood ready to cast off, and Marcella thought he looked accusingly at the doctor.

"They'll be taking you along, doctor," she said. "Oh I do wish you were coming! Good-bye! Good-bye. Oh dear, I do believe I'm going to cry."

"Good-bye, lassie," said the doctor, taking off his glasses as he stepped on to the gangway and blinked at her. Suddenly she thought he looked so grey and so lonely that it seemed necessary to comfort him and, before the man at the gangway could stop her, she had dashed after him, flung her arms round his neck, kissed him loudly on his ruddy cheek and ran back on deck again, all in a moment. She was looking at the doctor as he stared at her blindly, but she was suddenly conscious of a loud and passionate "Damn!" very close to her. She guessed, rather than realized, that she was standing on someone's foot.

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"Oh, I am so sorry," she said, flushing hotly; she gave the owner of the foot, which was in a neat brown shoe, a swift upward glance that stopped at rather bright, downcast brown eyes. The next minute she was waving to the doctor, for the tender had already started and the gap of dirty water was widening.

"You'll take care, Marcella," he called. "And, Marcella, if you're getting unhappy, you'll be coming back home?"

"Of course I'll come back. This is only a crusade," she said, waving her hand to him, feeling that she would begin to dance with excitement in another moment, and at the same time wishing that he could come with her, for, as she saw him through mists slowly getting further and further away while the gap of water widened, she realized how absolutely alone she was.

Next moment she became aware of a tall, grey-haired lady in black clinging to the rail beside the doctor, and crying unrestrainedly as she seemed to be gazing directly at Marcella.

"Louis, you'll remember, won't you?" she cried in a faint, choked voice. "You'll try, won't you?" and Marcella, turning slightly, realized that it was the young man with brown eyes at whom she was looking.

"Yes, Mater, you know I will," said he hoarsely. A crowd of half a dozen men standing on the other side of Dr. Angus began to yell greetings and farewells to the man called Louis while the grey lady's eyes and his held each other for a moment in a passionate glance of appeal and ratification.

"Cheerio, Farne," called someone.

"Farne, don't get wet!" yelled someone else. There was a chorus of cheers and catcalls.

"Buck up, Mater," he called with another long glance. Then, waving his hat to the others he called cheerfully, "Give my respects to Leicester Square, you chaps."

A group of stewards in white jackets began to whistle the song and someone on the boat deck sang it in a high falsetto. Someone behind Marcella was holding a piece of white ribbon that went right across the water to the tender; as the boat's speed accelerated the frail thread snapped and the girl in whose hand it was clasped, a very thin, anaemic looking girl, gave a choking sob.

"My only sister," she said to no one in particular. "There she is, and here am I. They wouldn't pass her for Australia, because they say she's got consumption."

“What a shame!” murmured Marcella, waving frantically to the doctor while from the tender came the deep, gay voices of the students who had cheered Louis singing “We want more Beer” to the tune of “Lead Kindly Light.”

The wake of the tender widened out, lapped against the side of the *Oriana* and rippled away; it was no longer possible to distinguish anything but a blurred mass of pinkish faces and dark clothes, splashed by a crest of white handkerchiefs. Good-byes rang out to the undersong of “We want more Beer.” Marcella turned away and looked right into the face of Louis Farne. It was a very red face, unnaturally red and distorted; the brown eyes were bright with tears.

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She stared at him in amazement; he really was a phenomenon to her—the first young man she had ever seen, with the exception of the peasant lads. She blinked her own dry eyes and frowned at him reflectively.

“Did it hurt you as much as that? Anyway, I’m very sorry,” she said.

“D’you think I’m blubbing for that, idiot?” said the boy in a jerky voice, and, bending almost double, darted down the companion-way.

She stared at him, and turned to the ship’s rail again, drowning in surprise. She was surprised at Tilbury now that she had time to look about her. It was so utterly unromantic ashore—docks, wharves, miserable buildings and brown fields, very distant. She remembered that Queen Elizabeth had reviewed her troops at Tilbury when she was getting ready for the Armada to land; she had expected that the glamour of that ancient pageant would hang about Tilbury. And there was no glamour at all—except, perhaps, in the ships that lay at anchor and the barges that glided by; they were glamorous enough with their aura of far lands and strange merchandise.

She became aware that the girl with the consumptive sister was looking at her, and must have heard the boy’s remark.

“People here seem very rude,” she remarked.

“That they are! Saying she had consumption—I know it was consumption though they wrote it down in funny words. Other folks said she had consumption too—sauce! And now she’s all alone there, and I’m here.”

“What made you come,” asked Marcella, “if you didn’t want to leave her?”

“I do’ know. Fed up, that’s about it,” said the girl resignedly. “I wisht I hadn’t come an’ left her now, though. Her not being strong—mind you, it’s all my eye to talk about consumption, but her best friend couldn’t say as she was strong. Oh, dear, I do wisht I hadn’t left her.”

For half an hour the thin girl argued with Marcella—a very one-sided argument—explaining in detail that her sister could not possibly have consumption, but that the doctor who had refused to pass her as an emigrant must have had a spite against her—simply must have had. Otherwise why didn’t he pass her? What was it to him? Marcella was very sympathetic but quite unhelpful, and after a while got away and went below to arrange her things in her cabin.

It fascinated her; it was quite the smallest thing she had ever seen, much smaller than Wullie’s hut, and the shining whiteness of the new enamel particularly appealed to her, though the smell of it was not very pleasing. The clamps that held the water-bottle and glass gave an exhilarating hint of rough weather; the top bunk, about on the level of her

eyes, promised thrilling acrobatic feats at bedtime, and she decided to sleep in that one, leaving the other as a receptacle for her baggage.

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In her preparations she lost sight of the lunch hour, and the bell and the sound of feet scurrying down the companion way meant nothing to her. But at three o'clock something extraordinarily exciting happened; she heard the sharp "ting-ting" of a bell, and the ship began to palpitate as if a great heart were beating within it. She hurried on deck as the siren began to cry. As soon as her head appeared above the top of the companion-way she saw the wharves and houses on shore running away in a peculiarly stealthy fashion; a ship much bigger than the *Oriana*, whose decks were thronged with stewards and deck-hands cheering and calling out greetings, went by; she dipped her flag to the outgoing *Oriana*, and Marcella thought how nice and chivalrous ships were to each other. Then it dawned on her that they were under weigh—that the heart she felt beating was the ship's engines, and that the extraordinary behaviour of the shore was because the *Oriana* was going out with the tide.

She wondered then why she had come, and felt very frightened and lonely. In all this big ship was no one who would care if she fell overboard into the muddy water; in all the world except at Lashnagar, which was sliding away from her with every beat of the ship's heart, there was no one who knew her except an unknown, almost legendary, uncle. She sat down on a covered hatchway, suddenly a little weak at the knees.

People passed and repassed, worrying the stewards with foolish and unnecessary questions, which they answered vaguely as they hurried by. The thin girl stood leaning over the rail watching the brown shores that imprisoned her sister: four men who had apparently already made friends came along and sat down by Marcella, exchanging plans. One of them was horribly pock-marked; a younger man with red hair, queer shifty eyes and a habit of gesticulating a great deal when he talked was apparently going out with him. As the mudflats of the Thames glided by dreamily Marcella found their conversation slipping into her consciousness. The man with the red hair was talking: as he waved his right hand she saw that it had the three middle fingers missing. Her eyes followed it as if it hypnotized her.

"Going out to Sydney?" asked the pock-marked man of the two young farm hands who were staring about them open-mouthed. They nodded stupidly.

"Got 'ny tin?" asked the red-haired man. The younger farm hand, a ruddy, clean, foolish boy of twenty, jerked his thumb towards his friend.

"Dick's got it."

"Going to a job?"

"Maybe," said the elder of the two, a little on his guard.

“Well, what I was finkin’ was vat vis is a six-weeks’ trip, an’ if we was to pal in we could have a good time. I’ve done vis jaunt before, and know ve ropes. I know how to square ve stewards to get drinks out of hours, and little extrys.”

The farm lads nodded comprehension, and the younger one began to talk rather loudly of his prospects. The pock-marked man drew a little closer.



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"We're going out to start a little business," he began.

"Ole Fred," the red-haired man took up the tale, jerking his head towards his friend, "he's bin runnin' a business down Poplar way—not a business, in a manner o' speaking. It was a kip for sailors. On'y he got acrorst the cops abaht a sailor as disappeared. So him an' me—we've alwiz palled in wiv each ovver—fought we'd make a move over ve water. If we was to pall in togevver vis trip maybe we might do somefing togevver when we hit up in Sydney."

"Put it there, mate," said the pock-marked man, holding out his hand to the farm lads, "and we'll wet it."

They all got up. Ole Fred, noticing Marcella looking at him with frank curiosity as she tried to translate his queer, clipped English, gave her what he imagined to be a friendly smile.

"Coming?" he asked, holding back, while the red-haired man gave a loud guffaw and dug him in the ribs.

"Now, now, Freddy—vat's his great weakness—a little bit o' skirt," he explained to the others, who laughed loudly.

"Coming where?" asked Marcella with pleased interest, though she wished his face was not so appalling. "Is it tea-time?"

"No. Come an' 'ave a drink," he said.

"Oh, can we get one? I am glad. I missed lunch. You were luckier, I suppose, as you have been here before and understand the rules. It's very kind of you."

"I never mind being kind to young ladies," he said, leering at her. "Look here, you sit down here an' I'll bring you a drink. Then we c'n have a little talk and get to know each other better."

She sat down, feeling horrible at hating his face when he was so kind. She heard laughter from the men who had gone a little way up the deck to a doorway, and then Ole Fred came back with a small tumbler in one hand and a large one in the other. The small one he put into Marcella's hand.

"Oh—" she began, looking at it doubtfully.

"What's up?" he asked, sitting down very close to her.

"I'm sorry. I wish I'd asked you to bring tea."

“Oh, you can’t get tea. Anyway, ship’s tea is rotten. Drink that up, dear. It’ll put a bit of go into you. I like young ladies with a bit of go.”

She frowned at him. Then the smell of the stuff in the tumbler was wafted to her. The green baize door came before her, almost tangible, and the book-room as it was the night her father died, when last she had smelt whisky as she and Wullie knelt on the floor beside him.

“Here, take it,” she cried, starting up wildly. “Take it away! I’d die if I drank it.”

“What in hell—” began the man, staring after her.

But she was already down the companion-way and rushing towards her cabin. All the misery of her father’s death and illness had swept back upon her. It was quite true, as Aunt Janet had said, that nothing would kill that pain until she had schooled herself not to feel. She felt the literal, physical weight of all that misery as she ran along the alley-way, her eyes swimming, her face flushed.

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Her cabin—Number 9—being the one with the porthole, was at the end of the alleyway. The door of Number 8 was open into the passage, but she was too blinded by her emotion to notice it, and blundered into it. It was badly swung, and slammed inwards. She heard a smash inside the cabin, and someone said “Damn!” It was exactly the same “Damn” that had resulted from her headlong flight after Dr. Angus.

She was standing a little breathless by her own door when Number 8 opened and Louis Farne looked out. His hair was rumpled, his expression one of speechless annoyance.

“W—what the d—devil are you up to?” he said, stammering a little. “Th—that’s the s-second time.”

“Oh, it’s you!” she said, speaking breathlessly. “A horrible man gave me whisky, and I was frightened.”

“Good Lord!” He gazed at her, and she noticed that he gazed in a queer way, afraid to meet her eyes: it was her chin he saw when he looked at her; she rubbed it with her handkerchief, wondering if a smut had got on it. And he transferred his gaze to her ear.

“And I made you spill your tea! I am sorry! I seem made to do violent things to you. But can’t I get you some more?”

“I s-suppose I c-can make some,” he said, turning into the cabin.

“Don’t they give us tea? Do we have to make our own?”

“Oh no—but I’ve done this trip before, and know how one w-wants a d-drink in the tropics.”

He took the door in his hand and fumbled with the faulty catch as though he would shut it. Then he seemed to shake himself together inside his coat, which was very crumpled, as though he had been lying down inside it. “Look here,” he said breathlessly and with an effort, “w-would you like some tea? I can get another c-cup from the steward.”

“I would,” she said frankly. “Do make some more. I’ve a cake in my box that’s supposed to last me till I get to Australia. But I’ll find it, and we’ll have it now. I’m horribly hungry.”

She went inside her cabin and drew out her trunk, which she had not yet unlocked. She heard him clearing up the broken cup, and then he tapped on her door.

“I can’t open it—mine opens inwards, you see,” she called. “And my trunk’s in the way. What is it?”

“I—I—c-called you an idiot,” came his voice, rather low and hesitating.

“So I was,” she said bluntly, and heard him laugh.

“St-still—I needn’t have mentioned it.”

Then his steps grew faint along the alley-way. She sat back on her heels, frowning. She was wondering why he would not look at her, why he flushed and stammered when he spoke to her.

He was back in a few minutes, explaining that he had been to the cook’s galley for boiling water to make tea. She had dragged her cabin trunk into the doorway, and laid upon it the tin in which her cake was packed, the two cups he brought with him and the teapot.

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"A beneficent shipping company provides one camp stool to each cabin, you'll find—if you're lucky," he said; but there was not one in Marcella's cabin. He sat down on his own, and then, standing up awkwardly as she sat quite casually and comfortably on the floor, offered it to her.

"Oh no—keep it. I always sit on the floor," she explained, and this time he stared at the end of her nose.

He explained the mystery of powdered milk to her; reaching over for the tin to examine it more closely, she tipped it over.

"I keep doing this sort of thing," she explained, "ever since I left Lashnagar. Most things I touch I knock over."

"Weak co-ordination," he said.

"Whatever's that?" She paused in cutting a slice of cake with an enormous clasp-knife Wullie had given her years ago.

He immediately looked consciously learned.

"Like a baby, you know—it grabs for a thing and can't aim at it. It reaches a few inches the other side of it. It means your brain and body are not on speaking terms."

"Oh, my goodness! Am I like that? Does it matter? How do you know all about it?"

"I learnt it at the hospital."

"Oh, are you a doctor then?"

"No. N-not n-now," he stammered, and began to untie and retie his shoe lace very carefully. "I—I was going to be."

"You must be clever," she said admiringly. "What a lot of things we can talk about!"

"Rather! I'm w-wondering what m-makes you like that!—you know what I mean, without co-ordination. Babies and drunkards and that sort of thing usually are."

"Well, I'm neither of those. But I'll tell you why I think it is. It's because I've lived in the open air, where there was nothing to knock over except trees and stones; or else I've lived in an enormous house where everything was so big you couldn't knock it over if you tried. I'm not used to being among things and people."

"Been in prison?" he said, smiling for the first time.

She entered on a vivid description of Lashnagar. He seemed to think it was a fairy tale, though he listened eagerly enough, and once she saw him actually look directly at her face for an instant.

“Are you going to Sydney?” he asked at length.

“I’m booked through to Sydney, but I’m going to live with an uncle right in the backblocks somewhere, and he may meet me at Melbourne. I’ve never seen him yet. Where are you going?”

“Sydney.”

“To live there?”

“No, die probably,” he said, and his face that had been animated suddenly became morose and gloomy, and his hand shook as he lighted a cigarette. Her eyes opened wider.

“Are you ill, then?” she asked gently. “You don’t look ill.”

“No, I’m not ill. By the way, do you smoke? It didn’t occur to me to offer you a cigarette.”

She shook her head, watching him with a puzzled frown. She wondered why his hands gave her such a vague sense of discomfort as she watched him light another cigarette. It was not until she was in her bunk that night that she remembered that his nails were bitten and ragged—one finger was bleeding and inflamed.

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"No, I'm not ill. I'm sick, though. The Pater says I want stiffening. This is my third trip in the stiffening process. Like a bally collar in a laundry! Oh, damn life! What's he know about it, anyway? Have you got a deck-chair?"

"Yes, but—"

"I'm going to put mine on the fo'c'sle presently. If we don't peg out claims they'll all go, and the fo'c'sle is the best place in the steerage. Where's yours? I'll t-take it there, if you like."

He had begun to stammer in the last sentence, suddenly self-conscious again. She told him where her chair was on deck, and next minute, without another word, he was half-way along the alley-way, leaving the tea-things where they were. Then he turned back and spoke from several yards away.

"I suppose you're wondering what the devil I'm doing in the steerage, aren't you? A chap like me—a medical student! And I'll t-tell you w-why it is! The p-pater's too mean to pay for me to go decently."

He was looking down at his shoes as he spoke. She noticed that the nice brown eyes were quite far apart; the forces that set them so had not meant them to be shifty. His chin was strong, too, but his mouth was loose and much too mobile. It quivered when he had finished speaking. She reflected that if she had seen him in a train reading, and not speaking to anyone, she would have thought him very nice to look at. Only his nervousness and his mannerisms made him unpleasant.

"He'd go first class himself if he was going to Hades! Steerage is good enough for Louis—as there's no way of letting him run behind like a little dog!" He began to bite his lower lip, and his fingers twisted aimlessly.

"I hadn't thought of the lack of dignity in it," said Marcella calmly. "I said I'd come steerage, and here I am. I'm sure it's going to be jolly."

"I don't suppose you'd notice, being a farmer's daughter," he said.

"I never notice anything, and I never worry about things. I knew perfectly well aunt couldn't afford to pay more for me, and I'm not such a fool as to pretend she could."

"And I'm to consider myself squashed—abso-bally-lutely pestle and mortared?" he said, turning away flushing and biting his lip.

"Quite. I hate pretenders," she said. The next moment he heard her cabin trunk being pushed noisily inside and the door was banged to.

At five o'clock a steward came along to explain that he had looked for her at lunch-time, but could not find her.

"I've reserved you a place at my table, miss," he said. "You'd better get in early and take it. These emigrants, they push and shove so—and expect the best of everything. And mind you, not a penny to be had out of them—not one penny! It's 'Knollys this' and 'Knollys that' all day—my name being Knollys, miss—you'd think I was a dog."

She went along the alley-way with him. He went on, aggrievedly:



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"Simply because they've never had anyone to order about before, and they aren't used to it. But anything you want, let me know, miss, and I'll see you all right."

When she got into the dining saloon she found small wars in progress. About a hundred and fifty people were trying to sit down in a hundred seats. The stewards looked harassed as they explained that there was another meal-time half an hour after the first. Knollys was trying, with impassive dignity, to prove mathematically to an old lady that by waiting until six o'clock for her tea to-day and automatically shifting all her meal-times on half an hour she was losing nothing; and, after all, it would all be the same whether she had her tea at five or six or seven a hundred years hence. But she thought there was some catch in it, for she expressed an intention of seeing the captain, and then, thinking better of it, stood behind an already occupied chair with the air of Horatius holding the bridge.

When at last order was restored and Marcella sat down, she found that she was at a long table, one of three that ran from end to end of the saloon. Ole Fred and his three friends were at the same table, a little higher up. He scowled at her, and the three others made some grinning remarks to him which he seemed to resent. Next to her was a little boy of six or seven, who looked at her gravely. Beside him was a man with greying hair and a very red face, who was talking to a small lady of deceptive age—a very pretty, dark, bright-eyed little lady, charmingly dressed, with hair of shining blackness arranged about her head in dozens of little tight curls. She and the elderly man were talking animatedly. The little boy pulled the man's arm several times gently, and said "Father," but he did not notice.

There were piles of sliced bread at intervals up the table, and saucers containing butter and jam. The stewards came to each person with an enormous pair of pots and, murmuring "tea or coffee?" poured something by sleight-of-hand into the thick, unbreakable cups.

"Father!" murmured the little boy again, pulling his father's sleeve. The father shook his arm impatiently, as one jerks away an annoying fly. He went on talking absorbedly. A steward asked if Marcella would have ham or fish.

"Father," said the little boy, with quivering lips.

"What's to do, laddie?" said Marcella.

He stared at her, summed her up and decided.

"I'm thinking, shall I have ham or fish?" he said seriously.

"Which do you like?"

"Fish—only the bones are so worrying."

"I'll see to the bones for you. Have fish because I'm having it, and we can keep each other company," she said. Knollys darted away.

"I'd advise you to make a good tea, miss," said Knollys with a firmly respectful air. "There's nothing until breakfast at eight to-morrow."

Marcella nodded at him. Next minute she heard Ole Fred swearing at him for not being quicker, but Knollys took it all with an impersonally sarcastic air. She cut up the little boy's bread and butter into strips, arranged his fish, and watched, with amusement, his father turn to him with a jerk of remembrance.

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"It's good of you to look after young Jimmy," he said, smiling at Marcella. "He misses his mother."

"Is she dead?"

"Yes. He's only me. There are a surprising lot of lonely people in the world, aren't there? The little lady next to me—she's a widow, I find. It's hard when a woman has had a man to depend on and suddenly finds herself left to battle with the world, isn't it? Women are such fragile little flowers to me—they want protecting from the winds."

Marcella looked at him; he was rather fat: the excitement of his talk with the little lady had made his forehead shine; when he smiled his drooping moustache could not hide a row of blackened, broken teeth. He smelt of stale tobacco, as though he carried old pipes in every pocket. He ate quickly and noisily, his eyes on his plate, his shoulders moving.

Jimmy asked timidly if he might have a piece of bread and jam. His father said "Yes, of course," and went on eating. Marcella spread the jam for him, and then turned to his father.

"I don't know many women," she said. "But I'd just like to see a man treat me as a fragile flower."

"Ah, wasteful woman!" said Mr. Peters, smiling fatuously as he wrestled with a hard piece of ham rather too big for his mouth. As soon as he had swallowed it, he went on, "That's the thing a man loves in a woman—a *real* man, that is! 'Just like the ivy, I cling to thee' should be a woman's motto, a true woman's motto. A woman's weakness, her trust in man is her most womanly characteristic. It appeals to all that is best and chivalrous in a man."

A fragile voice at his elbow said, "Mistah Petahs," and he turned hurriedly towards it. Marcella said, "Pooh!" loudly and very rudely and turned to Jimmy.

"Do you like cake?" she asked.

"Rather! Gran gives me cake."

"Well, you come with me into my little house after tea and we'll have some. What number is your little house?"

"Fifteen."

"Mine is Number 9 so we are not very far away."

She looked round several times for Louis Farne, wondering if he would consider it beneath his dignity to have his meals with the steerage people, but could not see him. Even after she and Jimmy had explored her cabin, eaten some cake and walked several times up and down the deck talking, while the wind blew keenly in their faces, she saw nothing of him and there was dead silence in his cabin. Her deck-chair, she noticed, was where she had seen it put among a pile of others; later in the day Knollys came along and stencilled her initials.

“If you don’t have your name on, some of these blooming emigrants will pinch it, or the deck-hands will hide it till we’re a few days out and sell it to someone else.”

She began to think Knollys was a very useful person to know, for all his superiority and pessimism.

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As it grew dark, lights twinkled out ashore—lights rocked here and there on passing ships and barges: tubes of light projected themselves out from the portholes on to the blackening water, that swished and washed past the sides with a sound of desolation; to the landward an uncoiled serpent glittered out into the water and then seemed to cover itself in a grey veil of darkness as the *Oriana* passed the pier of some little watering-place. Marcella went slowly along the deck, climbed the fo’c’sle steps and sat down on the anchor. At Lashnagar she had always seen ghosts walking on the sea at nightfall. Now they rose out of the swirling water, passed in and out swaying among the lights of the ship. From under her feet in the crew’s quarters came the tinkle of a mandoline playing “La Donna e Mobile.”

She had seen ships pass in the darkness at home, out on the horizon, a glimmering blur of light. She had pictured them by daylight, shining in the sunlight with snowy decks and glittering engines; she had no idea that this spirit of desolation would rise out of the waves and possess her. For an hour she sat, dreaming of grey things, for her dreams could admit of no colour. After a while, cold and cramped, she went to her cabin for her coat. She noticed Mr. Peters and the little widow sitting on two deck-chairs in a corner, their faces two blurs in the darkness, the widow’s tinkling laugh an oversong to his deep voice. Around the bar some dozen men were laughing and talking loudly; in the dining saloon a few people were playing cards, a few more writing letters, to post in Plymouth next day. The thin girl sat with her elbows on the table, her chin on her hands, crying. The tears were running down her cheeks, over her fingers and dropping on to the table. It seemed less lonely on the dark fo’c’sle, so Marcella went back.

It was quite dark now; the mandoline had stopped. From a ventilator shaft close by came a deep murmur of conversation from the crew’s quarters that mingled with her dreams. Aunt Janet, her father, Wullie, Dr. Angus, the restless London crowds came and went like pictures crossing a screen. Jimmy, the thin girl, Ole Fred and Louis Farne followed them, passing on. Suddenly out of the darkness at the other end of the great anchor came a sound that was entangled with the wash of the waves against the bows of the ship. It was a sob, choked back quickly and bursting out again. She crept along the anchor softly. A huddled figure was there, looking out to the black sea.

“What’s the matter now? It’s you, isn’t it, Louis?” she said, for she was quite sure it was he, even in the darkness. “I could sit and cry too, it’s so lonely, isn’t it?”

“Oh, you’re everywhere! And you only poke fun at me,” he said in a strangled voice.

“I didn’t poke fun at you. I only laughed at your trying to pretend you were such an exalted person you couldn’t travel steerage.”

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"I d-didn't want y-y-you to think my p-people couldn't afford to—to—" he stammered in a low voice.

"Oh, what an idiot you are! My father was always calling me an idiot, but if he'd known you! My goodness—he said I was a double-distilled one! Whatever are you?"

"There you are, you see," he grumbled.

"But, Louis, whatever does it matter? My people couldn't afford to pay more for me, and I don't care who knows it. We'll get there as soon—"

"I—d-don't w-want to g-get there. What's at the end of it? I know very well—I'll throw my damned self overboard, and then they'll see what they've done."

"Who's they? And what is it they've done?" She had no idea that it was an extraordinary thing to take so much interest in a perfect stranger. All her world hitherto had had the claims of friendship upon her.

"They never understood me," he cried passionately. "They were always trying to tie me down—they were always looking for faults. That's enough to make a man go to the devil."

"Is it? Tell me all about it," she said, drawing a little closer.

"Do you know," he cried bitterly, so intent that he forgot his nervousness and did not stammer, "I was the best man in my year. They all told me so, the Dean and everyone—but I never had a chance. I never got a free hand. And now do you know what I am? All because they never understood me?"

She shook her head wonderingly.

"I'm a remittance man."

"What's that?"

"Don't you know? They're very picturesque in fiction! You'll find h-h-heaps of them in Australia, spewed out as far as possible from the Old Country! It's the dumping ground, Australia is!"

"I don't understand," she said.

"I went to church with the Mater last Sunday. I suppose she thought it would induce the right atmosphere—something sacrificial, you know. We yawped some psalms—the Mater and Pater are great at that. There was one bit I noticed particularly—'Moab is my

washpot, over Edom will I cast my shoe.’ That reminds me of Australia. They kick us out, pitch us out over there like old boots.”

“But don’t you *want* to go?” she protested, frowning. “I’m just dying to go. It’s such adventure.”

“Adventure! Perhaps it is, for you. It depends on how much money you’ve got.”

“Ten pounds,” she said guilelessly.

“Do you know what they’re allowing me? A miserable pound a week! Doled out once a week, mind you! Little Louis must toddle up to the General Post Office in Sydney every English mail day, and if he says ‘please’ very nicely they’ll give him a letter from his mother. It’s always from his mother. His father ‘cannot trust himself to write in a Christian spirit,’ he says. In the letter is a pound order. That’s to keep body and soul together.”

In his passion of self-pity he forgot to stammer; his words tumbled out wildly, between sobbing catches of his breath.

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"But who gives you the pound?"

"The Pater, I tell you—so long as I stop there I'm assured of a pound a week! If I come any nearer to England the money stops. They probably hope I'll commit suicide and save them the expense of the pound a week. It'll even save them the expense of a funeral and buying mourning, won't it? I'll do it in Sydney, you see."

"But I never heard of such a funny thing in my life! Paid to keep away from home! What's the matter with you? What have you done? It's like the lepers in the Bible."

"T-that's what they say I am!" he burst out. "They c-call me a disgrace, a drunkard! They sent me down from the hospital because they said I was a drunkard. The girl I was in love with threw me over because of that. She was married three months ago to someone else. That's why I'm here now. My third remittance trip—"

He stopped, and she was horrified to hear him sobbing—gasping, choking sobs that frightened her.

"I came home—tried my damndest to get a grip on things, but when she did that trick on me I saw red. They've kicked me out now."

"I am so sorry," she said in a low voice. "You must be so unhappy if you're a drunkard—whisky—"

She broke off. The old farm came gliding over the waves and settled round her with a sense of inevitability. She saw the green baize door; she heard the crying of the wind, the scuttering of the rats: she saw her father's blazing eyes, red-rimmed and mad. And then she heard him, pleading, talking to God. Louis's voice broke in on her dream.

"A drunkard—that's what I am now."

"I didn't think boys were drunkards," she said casually.

"I'm twenty-seven."

"Are you really? All the boys at Lashnagar are grown up when they're twenty-seven. You seem so young. You're so shy and queer. I'm nineteen," she added.

"And you know," he burst out in the midst of her words, "they can't blame me! It isn't my own fault—they know it's in the family, only they haven't the decency to admit it. But I know—different people in my family who are cut by the respectable ones—I've raked them out, and ever since I've felt hopeless."



“Oh no—no,” she cried, suddenly throwing out her hands as if to ward off something horrible. Leaning forwards she gripped his shoulder. “It’s so silly! Besides, think how cowardly it is to say you must do a thing because someone else has done it.”

“It’s killed lots of my people, or landed them in asylums—they’re not talked about in the family, but I know it,” he raved.

“Well, I think you’re a perfect idiot,” she cried impatiently. “Why, if you saw about twenty people on this ship walk overboard in a procession, that’s no reason why you should do it too, is it?”

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"That just shows you don't understand the power of suggestion," he said. "At the hospital—I'll never forget it. There was a girl brought in dying of burns. We got it from her that she was very unhappy and had set herself on fire because the woman next door had been burnt to death. Old Professor Hay, our lecturer in psychology, explained it to us. He said the girl was in a weak state of nerves and health generally, owing to family troubles she'd had to shoulder. She was receptive to suggestion, you see. And she was too tired to think logically. Seeing the burnt woman there very peaceful, and people sorry for her—don't you see?"

Marcella nodded.

"I'm pretty sure I'd never have got to this state of things if I'd never known it was in the family. It seems inevitable, as if I'm working out a laid-down law."

"Louis, I'm not very clever. As I told you, father used to call me a double-distilled idiot when he got in a temper. But I do think you're wrong. People are not a part of families nearly so much as they are themselves. Besides—imagine letting anything get you down, and put chains on you like that!" she added scornfully.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said bitterly. "It simply chews you up, gnaws holes in you."

She thought of what Dr. Angus had said.

"Well then, patch yourself up and go on again."

"But after all, why should you? There's nobody cares tuppence now what happens to me. I'm an outcast."

"Louis, what was that you promised your mother—I heard you on the ship just as the tender was going? Didn't you promise to make yourself better?"

"Yes, but I've been thinking about it. Why should I? What does it really matter to the Mater? She didn't care enough not to have me spewed out of home. She's at home now; they'll be sitting round the dinner-table after a tip-top meal. Presently they'll be playing whist and congratulating themselves that I'm safely out of England. They'll breathe freely now."

"I don't believe it," she said quickly. "Mothers and fathers are not like that."

"That's all you know. All day to-day, after she got back from Tilbury and had powdered the traces of tears from her face she'd be at Harrods or the Stores, buying things. And she'd take just as much interest in matching some silks for embroidery, and getting the exact flavour of cheese the Pater likes as she took in making me promise not to drink. And to-morrow her friends will come, with an air of a funeral about them, and be

discreetly sympathetic about the terrible trouble she has been having with Louis—such a pity—after he promised so well! Oh be damned to them all! I'm not going to care any more."

Marcella sat in miserable silence. She did not know enough to say anything helpful. She had no idea what had cured her father. She had seen him a drunkard; she had seen him ill, no longer a drunkard; she had seen him die and guessed dimly that the drinking had killed him. But she suddenly grasped the fact that she had seen effects—whole years of effects; of causes she knew nothing whatever.

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The mandoline began to play again “La Donna e Mobile.” Louis’s voice broke into the music and the lashing water.

“They’re cowards, my people, mean little cowards. That’s why I’m a coward! I’m a beastly, bally sort of half-breed, don’t you know! Do you know why they give me a pound a week? Partly, of course, it’s to bribe me to keep away. They’ve no other weapon but that. But mostly it’s because they’re so miserably sentimental they can’t bear to think of me starving or sleeping out all night! Ough! If they weren’t such miserable cowards they’d know I’d be better dead than chained to the end of a row of pound-notes. They’d have kicked me out, and let me either buck up or die.”

“But—oh, I do wish Dr. Angus or Wullie were here! I know there’s an answer to all that, but I’m such an idiot I can’t find it,” she cried despairingly.

“I’ll do them! I’ll get my own back on them! I’m damned if I’ll do as they expect me to. If they’d only seen me last time in Auckland,” and he gave an ugly laugh. “Do you think I lived on their bally pound a week? Why, I spent that in half a day! Sometimes I wouldn’t call for it for five weeks. I’d go past the Post Office every day, knowing it was there, and torturing myself with the thought of what I could buy with it, and leaving it there till I’d got five pounds and could drink myself to hell!”

She shivered. She could hear him grinding his teeth as he sat close to her. She felt the same inarticulate helplessness that she had felt about all the miseries of Lashnagar. She wanted, most passionately, to do something for him. His telling her about it was, in itself, a challenge.

“But how did you live all the time, wasting your money like that?”

He laughed harshly.

“It’s easy to live south the line—in Australasia, anyway, if you’re a drunkard. There’s a lot of money about, you know. Men come from up-country with a big cheque to knock out—shearers and men like that, who live in the backblocks for months, hundreds of miles from hotels. They come down from the backblocks with perhaps a hundred pounds to spend on a week of blissful unconsciousness. Sailors come in and get paid off too. There’s a lot of freehandedness. They treat the whole bar. If you won’t drink with them, they knock you out of time before you know where you are, sit on your chest and pour it down your neck. Once you’re in a pub in Australia you can stay in all day on nothing. And you can get in for threepence—the price of a pint of beer. And you don’t get out till you’re kicked out drunk.”

“Oh—” she gasped.

“The devil of it is getting hold of the threepence. Sometimes you meet a pal and borrow it. Sometimes you pawn something and get it. If the Home boat’s in, you go down to the quay, pick out a new chum—that’s anyone from the Old Country—offer to show him round a bit, and he naturally treats you. Then you’re in the haven.”

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He spoke cynically, bitterly. She grasped at his sleeve, as though she would pull him back.

“Oh—,” she gasped.

“D-don’t keep s-saying ‘Oh’ like that!” he cried impatiently. “S-say s-something s-sensible.”

“Does your mother know all about the way you live?” she asked desperately.

“I told her. I enjoyed letting her know what they drove me to. But she doesn’t understand. They don’t ever understand, these easy, half-alive, untempted folks! She’s never been away from a world of afternoon calls, broughams and shopping! I tell her I’m a beer-bum—yes, that’s the word for it in Australia! Not a pretty word—not a pretty thing either! I gave the Mater and Pater a picture of myself once—broken shoes tied on with string, trousers tied on with a bit of rope because I’d sold my braces for threepence—slinking along in the gutter outside the Theatre Royal picking up cigarette ends that had been thrown away! Counter lunches! D’you know what counter lunches are?”

She shook her head. It seemed as though he were trying to shock her, as he piled on his miseries to her.

“Three times a day the hotel keeper in Australia covers his counter in all sorts of food—cold meat, bread, cheese, pickles, cakes—oh, just everything there is going. He doesn’t want you to go out to get food, you see, and perhaps get caught by some other pub. You don’t have to pay. You just eat what you like, so long as you go on buying drinks or having them bought for you. There’s a lot more there to eat than you want. You don’t want much when you’re boozing. I lived on counter lunches once—crayfish and celery mostly, with vinegar and cayenne—for four months. I spent not a single penny on food the whole time. Then I nearly died in hospital. They had me in the padded cell for three days.”

“Were you mad?” she whispered, wishing he would tell her no more, but fascinated by the horror of it all, the pity of it. “I think you are mad, really, even now—talking like this, almost as if you’re proud of it.”

“No, I’m not mad—only the usual pink rat sort of madness. The thing’s obvious,” he said, shrugging his shoulders. It was not obvious to her; he had put her into a maelstrom of puzzles, but she did not tell him so. She preferred to think it out for herself. But suddenly she coupled her little broken arm and the barrel as effect and cause.

He went on muttering. She had great difficulty in hearing all he said.



“At night, at kicking out time, you can hang on, sometimes, to a man with some cash and get asked to kip with him for the night. You can get a bed for a shilling a night in many places. It isn’t a feather-bed. If there is no Good Samaritan about you go and lie down in the Domain—that’s the public park, you know—praying to whatever gods there be that it won’t rain. You never get a decent wash, and as soon as the hotels are open at six o’clock you start again—if you can get the entrance fee. If you haven’t, you cadge round till you have.”

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He broke off, staring bitterly away from her, his knees drawn up, his chin resting on them.

"And you told your mother about it—and your father?" she said.

"Yes, every word, and more. Things I wouldn't tell you, because you're a girl, and I've still some respect for girls. Things that happened in Rio and Rosario—some of the women there, the rich women—Lord, they're the devil's own!" He reflected grimly. "I told the Pater a few things—opened his eyes. He's a publisher—Sunday school prizes and that sort of thing. Stacks of money! No imagination. Most people have no imagination. They see things in a detached way. They see them, somehow, as if they're in print or going on on a stage. But not really happening. The Pater simply said I ought to be ashamed of myself—as if I'm not!"

He broke off and tried to light a cigarette with fingers that trembled. Three, four matches he struck before he got it lighted and puffing. She sat silent, listening to the murmur of voices and the swishing water.

"Why the devil I'm telling you this I can't imagine," he said at last. "Most girls would have yelled out for help before this."

"I think, you know," she said rather breathless, "I think you're a great idiot! You ask for things, don't you?"

"But what is there for a man to do out there? There's nothing I want to do except medicine, and that's past for ever now. There's nothing to do but get drunk. I've tried, often—got jobs, and all that. But there's no inducement—and I've told you how easy it is not to starve."

"But it's so—so beastly! You might as well be dead—you're not happy."

"That's exactly what I think. That's what I'm going to do. I got ten pounds out of the Mater. She's always ready to give me anything if it happens to be the beginning of the month and she's well off. The Pater solemnly presented me with three pounds—that's ten shillings a week for smokes for the six weeks of the trip. I'll buy bull's-eyes with it, I think. That'd please him. That makes thirteen pounds, and there's ten pounds waiting for me in Sydney. I'll have a damned good bust-up then, and then I'll finish the job for ever."

"Oh, I do think you're mad—raving mad!" she cried, and could say nothing else.

"Of course it's by no means certain I'll have enough courage to kill myself. I rather doubt it! You see, they didn't breed me with courage. They've given me porridge in my veins instead of blood! They press electric buttons for their emotions and keep them down as long as is respectable! They didn't give me grit at all—they gave me



convention and respectability. Everything I wanted to do they restrained because so many of the things I wanted to do seemed natural but were not respectable. And in the end they made a first-class liar of me.” There was a long, terrible silence.

“To-night, for a bit, I’m stripped bare here,” he said in a low voice, “letting you see me. To-morrow I’ll be a nervous, stammering fool, hiding all I feel, swanking like hell about my people, myself and everyone I’ve ever seen, like I was doing to-day when you told me off so beautifully. To-morrow I’ll be drunk, and I’ll lie to you till all’s blue. To-night I’m just honest.”

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"Why is it that you're honest with me?" she asked him.

"Lord knows! I suppose it's because I'll disintegrate and go over the side in shivers if I can't get something off my chest. You don't seem disgusted with me—Lord, everyone else is! And I'm the loneliest devil on earth."

"I'm glad you told me. Let's be friends, Louis—till we get to Sydney, anyway."

"I never have friends. I lie to them, and they find me out. I borrow money from them and don't pay it back, and then I'm afraid to face them. I make fools of them in public; I'm irritable with them."

"I'm warned," she said with a laugh. "I'm not afraid of you."

Suddenly he turned round. All the time he had been talking his back had been half turned to her. She saw the crimson end of the cigarette glowing. It was flung overboard. He groped for and found both her hands.

"Look here, this is the maddest thing I've ever done yet—but will you take it on, being friends with me?"

"I want to. I'm lonely, you know. I could have cried to-night, really."

"But—look here. I'm begging, yes begging, this of you. When I lie to you, insult me, will you? You'll know. You've seen me honest to-night, but sometimes a thing gets hold of me and I lie like hell! I'll tell you the most amazing, most circumstantial tales—just as you told me this afternoon—and you'll believe me. But I implore you, don't believe me! Heaps of people have lent me money because they've believed what I've told them about my wife or my mother or my child dying. Lord, I'm a waster! But if I can find someone who'll be hard with me, I think I might make a stand. Look here, I promised the Mater, as this was my last week at home, and I haven't had a drink since Monday. That's four days to the good. If I promise you there's a faint chance I won't do it. Do you mind?"

"I'll watch you," she said calmly. "And I'll tell you if you tell me lies. But I don't believe you'll do any such thing!"

"Don't you? Do you believe in me?" he cried.

"Why not? I think you're a fearful duffer, but naturally I believe in you," she said calmly.

"I know why I came by this ship! It's a miracle. I believe I'm going to make a stand now, I really do! It's fate, and nothing else. There's an Anchor boat I was to have gone by—via the Cape, you know. She sailed last week, and I couldn't get off in time. I wanted to

wait for the next as I've not been to the Cape. But the Pater couldn't put up with me for another week, so out I came! I know why I came! I came to meet you!"

"Do you think so?" she said wonderingly.

"I do! I've never in all my life told the truth about myself before! If you only knew what that means! I'm too nervous as a rule. But don't you notice the difference? Of course you're not trained, so you wouldn't notice as I should. But I'm not even stammering half so much. It's jolly good of you to listen to me—and it's jolly good for me, because I've no reason to try to get at you, or to get my own back on you, as I have with my people all the time."

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Marcella felt very small, very helpless. She had a sudden vision of a man dying in an agony of poisoning while she stood frantic in a doctor's laboratory, antidotes all round her, but no knowledge in her brain of which drug to use. And all the time his agony went on, and death drew nearer. She had not the least idea in the world what to do for Louis Fame. He frightened her, he disgusted her, he made her feel hungrily anxious to help, he made her feel responsible and yet helpless, but at the same time it mattered and challenged her that he had appealed to her at all. She thought of her father, and remembered with a pang that she knew nothing about him except superficially. She thought of his books, but nothing in them seemed helpful. She thought of the Bible, of her poetry, her legends. They were a blur, a mist. Nothing in them held out a hand to hail her. There seemed nothing that she could do.

"Oh," she cried passionately, "I'm such a fool. If only I was clever! If only I knew what to do."

Before she had finished speaking came a flash of insight, and she went on, in the same breath, "But there's one thing that occurs to me. You think about yourself far too much. Old Wullie—I'll tell you about him some day—used to say that if we were quiet and didn't fuss about ourselves too much God would walk along our lives and help us to kill beasts—like whisky—"

"God? Oh, I'm fed up with God! I've had too much of that all my life at home," he said dully.

She had no answer for that, but as she bade him good night at the top of the companion-way she saw herself in armour. Her vague dreams of John the Baptist, of Siegfried and of Britomart suddenly crystallized, and she saw herself, very self-consciously, the Deliverer who would save Louis Fame. It did not occur to her to wonder if he were worth saving. He was imprisoned in the first windmill she had encountered on her Don Quixote quest—and so he was to be rescued.

## CHAPTER VII

She wakened to a world of blue and silver next morning; the sunlight seemed to come from the sea with a cold, hard glitter; there was a keenness in the air, a sharp tang of sea-salt with an underlying suggestion of something that was pleasantly reminiscent of Dr. Angus's surgery. The sailors were sluicing the deck with great hoses, and sprinkling it with little watering-cans of disinfectant. Up on the fo'c'sle her deck-chair was side by side with another on which "L. F." was stencilled; after breakfast she went there with a book, expecting Louis to follow her. Presently Jimmy discovered her, bringing three other children with him, and they sat with shining eyes while she told them fairy-tales.

When they drew into Plymouth Harbour the fo'c'sle was cleared, and Marcella watched a few people going ashore. Not very many went: they had not been at sea long enough to welcome a change on land, and the *Oriana* only stayed two hours to take on mails and passengers.

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All that day she did not see Louis. Once or twice she heard him in his cabin, speaking to the man who shared it with him; not once did he put in an appearance at meals, and even at the melancholy hour of twilight he hid himself somewhere. She began to feel a little neglected.

It was easy to make friends: there were so many children to act as introducers. It was interesting to watch people forming little cliques; the pock-marked man had now a collection of eight; they went ashore at Plymouth and came back again talking excitedly, with little snatches of song. Mr. Peters and Mrs. Hetherington, the bright-haired little widow, were inseparable; one of the farm lads had forsaken Ole Fred already for a shy, red-cheeked emigrant girl, who giggled a good deal in corners with him; they sat for long hours, as the trip went on, saying nothing, staring out vacantly to sea, and occasionally holding each other's hands. At tea-time Marcella saw Louis come to the door of the saloon, look round with a frown, become very red in the face as he saw several people look at him casually, and beat a hasty retreat. She had a long talk with the thin girl during the evening, learning that she had been under-housemaid in a girls' school; she asked Marcella her name, volunteering the information that she was Phyllis Mayes, only her friends called her Diddy; she seemed to have got over much of her grief at parting with her sister. After a while she explained, blushing and giggling, that one of the cook's assistants had made friends with her the previous night and given her two meringues.

"A friend of mine who came out as a stewardess told me the best thing you could do was to make friends with the cooks or the butchers—because there's all sorts of little tit-bits they can get for you. Young Bill—him that gave me the meringues—has got a mate called Winkle. I'll give you an intro., if you like. He's quite a toff. He's been a waiter."

Marcella made some excuse, but when Phyllis—or Diddy—went away to her appointment with Bill she sat for a long time thinking. She was already feeling disillusioned.

At nine o'clock she decided to go below. In the shadow of the steps leading to the upper deck Mr. Peters and Mrs. Hetherington were sitting very close together. A little bright tray was at their feet, and a big bottle with a cap and scarf of gold foil stood sentinel over two glasses of such an exquisite shape that Marcella stared hard at them as she passed, saying "Good night." Mr. Peters was smiling with filmy, vacuous eyes. The little lady was flushed and vivid-looking. They both nodded beamingly at her. At the other side of the steps, in the bright light of the electric lamp was a small bundle, between two scarlet fire buckets. It was Jimmy.

His hands were very dirty, his neck and back looked uncomfortably twisted. She touched him gently and he wakened with a start.

"Jimmy, what's to do? You ought to be in bed," she said.

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"I'm waiting for dad," he explained, blinking and stretching. "My, it does make your neck stiff."

"Come with me, and I'll put you in bed."

"Must wait for dad," he protested.

"You'll be too tired to play to-morrow. You'll be dropping asleep all day."

"Then he'll go to sleep on the floor, and have a bad back," he said.

"Whyever does he go to sleep on the floor?"

"Because he's too tired, like I was. Only if I take my boots off and kick him—very kindly, I have to kick—he wakes up and he's cross and then he gets into bed."

He stared at her, frowning, as though trying to understand or else to explain this queerness of his father's. Next minute he found himself clasped firmly in her arms. He was very thin and light—much thinner than the Mactavish babies and Jock's children.

She marched up to Mr. Peters.

"I'm putting Jimmy to bed, Mr. Peters. It's late and cold." Then she added, "May I?"

"Plezh—plezh—my dear," he said, smiling foolishly.

"Sweet of you—dear little chap," twittered the little lady.

They passed a group of some dozen men sitting round a brown blanket hedged with a fence of tumblers. They were watching a game of cards. The pock-marked man looked up from the pile of cards in front of him and grinned at Jimmy.

"You find it easier to get off than I do, son," he shouted. Jimmy kicked out at him as they passed, and there was a roar of laughter.

"I hate him—he's like the Beast," said the child as they went down the companion-way.

"Poor man—he can't help that. The Beast turned into a prince, didn't he?"

"He's a nasty man. He sleeps in with us. And the man with no fingers. Ugh, they're dreadful. They stayed awake all night and so did daddy. And they wouldn't let me put the bottles through the porthole this morning. They put them themselves, and I did so want to see them go smash."

Marcella stopped dead. Things were trickling into her mind. She saw her father and her little thin arm dangling sickeningly when he broke it years ago; all her childish terrors

of him came back, associated with the whisky, changed into a general terror of anything that was a father. She saw Jimmy's little arm broken—and there were three of them in that tiny cabin to break his little arm!

“Oh, poor wee mannie! Jimmy, ye're just going to sleep in my little house.”

He started to dance with joy, holding on to her hand and hopping on one foot in the alley-way. Then his face clouded over.

“There'll be nobody to make daddy get in bed, then,” he said.

“Well—”

“His back'll be bad to-morrow if he lies on the floor.”

“The ugly man will make him go to bed, because if he doesn't they won't have anywhere to walk,” she said, determined to save his arm at any cost.

“D'you think so?” he asked eagerly.



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"Yes, quite sure. He'll be quite safe. Where's your nighty?"

He darted into Number 15 and came back with a minute bundle.

"I don't have to have nighties now. Gran said I was grown up now I was coming to Australia. So I wear pyjamas, made out of the same stuff as Dad's," he explained, undressing hurriedly and putting them on with considerable pride. "Last night was the first time I wore them. Only Daddy never looked, with those other men there."

A lump came into Marcella's throat as he neatly folded his clothes and laid them in a heap on the floor.

"There's a pocket, look!" he said, afraid that she would miss any of the proud points of his pyjamas. "Gran put a silver sixpence in it, for luck, and a little letter. But I can't read yet."

He fumbled in the pocket which was just big enough for his hand. There was the sixpence and a little handkerchief with rabbits sitting perkily at each corner. The letter was a small text-card with a bright rosebud painted on it.

"Read it," he said, watching her anxiously. "Granny read it to me when she put it there."

"Call upon me in the time of trouble," she read. He nodded.

"That's right. Now put it back. Gran said I must never lose it, and some day if I remembered it, it might come in handy."

She tucked it safely away and he started to climb into bed.

"Jimmy, I always get washed before bed, don't you?" she suggested.

"Oh yes. I promised Gran. But it's hard to remember everything," he said resignedly. But his washing was not very comprehensive; Marcella promised herself a busy half-hour with him in the bathroom next morning.

He was asleep in two minutes, but Marcella did not attempt to undress for a long time. She dragged the cabin trunk out from under the bunk very quietly, and, sitting down on it, frowned. A queer thing had happened to her. Over all her early life her father had towered like a Colossus. The rest of the world had been filled with friends—friendly visions, friendly people, friendly ghosts. She had not met anyone unkind before. Conditions had never been anything but unkind; she expected cold and hunger, hardness and discomfort. But that people could be unkind to each other she had never realized. Then had come Louis's tale, which had horrified her, Diddy's tale which had grieved her at first and then puzzled her as she saw how easily the image of the sick girl was replaced by that of a man who gave her meringues. Ole Fred had frightened her:

Mr. Peters had at first seemed ridiculous and then cruel. Most of the people on the ship seemed cruel, when she came to reflect about it. Something cruel had happened that very morning. She had noticed, when they came aboard at Tilbury, a very romantic figure standing on deck; he fitted in much better with her conceptions of travel in far lands than did the very respectable, commonplace fathers

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of families she saw scattered about the deck. He was a man in knee breeches, leather leggings, a bright blue shirt and a claret and buff blazer. He wore a wide-brimmed brown hat and a fierce expression. From his leather belt hung a huge clasp knife and two small pistols. She thought him very funny, but very much like herself when she had dressed up as King Arthur. She sympathized entirely with his dressing a part. Later she heard shouts of cruel laughter as he explained valiantly that he had never in his life been from his native village in the Welsh hills—that Australia was a new country that needed to be “opened up.” He quoted Manville Fenn and other writers of boys’ adventure stories thirty or forty years old to show the dangers of Australia and his own indomitable courage in tackling them: he told of Captain Cook’s heart and many other blood-curdling tales, and was greeted with ironical cheers and laughter. They explained to him at great length all about the civilization of Australia, and when, an hour after the Devon coast had dropped below the horizon he became miserably sea-sick, they formed a procession before him, carrying fire buckets, brandy and beer to his assistance.

Marcella was muddled. She frowned and got no nearer a solution to her puzzles, until she remembered that, right at the top of her trunk, put in at the last moment, was a Golden Treasury her mother gave her years ago.

She turned the pages to the end, looking for something she remembered that seemed to fit in with her mood. In the Ode on the Intimations of Immortality she read it—

“Blank misgivings of a creature  
Moving about in worlds not realized,”

she murmured. “Well, that means that I’m not the only one. Wordsworth evidently got worried about things like I do. But it’s the cruelty—that’s what I can’t understand.”

There was a little comfort in that thought as she fell asleep: it gave her a sense of comradeship that anyone so eminently sane as Wordsworth should have had “blank misgivings.”

## CHAPTER VIII

Blue and silver had turned to blue and gold next morning; the light no longer seemed to come from the sea in bright glitters; it was transfused through the air as liquid gold, very mellow and soothing and softened. It was five o’clock when she awakened. Through the open port she could see the sea swelling gently, breaking into a little hesitating ripple of foam here and there. She climbed very carefully down from her bunk; Jimmy was still sleeping soundly. There was no one about save a few deck hands scrubbing up above;

they were out of sight of land now, and she gave a deep sigh of exhilaration as she turned on the sea-water spigot of the bath and, opening the port wide, felt the keen morning breezes blowing in upon her. Coming out ten minutes later, pink-cheeked and damp-haired, she met Louis in pyjamas, hurrying along with a towel over his arm.

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"Were you ill yesterday?" she said, standing in front of him. "I could hear your bunk creaking lots of times in the night, and once or twice you gave the partition an almighty crack."

"Oh, I'm all right," he said, dashing past without looking at her.

"I suppose," she called softly, with mischief in her eyes, "that you are intentionally making for the women's bathroom? Someone might want to use it and be horrified to see you emerging—"

"Laughing at me again, aren't you?" he cried savagely, turning with a scowl and standing undecided.

She hurried below to give him a chance to retire gracefully.

When she was in a white frock and Jimmy shining with soap and water, they took their places at the breakfast-table. Mr. Peters looked at Jimmy in surprise.

"Hello! I never noticed you get up," he said.

"He slept in my cabin," she explained. "He was frightened."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure, young lady," he said and turned to Mrs. Hetherington, who looked at Marcella calculatingly between narrow lids. As soon as breakfast was over she put her arm confidently through Marcella's and drew her aside.

"Come for a little stroll, dear, won't you? I can see that you're different from most of the passengers—they're so common so terribly common. I've regretted very much that I came third class. It wasn't that I wanted to save money, you know," her voice twittered to little inarticulacies.

"Most of the people are very interesting," said Marcella.

"I find poor Mistah Petahs interesting, very," said Mrs. Hetherington, pressing Marcella's arm. "Losing my dear husband, and he losing his wife—it's a bond, isn't it? And I feel so sorry for a poor man with a child to bring up."

"Um—" said Marcella doubtfully.

"It's sweet of you to mother the little fellow, dear. He must be a great trouble to poor Mistah Petahs! I have two little darlings, but I find that boarding school suits them much better than being with me. I think that children need both father and mother, don't you?"

"Yes," said Marcella dazedly, unable to follow Mrs. Hetherington's reasoning.

“And you know,” she went on, “I’ve a terrible feeling that poor Mistah Petah’s loneliness might lead him to—er—Oh dreadful things.” She dropped her voice to a whisper. “My dear—I believe he drinks,” she said, underlining the words. “I tried my best to look after him last night,” she added plaintively.

“Oh, did you?” said Marcella and suddenly stopped dead. “All this looking after! What are we all up to? Is it impudence or vanity, or what is it? I don’t know! Anyway, I’m going below,” and she turned abruptly away.

As it was Sunday Marcella lost her crowd of children, who were claimed for a church service by an enthusiastic missionary in the first class. She spent the morning writing letters and reading. When she went to her cabin to get ready for lunch there was a note pinned on to the mirror. She took it down in surprise.

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"I don't know your name," she read; "but I must see you. I've been going through hell and I can't hold out. I understand myself very well; I know what I need, but I can't do it. I've got to have someone to make me do things. And if you make me do things I'll get huffy with you and try to deceive you. It's pretty hopeless, isn't it? That pock-marked devil has been trying to get me. That's why I've been taking to cover all this time, partly. Come up on the fo'c'sle to-night at seven. I'll be sitting on the anchor. For God's sake come. And don't laugh at me, will you? I can't stand it. L. F."

Without pausing she took paper and pencil and wrote.

"I shall be there. Of course I shall not laugh at you. I cannot understand anything. I am sorry to admit this, because you will say I am like your parents. I am in muddles myself, but I am most sorry for you. And my name is Marcella Lashcairn of Lashnagar."

She put it in an envelope, addressed it to him, tapped on his door and pushed it under.

She went on deck that afternoon in a state of bubbling excitement. There were not many people about. They were just getting into the Bay of Biscay and the *Oriana* was rolling a little; many had succumbed to sea-sickness; many more were afraid of it and had gone to lie down in their bunks. She took some books to read but did not open them for a long time until the sea-glare had made her eyes ache.

Then she opened "Questing Cells," which she had decided to try to master during the voyage. She read a page, understanding much better than when she had read it to her father. But she was pulled up over the word "inhibition."

It was a chapter of generalization at the end of the book that she was trying to fathom.

*"Women have no inhibitions: their pretended inhibitions serve exactly the same purpose as the civet-cat's scent of musk, the peacock's gorgeous tail, the glow-worm's lamp. A woman's inhibitions are invitations. Women do not exist—per se. They are merely the vehicles of existence. If they fail to reproduce their kind, they have failed in their purpose; they are unconsciously ruled by the philoprogenitive passion; it is their raison d'être, for it they are fed, clothed, trained, bred. Existing for the race, they enjoy existence merely in the preliminary canter. Small brained, short-visioned, they lose sight of the race and desire the preliminary canter, with its excitements and promises, to continue indefinitely."*

The word "philoprogenitive" and the French phrase stopped her.

"Why on earth I didn't bring a dictionary," she said, "passes my comprehension! I'll write the words down and ask someone."

A young man was sitting on the deck a few yards away, his back against a capstan. He looked supremely uncomfortable trying to read a little blue-backed book.

Marcella looked at Louis's chair empty beside her.



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"Wouldn't you like to sit on this chair?" she said, and the young man looked up startled.

"You look so uncomfortable there. This chair isn't being used. Won't you sit down?"

"That's very good of you. I was getting a decided crick in my back," he said, sitting down and wondering whether to go on reading or to entertain her. Marcella looked at him; he was the epitome of propriety, the spirit of the Sabbath incarnate in his neat black suit, gold watch-chain and very high collar.

"I really asked you to sit here for quite a selfish reason," she said. "I want to know the meanings of some words that have just cropped up. You look as if you know."

The young man coughed and looked pleased.

"I am a schoolmaster," he remarked. "Probably I can—"

"Inhibition?" she interrupted.

"Inhibition?" he said. "That means 'holding back.' Latin '*habeo*, I have' or 'I hold' and 'in \_\_\_"

"Women have no inhibitions," she repeated; "no power of holding back."

She frowned, and decided to return to that later. "Now philoprogenitive," she said turning to him. He stared at her, coughed again and held out his hand for the book.

"That's rather a difficult book for a girl to be reading, isn't it?" he said, glancing at the title page. "Oh, Kraill the biologist? Whatever makes you read that? I thought girls read Mrs. Barclay and Charles Garvice."

"I have not read any of their books yet," she said. "I read this book some time ago, and it seemed to me to hold the whole illumination of life. But since I've been on this ship I've been in a muddle about things. People are not a bit like I thought they would be. I was awake hours last night trying to get right about it."

"They're not a very nice collection here—in the steerage. But the difference in fare between steerage and second is very considerable—very considerable," he sighed. "My profession must take care of the financial aspect of life."

Marcella felt that he was honest. He was the first passenger who had admitted that he had not unlimited wealth.

"That's refreshing. Most of the people here want one to think they are disguised millionaires only travelling steerage to enquire into the ways of poorer folks. And that's part of my puzzle. I want to know *why* these people are not a very nice collection. Is

my taste at fault? Last night I raked out my 'Golden Treasury' and read about 'Blind misgivings of a creature roaming about in worlds not realized.'"

"You misquote," he murmured. "'Blank' not 'blind' and 'moving' not 'roaming.'"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course," he said with an air of depth and of conscious helpfulness, "the most difficult thing on earth—and, I may remark, the most important—is realization of one's sphere, and one's place in that sphere. And our way of instructing the young in such realization is defective, defective to a degree at present. Queerly enough I am just reading Tagore on 'Realization.' You know Tagore, of course?"

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She shook her head.

"He is the Bengali poet who was recently honoured by His Majesty with a knighthood. Perhaps you would like to change books and see what he says? I have marked something on page sixteen that is helpful, particularly helpful."

"Thank you. But take care of my book, won't you? It is very precious, because it belonged to my father."

She looked into "Realization," but its cool calmness failed to grip her at first, and she lay back in her chair, the breeze fanning her hair, the deep blue of the sky flecked with little cirrus clouds above her as she dreamed. Presently the schoolmaster went below for tea, and she was left alone. She had decided that she did not want tea; after this quiet place the saloon seemed too noisy, and now that seven o'clock was drawing nearer she was feeling rather frightened.

The gold in the air was collected into a great ball that turned crimson in the west, touching the crests of the waves with red as though blood had been splashed upon them, setting Marcella's hair afire, turning her white frock rosy-pink. Two bells sounded, and the sea and the sky grew deep blue, while shadows began to slink about the decks and stalk over the water; grey veils fell over the western sky, and she sat up straight, wondering where Louis was.

Quarter-past seven—twenty-past—and the quick twilight with its message of melancholy was almost past. Three bells sounded, and on the upper deck she saw the saloon passengers going in to dinner. Then she started up.

"He said he was horribly shy and nervous—anyone can see he is, too. I suppose he's frightened, now."

For a moment she stood leaning over the rail, her face turned towards the stairway, waiting. Then her feet took her down the steps, along the deck, past the engine-room towards the companion-way. Diddy and a young man in white sat on the step of the cook's galley in a hot atmosphere redolent of food; she was eating an orange. Under the steps Mr. Peters and Mrs. Hetherington sat in shadow; further away, up the deck, the young missionary had collected a group of children and women who were singing "There's a Friend for Little Children" all out of tune. She looked round almost motivelessly before she went below. A splash of light and a volley of laughter from the bar broke through the hymn singing. She turned quickly. Inside the bar, which was arranged like a great window with sliding panels, stood a little man with bright black eyes, wearing a white coat. Behind him were rows upon rows of bottles and bright shining glasses; a cash register was on the counter. Leaning against it, his face amazingly merry, his eyes shining, was Louis, talking volubly without the suspicion of a stammer. In his hand was a tumbler.

Marcella felt her knees getting weak, though she scarcely realized that she was frightened; she felt that there was going to be a fight of some sort, though she did not rightly realize her enemy. Then, justly or unjustly, her fears crystallized and she had something tangible to fight, for the pock-marked man was standing beside Louis, patting him on the back and smiling at him.

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The words of Louis' letter flashed into the depths of her mind: *"That pock-marked man's a devil—he's trying to get me."*

She made her frightened feet go nearer. Ole Fred saw her and grinned.

"Come for that drink, miss?" he asked. She scowled at him; if she had been nine instead of nineteen it would have been called deliberately "making a face." Then she looked past him to Louis.

"I've been waiting for you half an hour, Louis."

"I'm not coming," he said, looking away from her awkwardly. "Y-you've b-better c-company than m-mine."

She flushed and felt herself trembling with temper. A flash from her father's eyes lit up her face as she said quickly:

"No, I haven't. I want to talk to you."

"I c-can't l-leave these chaps now. I'll s-see you to-morrow," he said sullenly.

"Oh no, you'll not. What's to do, Louis? You said you wanted to see me, and there I was waiting for you, and feeling so lonely."

"Go on, ole man. Take her in a dark corner somewhere. Wants a spoon pretty bad," said the red-haired man. "The bar don't close till eleven, an' we'll have some in Number 15 if you're too late."

Marcella treated him to one of her scowls that astonished him, and suddenly, setting his teeth, Louis put down his glass, took her arm roughly and, striding along blindly, made forrard.

Until they got into the privacy of the fo'c'sle neither spoke. She was breathless, partly with indignation, partly with indefinable fear and partly with the breakneck speed at which he had rushed her along the deck. He sat down on the anchor; she stood before him, her back to the rail, which she gripped with her hands. Her first impulse was to shake him thoroughly. But she resisted it as she heard him groan.

"Never—never in all my life have I imagined there could be anyone so utterly rude as you, and so utterly mad. What on earth do you think you're doing?" she said breathlessly.

To her surprise he spoke quite quietly.

"I got mad with you. I can see now I was a fool."



"But why should you get mad with me? And even if you did, is that any reason why you should go and—and—what was that beastly word?—beer-bum with those awful men?"

"I—I—s-saw you—s-sitting here th-this afternoon—t-talking t-to a man," he stammered, covering his face with his hand.

"Yes, I was. Why not?"

"In—in m-my chair!"

"Oh, my goodness! You great baby!" she cried.

"I w-was c-coming up with s-some t-tea for you and—and th-there I s-saw another man," he jerked out, overcome by the pathos of it. "I th-threw it overboard."

"But supposing there had been sixteen men, why shouldn't I talk to them?"

"I d-don't w-want you to. I w-wanted to talk to you."

"Well!" She could find nothing else to say in her astonishment.

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"Don't you see that's enough to start me drinking?" he burst out passionately.

"Whenever I get hipped about anything—I—t-told you I know myself very well. I'd only h-had one drink when you came along. Did you notice me?"

"*Notice* you! Oh no!" she cried scornfully.

"Y-you know w-what a nervous f-fool I am; how I'm afraid of my own shadow. But when I've had only one whisky I'd tackle Satan himself! You must have noticed that I was jolly enough then! I used to be the ringleader in all the stunts at the hospital. But when I don't drink I'm afraid to face people. Do you know I haven't had a meal since I came aboard, except your piece of cake and the tea I've made? And now I've thrown my teapot overboard."

"But whyever haven't you had a meal?"

"All those damn fools in the saloon are looking at me!"

"Oh, you idiot!" she cried, and suddenly sat down on the anchor beside him, all her indignation at the personal slight and the personal annoyance gone.

"You see how it is, Marcella," he groaned. "I can call you Marcella, can't I? Just till we get to Sydney. It sounds a Roman, fighting sort of name. You see how wobbly I am! I've had the devil's own time since we left Tilbury, lying there in my bunk, thinking, thinking—and the more I think the more sorry I get for myself, and the more I hate other people, and the more nervous I get. I knew I was in for a bad attack. I always do when I get away from home. Reaction I suppose. I put up the devil of a fight, and then when I felt it was whacking me I wrote to you."

"Well, I said I'd come, didn't I? And I waited," she reminded him.

"Yes, and then I saw you talking to that idiotic fellow in a high collar, and I thought, 'Oh, everything be damned!' So I chummed up to the pock-marked chap. He was glad enough to have me! Wants me to play poker."

He buried his face, and she could scarcely hear his words.

"Oh, God," he muttered, "you can see how it is! All the time I'm not drunk I'm worrying and thinking what a hell of a mess I've made of things. Th-the minute I'm even sniffing whisky I see everything in a warm, rosy glow. When I'm not drunk everyone's an enemy; when I'm drunk they're all jolly good fellows. Marcella, I'm alone on earth, and I don't want to be."

She sat there, impatient with herself for her ignorance, her hands clasping and unclasping each other nervously.



“Louis—” she began. She could get no further. “Louis—what’s one to do? You say you’re a doctor and understand yourself. It seems to me you’ve really a disease, haven’t you? Just as much as—as measles?”

“Of course it’s a disease! But don’t you see how hopeless it is? It’s a disease in which the nurse and the doctor both get the huff with the patient because he’s such a damned nuisance to them! And he, poor devil, by the very nature of the disease, fights every step of the treatment.”



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There was a long silence. At last she put her hand on his arm.

"You know you want to be happy, don't you? You say you don't want to be lonely. That's why you drink the miserable stuff, to make you forget that you're unhappy and friendless."

"Yes—you do understand, you see," he cried eagerly.

"Well, this is where I'm so puzzled. I'm quite happy, and I always think people are my friends. What I want to know is what is there inside us two that's different?"

He shook his head impatiently.

"It's in my family," he began, and she felt it on the tip of her tongue to tell him it was in hers too, but something stopped her. "And it's a hunger—absolutely an unendurable hunger."

"Were you always frightened of things?" she said, a little wonderingly.

"No—I was always nervy and shy and repressed. But this is a vicious circle, don't you see? A thing is called a vicious circle in medicine when cause and effect are so closely linked that you can't tell which is which. At home I was repressed; that was the fashion in my young days. The motto was, 'Children are to be seen and not heard.' I dodged visitors always; when I met them by any chance I was always a fool with them, blinking and stammering like anything. When I was first at the hospital among men I was gawky until quite by chance I discovered that whisky made me graceful, stopped the stammering, gave me a surprising flow of eloquence and made me feel a damned fine chap. Naturally I went at it like anything, and of course after each burst was more nervous than ever. It plays havoc with your nerves, you know. And in addition I had a sense of guilt.—Oh, damn life!"

"Yes," she said slowly. She understood what a vicious circle was now. "You drank to stop yourself being nervous. The stuff makes you temporarily happy, and then even more nervous afterwards. So you drink more. Oh, my goodness, how silly!"

"But you don't take into account what a hunger it is, you know," he said in a low voice. "You don't understand that. I don't think there can be such another hunger on earth, even love."

"Oh—" she started to speak, and stopped. She had never thought of love like that, and wanted to tell him so, but that seemed to be side-tracking. So she went on, "Has it occurred to you that it will make you ill, kill you in time?"

“Do you think I’ve had five years at a hospital without seeing alcoholism?” he said bitterly. “Oh, I know all the diseases—I shall go mad, I expect. My brain’s much weaker than my body.”

“I suppose you think it’s very nice to go mad?” she said, hating herself for the futility of her words, wishing she had books or preachments to hurl at him and convince him.

“Oh, what’s it matter?” he said wearily. “Who cares?”

“Have you any idea how horrible it is, Louis?” she asked solemnly, with all the tragedy of the farm behind her words, compelling him to look at her.

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"Most diseases are horrible—what about cancer?" he said coolly.

"But people can't help cancer, and they can—at least I think so—help your sort of illness. Louis, I saw the two people I love best on earth dying. One of them died of cancer, the other of drink. I wasn't going to tell you that. But when you said it was in your family I was going to tell you that was no argument. It's been in my family for generations and generations. I suppose it's in everyone's to some extent. It has wiped out all my family. But it certainly is not going to wipe out me. I perhaps should not talk about my family to you, a stranger. Yet somehow I feel that father would not mind my telling you about him, if it can help you from suffering as he did. He cured himself."

"How?" he cried with sudden, breathless hopefulness.

"There, that's the awfulness of it. I don't know. I only know that one day he was drunk, and the next day he was not, and never was again. He said he gave all his burden to God."

He shook himself impatiently.

"Oh, I can't believe in all that rot!" he said harshly. "I neither trust God nor myself."

Below deck the mandoline began to twang again, and the soft Italian voice went on with "La Donna E Mobile" interminably.

"Louis, listen to me," she said quietly. "I'm not going to let you die like father died. I'm not going to let your heart get all horrible and thumping so that you can't lie down, and your feet and hands swollen and white and horrible. And I'm not going to have you shut up in an asylum."

"It's good of you to bother," he said humbly, "but I can see it's no good. You can't stop it. I can't myself. You'd get fed up. You'll get fed up with me as it is before we get to Sydney. You'll be jolly glad to get rid of me and be off with the uncle into the backblocks. I insulted and sickened and shamed Violet till she threw me over. And she loved me. I know very well she did."

"I won't let you be rude to me, Louis. I'm not quite like Violet, perhaps. If people are rude to me I don't get hurt. I just give them a good shaking and forget it. Besides, I couldn't get cross with anyone for being ill, could I? And I'm going to make you get better before we get to Sydney."

He shook his head hopelessly.

"I mean it. I am going to keep worrying you about it till you stop it dead. I'll make it seem a dreadful nuisance to you."

“It may work,” he said slowly, impressed by her certainty. “So long as we’re on the ship. If you can keep me from the Ole Fred gang. But it’ll be all up when we get to Sydney and you leave me.”

“Well then, I’ll stay in Sydney,” she said, making up her mind casually. “I’ll tell uncle I don’t want to go and live with him. I’ll find some way of staying with you.”

“I say, do you mean it?” he cried. “After my rudeness?”

“Of course I mean it. It will be fun! I love a fight!”

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"And you mean that you really care about me?"

"Of course I care! I believe I'll die if you don't get better," she said eagerly.

He fumbled in his pockets, lit several matches and put something in her hand.

"Here it is, look. Thirteen pounds, eight and fivepence."

"What's that for?"

"It's all my money. If I have any I'll be magnetized towards the bar. If I haven't, it's much safer. And look here, Marcella, if I come and knock you down with a sledgehammer, don't let me have that money, will you?"

"I won't," she said promptly.

She was thrilled, exhilarated, as they went below after shaking hands solemnly. She was Siegfried, and the dragon had a pock-marked face, and each foot had three claws missing. She thought, as she looked through dream-misted eyes, that the dragon was a very long one, with many legs and many heads. But she had not the faintest doubt that, in the end, he would fall to her trusty sword. And she told Louis so at the door of his cabin as she said good night to him.

Then she turned back to Number 15. She had looked about the deck for Jimmy, but guessing that he had fallen asleep in his own bunk, pushed open the door softly. She was determined that he should not sleep in there with Ole Fred, who was celebrating a great win at poker.

Louis stood at his own door.

"What are you going in there for?" he asked.

"I'm fetching poor little Jimmy. He's terrified of Ole Fred. He calls him the Beast. I think it's disgusting that he and the red-haired man sleep in here with a little boy."

He nodded and smiled at her, but Jimmy was not in the cabin at all. As she came out Ole Fred came along the alley-way. He leered at her but did not speak. She hurried into her own cabin, shut the door and pushed the bolt along instinctively. As she switched on the light she saw a very small amount of exceedingly dirty water in her basin, and Jimmy's neat pile of tiny clothes folded on the floor. He was fast asleep in the lower bunk.

She started to undress in a golden glow of romance, and realized that, as her clothes came off, her armour was going to stay on, waking and sleeping, visible only to herself. Then she thought of a small, trivial thing. She tapped on the partition.

“Are you hungry?” she called quietly.

“Frightfully.”

“Go and talk to Knollys. He’s very nice. He’ll find something for you.”

“N-no. I c-can’t,” he stammered, frightened immediately.

“Then I shall,” she said, and, slipping on her dressing-gown, went along to the saloon. By luck she found Knollys there and he produced bread and cheese and ship’s biscuit from the steward’s pantry.

“I imagine you are hungry, miss,” he said respectfully when she asked him to be sure to give her a lot.

“No, I’m not. It’s Mr. Farne in Number 8. He hasn’t had a meal since he came aboard.”

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"Sea-sick?" he said sympathetically.

"Well—" she began, and realizing that she could not explain, nodded.

"He's better now, anyhow."

"I'll make him some tea if you like, miss," went on Knollys. She waited until he had made it, and ten minutes later she tapped on Louis's door, took the tray in, laid it on his bunk and came out.

"I won't stay to keep you company. When I'm very hungry I like to gobble, but I don't like anyone to watch me," she said.

As she came out Ole Fred opened the door of Number 15 and stood watching her until her door closed. Then he hurried on deck.

## CHAPTER IX

For the next few days Marcella and Louis were inseparable. They were up very early each morning and did the usual march—seven times round the deck before breakfast. Afterwards she went up on the fo'c'sle and waited for him; for the rest of the day there was nothing to do but talk and read, and there was only a very limited library. Sometimes Louis talked of medicine; he told her things that had happened, that he had seen at the hospital; he explained cases to her, quoted lectures, and she, with all a layman's rather morbid interest, was fascinated. He, with the aura of travel, of learning, of experience in the ways of men, began to play Othello to her Desdemona. Feeling at his ease with her, and getting strength every day from the fact that yet another day had gone by without a victory to his enemy, he lost his shyness; she began to feel very humble as he talked largely, and her passion for understanding, enlightenment, that had led her to read books she could not understand, to talk to everyone and even to talk to herself, now enveloped him. She opened her mouth to be fed from his stores. Sometimes he would talk of London, a marvellous fairyland to her; tell her of "rags" in which he had played the leading part; of things he had done when he was in Rio for three months—Rio! the very name enthralled her! It smacked of buccaneers and Francis Drake—of his life in New Zealand two years ago, when, snatching himself from the outcasts of Christchurch and Auckland he had flung himself valiantly into the prohibition district of the King Country and lived with the Maoris for six months in the hope of finding the tribal cure for cancer; of the time when, on a girl-chase, he had toured with a theatrical company for a few months while his father thought he was at the hospital working. Her sponge-like eagerness for all the Romance, the Adventure he could give her was insidious in its effect on him; she was flattered that he, with all his cleverness, his "grown-up-ness" that went so queerly with his babyishness, should have so thrown himself on her mercy; to her nineteen years it seemed a wonderful and

beautiful thing that a man of twenty-seven should find in her an anchor. Of the three men she had known before, her father had been, even in his weakness, her tyrant; Wullie had



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been her playmate all her life; the doctor, all alone and friendless in a small, remote village, had found in her an intelligent listener, and had talked quite impersonally to her, as a safety-valve for his own loneliness. To them all she had been just a girl in certain circumstances; her circumstances and not herself had really been the thing that impressed them; she was just someone who happened to be there. But to Louis she was obviously a very tangible, defined person. She could not forget the wonder of that.

And Louis, flattered by her admiration, her wonderment, fell into a very human sort of weakness; he tried to make himself even more interesting; with the same quite amiable weakness that makes the witness of a street accident spill more blood, bear more pain in the telling than the victim could possibly have done, he began to lie to her. She was so easy to lie to. He scarcely realized, at first, that he was lying; a description of an operation he had witnessed, as a student, with Sir Horsley Winans playing the chief part, had won her horrified, shivering admiration; ten minutes later he was describing how he himself had done trephining (which he was careful to assure her was the most difficult operation possible) on an injured dock labourer; how the patient had wakened from the anesthetic in the middle of it; how Louis had immediately dropped his instruments and gone on administering the anesthetic because the anesthetist was actually flirting with a nurse who was Louis's pet annoyance in the wards; how the electric light had failed at the crucial moment; how only Louis's iron nerve had prevented tragedy and horror.

"You may think, seeing me such a bundle of nerves as I am now, that I couldn't have done it," he said. "But when I'm doing the doctor job I'm a different being; I lose myself. I just gave him another whiff of A.C.E., called to the nurses to fetch candles and got on with it. He's walking about London to-day—as right as nine-pence."

She knew nothing about hospitals, had never seen one in her life; he called most things by their bewildering technical names and she listened respectfully as a layman will always listen to technicalities. She did not know that the whole thing was a fabrication; in spite of his warning about his lying she had naturally thought that, if he should lie to her at all it would be about drinking and not about everyday affairs. And he, carried away by his imagination and his desire to impress her, scarcely realized what he was doing.

Marcella was very bad for him; her courteous belief in him encouraged him to deceive her; he thought she was rather silly; any other girl would have chaffed him, have capped his tales by others, obviously "tall" as Violet had done until he had sickened her entirely; but to Marcella's Keltic imagination there was nothing incredible in his gory, gorgeous exploits; was not she, herself, the daughter of a faraway spaewife who could slide down moonbeams and ride on the breasts

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of snowflakes? And was not she herself a fighter of windmills? To her Romance could not come in too brightly-coloured garb, and so her Romance wove a net about him. Sometimes it flattered: sometimes it amused: sometimes it gave a sense of kinship that made him think that, unless she were a liar she would never have so sympathized with him. He was unable to trace the fine distinction in veracity between describing a perfectly fictitious operation performed by oneself, and in recounting the messages given by the screaming gulls, the whining winds on Lashnagar.

On one or two things she was certainly caught up sharp. His taste in books showed a width of divergence between them that nothing could ever bridge; seeing her with "Fruit Gathering" which the schoolmaster had lent to her, he asked what it was.

"It's by Tagore," she ventured.

"Tagore? Never heard of him," he said dismissively.

In the fly-leaf of the book was a beautiful portrait of Tagore. She showed it to him, remarking that he was the Bengali poet.

"Oh, a nigger!" he cried contemptuously, pushing the book on one side. She frowned at him and shyly suggested that Christ, in that case, shared Tagore's disadvantage. He laughed loudly. Then she opened the book at random. She had been impressed with something before going to bed the night before.

"Listen to this, Louis. I thought I'd like to read it to you," she said, and read, "Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers, but to be fearless in facing them. And this—listen, 'Let me not look for allies in life's fight, but to my own strength'; and here's the best bit of all, 'Grant me that I may not be a coward, feeling your mercy in my success alone; but let me find the grasp of your hand in my failure.' I wish so much I could have found that before father died and read it to him."

"Oh—poetry," he said contemptuously; "a lot of high falutin' nonsense—and by a nigger too! What's that someone said? 'Intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity.' That's a good description of a poet."

Another time she spoke of St. Brigid, the Bride of Christ.

"Who's she?" he asked contemptuously.

"The Irish saint." He interrupted with a long tirade against Home Rule which proved, to his satisfaction, that St. Brigid was also "high-falutin' nonsense." A pamphlet of Shaw's she found in the saloon he told her not, on any account, to read.

“A damned Socialist—a vegetarian—a faddist,” he said excitedly, and she led the conversation away from books, though he brought it back several times to explain to her the jokes in “Punch” which he said would have to be put into her head with a hammer and chisel, since she was a Scot.

But in spite of puzzlement and divergences she was intensely happy. After the solitude of Lashnagar every day was full of thrilled interest to her. The many people, the changes of temperature as the boat went south, the shoals of porpoises tumbling in the blue water; the strange foods, the passing ships were all amazements to her and the fact that her thoughts had, for the first time, found a tangible resting-place like homing pigeons alighting at their cot, together with her absorption in Louis, all gave her a sense of security.

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Louis, on the other hand, though he was trying hard to keep content, realized that the very fact he had to try meant a fight was coming. And his inflated sense of being a very fine fellow indeed in her eyes made it impossible for him to be honest as he had been at first, and tell her that he had caught sight of his enemy seeing to the edge of his sword, the priming of his pistols. He could not ask her for help now—he could not be less than a hero now! He would fight it out alone. Both of them had yet to realize that life is not a static condition: both of them had to realize that lives are interdependent.

At Gibraltar happened something that was to have far-reaching effects. She was watching the frowning Rock; Louis was pointing out the little threatening barbettes as they drew inshore slowly. Out in the stream—very much out—lay a Norddeutscher Lloyd ship at anchor.

“Every inch of this water is mined,” he told her. “A touch from switches up on the Rock would blow the whole lot of us to Kingdom Come. The bally old German out there knows that.”

Marcella knew nothing of world politics. He explained.

“England is mistress of the seas,” he orated proudly. “The empire on which the sun never sets! In a few years’ time every foreign ship—especially Germans—will be swept off the seas and Britannia will literally rule the waves.”

“She looks such a nice, comfortable, clean old ship,” began Marcella, feeling very sorry for her.

“Clean?” he cried. “A German clean? Filthy cockroachy holes, their ships are! Why, there’s only one race on earth dirtier than the Germans and that’s the Scots.”

Then he stopped dead and giggled nervously as he realized what he had said. Her eyes were blazing, her lips quivering; it was impossible for her to speak for a moment, her breath was coming in such sharp pants. For a moment she looked just like Andrew Lashcairn, but before she had time to launch her indignation he was stammering and apologizing and looking so sorry that she decided to bury the hatchet. And he went on breathlessly, trying to reinstate himself.

“You know, I hate the Germans. I happen to know a lot about them and the menace they are to Eng—Britain,” he said in a low, confidential voice. He had, as a matter of fact, recently read in proof some spy-revelations his father’s firm was publishing. He was well primed. He went on talking rapidly, showing her Germany as an ogre. She listened amazed; she thought all that sort of thing had died out years ago, but, thinking of her own indignant championing of Scotland, decided that she was just as illogical as Louis.

“However do you know all this?” she asked at last.

“Well—as a matter of fact—I did a bit of secret service work once. It was one time when the Pater spewed me out of home.”

That day he was secretive and bewildering: once he took a little bundle of crackling papers from his pocket and put them away again furtively, watching her as he did so. She was impressed, but puzzled.

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But all the time, in spite of chaffing insults and even friendly overtures he kept away from Ole Fred's gang and stayed almost desperately at Marcella's side. They became the subject of gossip; spiteful gossip on the part of the girls, shocked gossip on the side of the married women, who, with the exception of Mrs. Hetherington, left her severely alone.

Between Marcella and Mrs. Hetherington a queer friendship had sprung up; her quickness, her absolute lack of continuity, her littleness and her transparently minx-like qualities seemed so pathetic that Marcella took her under her wing. She never came out of her cabin for breakfast; the stewardess, with her nose very high in the air and a non-committal voice, had asked Marcella to go to Mrs. Hetherington's cabin the morning after Gibraltar. She found the little lady propped up in her bunk, her black hair all over the pillow, her small face rising from a foam of pink ribbons and laces that seemed unreal to the girl.

"Oh, my dear, how sweet of you to come to me! I am terribly ill—terribly ill," she said faintly.

"I am so sorry. Will I get the doctor?"

"Oh dear no. I am often like this! I suffer terribly, my dear, terribly. My poor, poor head."

Marcella had bought a bottle of eau-de-Cologne at Gibraltar when the Spanish merchants came aboard; she fetched it and bathed Mrs. Hetherington's aching head. All the time she was staring at her fascinating nightgown. It was the first dainty garment she had seen close to since her mother's death.

"That is so nice, dear," she murmured. Marcella blushed. She was not used to being called "dear" and liked it immensely.

"Would you brush my silly mop of hair and then pass me my cap, dear? Oh this hair is a bother! I've often thought I'd have it cut off like a convict."

"I think it is wonderful hair," Marcella told her, brushing it tenderly, and plaiting it back before she arranged it under a ridiculous boudoir cap of ribbon and lace.

"I can't tell you how I suffered during the night, dear," said Mrs. Hetherington plaintively. "(Just pass me the hand mirror, will you?) I can't think why I was so foolish as to travel steerage. Those three emigrant girls in this cabin—my dear, they are absolutely *coarse*! You should see their underclothes! Look, Marcella—I'm going to call you Marcella, you are so sweet. Look at that nightgown on the top bunk. *Pink flannelette*! And I hate to share my cabin with them! They've gone on deck now for the day. I told them I simply must be alone."

“Aren’t you going to have any breakfast?” asked Marcella. “I’ll make you some tea if you like.” She and Louis had bought a teapot at Gibraltar, solemnly paying half each and sharing the responsibility for the sacrifice of the other one.

“No, I don’t think I could drink tea. What do you think I could have? You know, my dear, it was champagne that upset me like this! Mistah Petahs and I had a small bottle last night and it brought everything back.”

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She began to wipe a plaintive eye on her small handkerchief.

“The day I married my dear George—the father of my darlings—we had champagne. It always brings it all back to me.”

“But—tea makes headaches better.”

“Not mine.” Mrs. Hetherington knitted her white brows and looked immensely interested.

“I think if you were to see dear Mistah Petahs and ask him to come along the alley-way and speak to me. He is so gentle, so sympathetic, he might suggest something, dear.”

“Um,” said Marcella, thinking of Jimmy. But she fetched Mistah Petahs who came with voluble and pleased sympathy.

He stood at the door of the cabin smiling fatuously. Mrs. Hetherington gave a little horrified shriek as she saw the tip of his toe over the threshold.

“No, no, naughty boy! You mustn’t come in here! I’m shocked.”

“Are you ill?” he asked in a deeply pained voice.

“My poor, poor head, Mistah Petahs! That champagne last night brought everything back—dear George and all our happiness.”

“Oh, I say,” murmured Mr. Peters.

“I feel so ill, so terribly ill. What could I have? If this head doesn’t get better I shall jump overboard, really I shall. And then the fishes will eat me!”

Mr. Peters contemplated the prospect hopefully.

“And—I keep thinking of my darlings,” she whispered, reduced to tears.

“What you want, little lady, is a hair of the dog that bit you,” said Mr. Peters judicially. She gave a gentle little scream.

“Oh you sound so fierce, Mistah Petahs! Which dog? When?” she asked guilelessly.

“I’ll get it—you lie back, little lady, and rest your pretty head.”

She lay back, with swimming eyes.

He went half a step along the alley-way.





"Mistah Petahs," she called faintly.

He came back, assiduous.

"On ice," she murmured. He nodded and went.

"So kind—so sympathetic," murmured Mrs. Hetherington with closed eyes.

Marcella, who had stood frowning and puzzled, was now pressed into the service.

"I think, dear, when Mistah Petahs comes back I could manage a little bread and butter—only the butter is so nasty."

"Would you like jam?" said Marcella helpfully, liking jam herself.

The thought of jam made Mrs. Hetherington feel faint.

"No, I'll have bread and butter. Get me two slices, dear—thin. And—ask Knollys if he could let you have some cayenne pepper. Bread and butter sprinkled with cayenne always does me good when my head has one of its naughty fits."

Twenty minutes later she was sitting up with sparkling eyes eating devilled bread and butter and drinking champagne daintily while Mr. Peters sat beaming and bashful and inexpressibly silly on a camp-stool in the alley-way, and the bedroom steward wondered what on earth he would do when the officers came along for cabin inspection.

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The night before they touched at Naples Marcella and Louis arranged what she called a “ploy.” They would go ashore together and spend the day at Pompeii. He had been there before, but he remembered little of it because he had been with a party who had hired a car, taken a luncheon basket and several bottles of whisky and left him asleep in the car while they explored the dead towns.

“It seems an insult to the past—going there and getting drunk on their tombs,” he said musingly. “But you and I will have a great day. In a Roman town, Marcella—there’s something very Roman about you—you’re like the mother of the Gracchi. I happen to know all about the mother of the Gracchi because it came in my Latin translation at Matric, and I had such a devil of a job with it that I never forgot it. That’s the only bit of Roman history that’s stuck to me, just as ‘Julius Caesar’ is the only bit of Shakespeare I know because we did scenes from it for a school concert once.”

During the afternoon the young schoolmaster came along with “The Last Days of Pompeii” in his hands.

“He’s going to suggest coming with us to-morrow,” said Louis, who laughed at him every time he saw him. “And he’s going to read us bits of local colour. I can see it glinting in his eye. Let’s look very busy.”

“What can we do?” asked Marcella with a giggle. He initiated her into the mysteries of “Noughts and Crosses” and they sat with heads bent low over the paper as the schoolmaster came along.

“I have been tracing the course of the fugitives in Lytton’s immortal work,” he began with a cough. “It would greatly add to the interest of visitors to Pompeii if they could follow it to-morrow, so I am giving a little lecture on it in the saloon to anyone who cares—”

“Thanks,” said Louis shortly. With a sigh the schoolmaster passed on, and, sitting down with his back against the capstan, read studiously.

“Don’t let’s go with him if he asks us,” whispered Marcella. “Let’s be alone.”

“Of course—he’s a bore,” whispered Louis. “I wouldn’t lose this day at Pompeii for a shipload of footling schoolmasters.”

Very early next morning he wakened her by tapping on her cabin door. She had heard him tossing about in the night and was not surprised that he looked tired and rather haggard. But she forgot to ask him what was the matter as Naples burst upon her the moment she put her head above the companion-way where he was waiting for her.

“Oh—look at it,” she gasped.

“Yes, isn’t it?” he said, waving his arm as if he were responsible for Naples. “Look at the jolly old bonfire.”

All round, in the brilliant blue waters of the Bay, ships lay as if asleep; a few little tugs fussed nervously, a few little boats laden brilliantly with fruit and vegetables glided along as though they were content to reach somewhere quite near by to-morrow or the day after. There was a cloud over the grey town at the foot of Vesuvius; it looked like winding sheets about the dead; it reminded Marcella insensibly of Lashnagar as she saw the mist and smoke wraiths mingle grey and white, rising from fissures, creeping along gullies until they formed a wreath at the crest of the volcano through which a thin needle of yellower smoke was rising straight as a pinnacle through the windless air.

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"Does it ever do things now?" she asked rather breathlessly.

"Oh yes. Listen!" She heard faint reports like distant small guns being fired. "With any luck it'll give us a bit of a Crystal Palace Bank Holiday exploit to-night—we sail at midnight, you know. It will be rather gorgeous if the old bonfire will oblige. Red fires, white and silver moonlight—why Naples is making me get poetical," he added, stopping short.

People began to come on deck: the schoolmaster walked along, his finger in between two pages of a Baedeker in which he was going to count off the items of interest he encountered.

"Good morning, Miss Lashcairn!" he said with a smile. "See Naples and die!"

"Oh no—it's too beautiful!" she said quickly. Louis edged her along the deck as a little clatter of church bells pealed from the many spires rising above the tall brown houses of the town. A motor-launch chuff-chuffed out from the quay, flying the yellow flag.

"Port doctor," he informed her. "If he gives us a clean bill we'll be ashore the minute breakfast's over. And I say, Marcella, let me *implore* you not to have Jimmy or schoolmasters in attendance. This is *my* show."

She smiled at him and turned to watch three boys scrambling up the ladder after the port doctor, carrying great baskets of grapes and flowers and oranges.

"I'm going to buy you some grapes—those whopping big black ones. It seems the obvious thing to do in Naples, doesn't it? Oh, by the way, I must pay a visit to the Bank of Scotland. You'd better give me five pounds."

"You're very extravagant," she laughed.

"Never mind. Any other trip I've been broke by this time, and in a devil of a mess as well. Lord knows what these bally dagoes will charge us for a car out to Pompeii. They're all on the make. But I don't care if they charge thirteen pounds—"

"Eight and fivepence," she added, laughing at him and running below to unlock her trunk and bring him the money without a glimmer of apprehension.

She put the five pounds into his hand in the alley-way. A minute later he was back with an enormous bunch of grapes lying amongst their green leaves.

"Lock your door when you come on deck, and shut your porthole," he told her. "We're coaling, and coal dust gets everywhere—in your eyes, your finger-nails, your food and your bed if you don't hermetically seal them all. It's a good place to be away from, a coaling ship."

He darted away before she could mention the grapes. She helped Jimmy dress, and then, turning him out, examined her three white frocks with minute care to see in which she should do honour to Pompeii. Often, in the past, she had dressed a part, but always her personality had been lost in the part she was playing. Now she consciously dressed as Marcella; it was probably the first time in her life she had looked interestedly in a mirror; comparing herself with Mrs. Hetherington, she felt vaguely dissatisfied: she wished she were much nicer. Noticing the vine leaves where she had twined them round the rail of her bunk, she broke off two or three and tucked them in her dress at the waist. Stepping back, she surveyed the effect, decided that it was as good as could be managed, and tapped at the partition. She had heard Louis moving about some time before.

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There was no answer, and she decided that he must have gone on deck.

It was crowded with passengers waiting for the little boats to take them ashore; Italians went here and there selling fruit, postcards and jewellery straight from Birmingham; two flat coal lighters were drawing ponderously alongside. She could not see Louis.

From end to end she searched the ship, even going on to the upper deck, which to-day was not sacred to the upper-class passengers. But he was nowhere to be seen. A lump came into her throat, her knees felt a little shaky.

Going below again she saw Knollys looking about eagerly.

"Oh, there you are, miss. Mr. Fame desired me to give you this. He was considerably hurried."

She took it with a word of thanks—a little note, folded three cornerwise.

"I'm more sorry than I can say," she read. "The port doctor was an old St. Crispin's man. He noticed me on deck and spoke. He and I were great pals at the hospital, and he asked me to go ashore with him. He remembered how keen I was on gynecology, and has a queer case he'd like me to look at. It's his wife as a matter of fact. I made all sorts of excuses, but he seemed so hurt I had to give way. I know this will disappoint you horribly, but it seems unavoidable. I'll cut away as soon as I can, and we'll still go to Pompeii. After all, I hear we don't sail till one o'clock, so there'll be time—we'll come back in the moonlight. Give my love to Jimmy and the schoolmaster.—L.F."

To her amazement she felt tears begin to prick her eyelids. She blinked fiercely.

"Well, of all the babies! Did it cry because it was wanting to go out, then?" she cried indignantly, and stood watching the coal bunkers being opened. But she could not see much; she was thinking of Louis.

"You'll get filthy here!" said the third officer behind her, "and most uncomfortable. I should advise you to go ashore."

"I can't. I'm waiting for someone," she explained.

"Then I'd go up on the boat deck. You've no idea how abominable it gets down here. Coaling should be prohibited by Act of Parliament."

"Which is the boat-deck?" she asked, glad that her voice was sensible again. He pointed, and she turned away.

The ship was deserted, practically; everyone had gone ashore. She went disconsolately towards the stairway. On the bottom step sat Jimmy sobbing dismally.

"There they are!" he said, rubbing his eyes with one hand and pointing to a little boat out on the blue water. "I did so want to go with them."

Mrs. Hetherington in a white frock and blue sash was waving her hand gaily from the little boat. Marcella suddenly felt indignant with her, and took Jimmy's tear-stained hand.

"There they are!" she said, smiling. "And here are we! We're both in the same boat, old man. Come down to my little house. I've something nice there."

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She broke off a big bunch of grapes for him and, taking pencils, books and writing-paper, went back on deck. Two Italians were just going off with a stock of postcards. She bought a dozen for Jimmy, and a little basket of strawberries.

"Now you're going to be a big man, Jimmy. We're going right up on the roof of the ship, and you're having a chair all to yourself so that you can write postcards to Gran."

His face cleared immediately, though as they got settled in the shadow of one of the lifeboats and he saw Mrs. Hetherington's white figure walking along the quay he gave a little sigh. She addressed his postcards as far as his remembered stock of addresses would go. Several Aunties who lived "along Gran's street and along the next and over the field" had to be left out. As soon as postcard writing palled a sailor came along providentially, took him to see the hen coops, and let him find two eggs that had been laid.

Marcella wrote long letters home; only to Wullie did she mention Louis, and even to him she said very little.

Noon came, and the boat deck was very hot. The chiming of bells in the churches told when the moment of the Elevation came and passed; the little reports sounded from the old mountain: she thought they sounded like guns that had been fired a thousand years ago. Jimmy said he didn't feel well, and went to sleep after a while; an Italian boy with black, hyacinthine curls and swimming black eyes spied her white frock from his little boat out in the bay: tying up to the accommodation ladder, he stood singing a passionate song to the twanging of a guitar. She wondered whether this were a personal tribute or a way of earning money. The cap he held out for a coin showed it was the one; his eloquent eyes and picturesque gestures as he begged her little withering bunch of vine leaves showed it was the other. She tossed them to him carelessly, and he bowed and kissed them gracefully.

At last the family parties began to come on board, with hot, tired mothers, cross children and disillusioned fathers; then came the emigrant girls, their hats covered in bright flowers. They were hustled below by the third officer, who was superintending the sluicing of the dusty, black decks. As Marcella went slowly below with Jimmy she heard him declaring that coaling was the bane of his existence, as he pointed out to the ship's doctor marks of black hands deliberately printed high up on the shining white paint.

When she had finished her letters Marcella sat for a while perfectly still while Jimmy slept and the fowls in the coops crooned. Down below in the bunkers the coal went thudding faintly, heard up on the boat deck more as vibrations than sounds, mingling with the tinkling of guitars, the lazy splash of oars; somewhere a man with a voice like a rook was cawing:



“A mother was chay-sing her boy round the room, She was chay-sing her boy round the room”

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over and over again. Somewhere at the end of a ventilator shaft a man was polishing boots; he was swearing monotonously, between each rub of his brush, using a list of twelve words beginning with “blast” uttered very softly and increasing in volume of sound and violence of meaning at the twelfth word, when he would start pianissimo again. Marcella’s eyes closed; she was not asleep, she was thinking very vividly of Louis, but all the murmur of sounds about her intruded on her consciousness, making clear thought impossible. The peculiar languor of shipboard life seized upon her mind and her body: when she went below both were partly anaesthetized; her feet scarcely felt the boards of the deck; her fingers were scarcely conscious of the letters and books she held. Her eyes and her mind took in the returning passengers dully.

“You look half asleep, kid,” said Diddy with sparkling eyes. “We didn’t half have a day of it! Young Bill and Mr. Winkle both got shore leave, and Mr. Winkle knew a man who keeps a little cafe. He was once chef where Mr. Winkle was assistant chef in an hotel. My, we didn’t half have a tuck in! Oysters and funny things in French, and chicken done up with jam, and ices. We went to Pompey in the afternoon, but I couldn’t move, I was that stuffed up! My, it was a day and a half! Where did you get to?”

“Oh, just about with Jimmy.”

“Where’s your young chap?” asked Diddy in surprise.

Marcella stared at her and flushed. The schoolmaster came up to her and stood silent beside her. He was very full of Naples. His shoes were dustless, though everyone else was covered in the fine, impalpable powdery dust of Naples. His high collar was spotless, his coat incredibly black. He looked irresistibly as if he had been lay-reading.

“I was hoping that I might have had the pleasure of your company during my journeyings to-day, Miss Lashcairn,” he began after a little cough. “But I was—er—afraid to intrude.”

“I stayed on board with Jimmy,” she explained. “Did you have a good time?”

“One cannot have a good time in the tomb of past splendours,” he said slowly. “Imperial Cesar dead and turned to clay stopping a hole to keep the wind away is indeed a tragedy to a sensitive mind. But to see Imperial Pompeii desecrated by ginger-beer bottles, cigarette packets and spent matches—it was more than tragic. It was—it was—but I pause for a word! All the time I was murmuring sadly to myself ‘*Sic transit gloria mundi*.’”

“I’m quite glad I didn’t go if it was so bad as that,” she said.

“I had been at great, very great, trouble to trace the path of the fugitives in Lytton’s immortal work. But I have an idea that at certain points Lytton was rather nebulous. I

met your young friend and asked him what he thought. He only laughed, however. He is fond of laughing.”

Marcella’s dullness disappeared; the clouds from her mind packed like wolves and vanished. Her heart suddenly stood still.

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"He was at Pompeii?" she whispered.

"Only for a little time this morning. Then he and his party went away again in their car."

"He was with the doctor," said Marcella, hating to talk about him, but unable not to.

"Not when I saw him. He was with those exceedingly noisy fellows—the man who is severely pitted with small-pox and the man with the missing fingers."

"Oh—"

She turned away and answered him at random after that. Even then she did not see that Louis had deliberately lied to her. She was hurt that he could have gone to Pompeii without her: she was indignant that he had gone with her abomination, the pock-marked man. But perhaps it was only an accident! She wondered, with sudden misgiving, if he could have been back on the boat for her and missed her. But that his desertion was intentional she could not imagine.

Lights began to twinkle from the houses, to flare from the streets, to dance from the boats. The sky of ultramarine became indigo with a green and mauve lightening to the west. Over Vesuvius was a column of white smoke that now turned rosy, now coppery from the fires beneath. Little boat loads of chattering people who seemed ghosts kept tumbling up the accommodation ladder out of the grey water; they seemed to come soundlessly as though they were produced by a conjuror's hand, for no one could hear what they said: only their gestures, their laughing, excited faces were visible. A little cold hand squeezed Marcella's, and she answered Jimmy's eager questions about his father thoughtlessly, while a steamer coming into port hooted shrilly and desolately beyond the bar. The little boats glided up and down, in and out of the shadows of big ships with double lights—lights on board that were determinate and steady, reflections of lights that cracked and shivered and went in long, shimmering ribbons through the water.

"Most of the passengers are aboard now," volunteered the schoolmaster.

"Are they?" she said, her heart sinking. It came to her that he had gone, that she would never see him again. And in that moment she knew just how much she wanted to see him: and in that moment she saw him.

A boatload of men was zigzagging towards the Oriana with snatches of loud song, laughter and occasional shouts. It was impossible to distinguish faces until the boat came within range of the vessel's arc lamps. And their dead white glare shone on Louis's face—and on his face alone, as far as Marcella was concerned. He was grinning vacantly: he looked very white. As he swayed up the ladder she saw that his clothes were covered in dust. Catching sight of her the minute he reached the deck, he

lurched towards her. She shrank away a little, frightened of the glazed stare of his eyes, his loose, slobbering mouth. She knew that he was drunk, but he was not drunk as her father had been. Wild thoughts flickered on the curtain

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of her mind: “drunk as a lord” was one of them. “That’s how father used to be,” and a queer sort of pride in him followed. After all, there was something in being a lord, even in drunkenness! But this foolish, grinning, damp-mouthed thing before her, who kept making ineffectual attempts to lift his hand to his head and take off his hat, who was coming closer towards her with the inadequate movements she had once seen made by a duck when its leg had been broken!—

“H’lo, ole girl!” he said, standing before her at last. “Parlez-vous Franshay? Ah, oui, oui! Give—kith, ole girl!”

“You’d better go below, Miss Lashcairn,” said the schoolmaster in a low voice. “It’s no use talking to an intoxicated man.”

She knew he was speaking, but she felt mesmerized by Louis, and shook her head impatiently, never taking her eyes for an instant from the boy’s dribbling mouth.

“Give’s—kith—kith—kisssh,” he said solemnly after a great effort, managing to close his mouth. “Baisez-moi—ole girl! Ah, oui, oui! Ole girl—I shay, ole girl—voulez-vous coucher avec moi?”

He caught her arm and held it tight, grinning into her face. She stood with set face, trembling.

“What does he mean?” she asked the schoolmaster, who was looking distressed.

“He is speaking French—I—don’t quite”—he coughed nervously—“I don’t quite understand him—it isn’t classical French. But I should go below. He will be better to-morrow.”

Louis turned to him solemnly, his jaws working.

“G-g-go to—school!” he cried, and giggled helplessly. “You w-w-white-livered k-k-kidpuncher! Are you after her yourself? G-god damn you, you’re always sniffing about after her.”

“I wish you would go below,” said the schoolmaster. “Men when intoxicated say things unfit for the ears of young ladies. You go away and leave him to me, Miss Lashcairn.”

“Louis, you trusted me to take care of you,” she said in a low voice.

He laughed hysterically until tears ran down his cheeks.

“Thass ri’, ole girl! Trus’ take care of me! Nashly! Father drunkard—father *dead* drunkard! Nash’ly ta’ care poor little Louis.”

Ole Fred and the red-haired man had made immediately for the bar, but finding it closed had come back to claim Louis. They saw the schoolmaster’s white face and Louis’s passionate gestures; they scented a fight, and hoped for it.

“Wan’ ’ny ’elp, mate?” cried Ole Fred, putting up his fists.

Marcella did not see them. She saw her father standing by his bed, holding on to the post, praying for courage. Something in her brain gave a little snap like a fiddle string breaking, and, taking Louis by both shoulders, she shook him violently. His head wobbled about loosely. He was terrified, and so were the others. Ole Fred had seen girls and women resort to physical argument: in his world of the East End it was quite common, but he was rather surprised to see a “young lady” do it. Nor had they ever imagined it possible for such a blaze of anger to scorch anyone as shone in her eyes, vibrated in her voice as she loosed him, quite breathless, propped him against the rail and said, very quietly:

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"The very next time you mention my father I'll put you in the sea."

Louis was trembling and staring at her, his mouth open. The schoolmaster was the first to speak.

"I regret this," he began, and stopped, coughing.

"Just you shut the 'ole in yer fice," growled Ole Fred. Then, turning to Louis, he became maudlinly soothing. "Look 'ere, mate, no young lady likes to hear her father spoke of rough—even if he ain't her father, as the saying goes. I do' know what the rah's abaht, but y' know, ole chap, no man should make sin—sin—sinuation he can't prove—in black an' white." He looked from one to the other with engaging earnestness. "Life's—life's—slife's too short to quarrel, hearts are too precious to break, so shake hands and kissh and kiss and be frien's, for ole time's sake."

He was so overcome by the pathos of his own eloquence that he began to sob brokenly, clinging to the red-haired man. "We alwiz bin mates, ain't we?" he added, trying to shake hands with him. Fired by his example, Louis made a grab at Marcella. He had entirely forgotten his fright, his shame of a moment ago.

"Thass ri', Marsh—Marcella. Kith—kith—kisssh an' be fren's! Ah, oui, oui, n'est ce pas? Ole Fred—no, no, Ole girl—voulez-vous coucher avec moi?"

She looked at him, frowning. The unusual words—she had never heard French words before—worried her: she never afterwards was able to hear French without an acute sense of discomfort. He was smiling at her with open mouth and wet eyes. She came quite close to him: he cringed unconsciously, and then lifted his face, expecting her to kiss him. Instead, she said in a low voice, close to his ear:

"You asked me to help you, Louis. Do you know the best way to help you?"

"Kith—baisez-moi—ah, oui, oui."

"The best way to help you is to drown you. You're—you're not fit to live! Oh, you're a perfect idiot!"

She turned and ran down below. Dimly she heard the schoolmaster say, "Very foolish to talk to an intoxicated man"; she heard the same boy who had begged her vine leaves singing his passionate love song to the tinkling music of his guitar and the lapping water. Then she was below deck, making blindly for her cabin.

At the door of Number 15 she was arrested by Jimmy. He was standing in the doorway, his head well back, his hands in his trouser pockets.

"Marcella!" he whispered proudly. "Look!"



She made herself conscious of him and looked. On the outer bunk was a crumpled mass of clothing that was heaving up and down and snoring loudly.

“He’s there all right. I got him up when he wanted to be on the floor. He pinched my arm fearful. He’s very strong, my Daddy is! He didn’t pinch it on purpose, he couldn’t help it.”

Pushing back the sleeve of his jersey, he showed her a red mark as a soldier might show his scars.

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"Now he's fast asleep. Marcella, isn't he making a funny noise?" he added with the queerest cross between amusement and puzzlement on his small face. She suddenly realized what he was saying.

"Oh, you little brave man," she cried, taking him up in her arms and kissing him. He wriggled down quickly, and stood in the doorway again, on sentry duty. She forgot to take him with her. She had forgotten everything save her instinct to be alone with her misery.

## CHAPTER X

It was not until the *Oriana* left Port Said that Louis spoke to Marcella again. Three times he wrote to her demanding his money. Three times something got beyond and above the pride that told her to send it to him and have nothing else to say to him, and she refused definitely to give him the money; she asked him to come and talk to her. But he entrenched himself behind the Ole Fred gang and speedily helped to make it the nuisance of the ship. The germ of self-confidence and courage that was entirely missing in his make-up was replaced by bombast under the combined influence of whisky and boredom. Some day, perhaps, the iniquity of fastening up a small world of people in a ship for six weeks with nothing compulsory to do will dawn upon shipping companies, and the passengers will be forced to work, for their own salvation. On board ship people drift; they drift into flirtation which rapidly becomes either love-making or a sex-problem; they drift into drinking or, if they have no such native weakness, they become back-biting and bad tempered.

Marcella found herself drifting like the rest. A letter to Dr. Angus she had begun to write the day after Naples asking him to explain the cause, treatment and cure of drunkenness, still awaited completion. She sat beside Louis's empty chair, physically too inert from want of strenuous exercise, and mentally too troubled to get a grip on anything. Naples had shown her that Louis had not come into her life merely as a shipboard acquaintance to be forgotten and dropped when they reached Sydney, as she would forget and drop Mrs. Hetherington, the schoolmaster and Biddy. His talk of the coincidence of his coming by the *Oriana* at all had made a deep dint on her Keltic imagination; his appeal to her for help had squared beautifully with her youthful dreams of Deliverance; the fact that he was the first young man who had ever talked to her probably had more than anything else to do with her preoccupation, though she did not realize it.

At Port Said she and Jimmy spent a stifling morning ashore amid the dust and smells of the native quarter. Turning a corner in the bazaar suddenly they heard Louis's voice joined with the red-haired man's in a futile song they sang night and day: it was a song about a man who went to mow a meadow; the second verse was about two men; the third about three and so on, as long as the singer's voice lasted out. It was the red-

haired man's boast that he had once kept up to five hundred. As Marcella turned the corner she saw them sitting under some palm trees outside a little cafe, bottles and glasses before them. Louis, who looked dirty and unkempt, was facing her. He broke off and darted towards her.

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"I wan' my money," he started.

"You're not going to have it—even if you try to get it with a sledge hammer, as you said you might," she said, white lipped.

"You—you—you're keeping it for yourself!"

"Don't be such a fool, Louis. You know why I'm keeping it. If only you'd stop drinking for a day or two your mind would come clear and you'd talk to me."

"Gi' m' my money, I tell you! Thas' why you hooked on to me, at first. You knew I was a gentleman! You guessed I'd plenty of money! Thas' what you want of me—you know the Pater's a well-known publisher, an' you think you'll do a good thing for yourself."

Marcella had a hard fight then; something told her that this was not Louis speaking. She remembered that he had told her that drinking was an illness. When Mrs. Mactavish had fever she remembered how the people in the village had talked of the cruel things she had said to Mr. Mactavish and her sister, and it came to Marcella that Louis was no more to be blamed than she. But her native temper made her quiver to take him and shake some sense in him, whether he were ill or not. It was in a strained, quiet voice that she said:

"I'm not going to talk any more about it. You'll get it when you say good-bye to me in Sydney," and so she turned away.

Just as the *Oriana* sailed, about six o'clock she saw him come aboard alone. His face was swollen, his eye blackened by a bruise; his collar was splashed with blood and his white drill suit very dirty and crumpled. She had seen Ole Fred carried on board some time ago by sympathetic, rather maudlin friends. She guessed that war had flamed up between the incongruous allies. Mrs. Hetherington, rather breathlessly, confirmed her suspicion.

"He fought about you—Ole Fred said you'd been in his cabin, and young Mr. Fame went for him," she said enviously.

"Of course I've been in his cabin. It's Jimmy's cabin—I had to get Jimmy's clean things," she said indignantly.

Mrs. Hetherington put on an air of helpfulness.

"You should always be so careful, dearie. I am. Oh *most* careful! I never let dear Mistah Petahs put more than the tip of his shoe over my doorway. And as for going into his cabin—My *dear*! There is no need to provoke scandal; you will learn as you grow older to do things more discreetly."

“Discreet! I hate the word! And Careful! I couldn’t be careful!” she cried hotly, but Mrs. Hetherington tapped her playfully on the arm and turned away, murmuring, “Naughty, naughty!”

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It was very quiet on deck that night, with Louis and Ole Fred both below in their bunks; a few Arabs had come aboard and sat in a corner of the deck eating their evening meal, which they could not take under the same roof as unbelievers; afterwards, as the sun sank into the purple distance of the desert leaving a sky like a palette splashed by a child's indiscriminating hand, they began an eerie, monotonous chant that went on for hours. Later the stewards rigged up a canvas screen behind which the women and children could sleep, for the heat of the desert was making the lower cabins unbearable; mattresses were dragged here and there, children put to sleep upon them; people walked about, stepping carefully over sleeping forms as the *Oriana* crept along at five miles an hour with a great searchlight forrard sending a huge fan of light on to the lapping waters of the Canal, and out into the brown sand of the desert. The schoolmaster became instructive about the rapid silting up of the Canal with erosion and sand storms: he discussed the genius and patience of de Lesseps, and argued lengthily on the respective merits of patience and genius. Finally, Marcella told him she had a headache. He suggested that he could cure it.

"I have some tabloids—very sedative, very. I make a point of never being without them. You, I take it, have the same type of brain and nerve force as I—always active, always alert. What we both need is a depressant—pot. brom. Or, as I prefer to call it, K.B.R."

"Oh no—it's very kind of you. But I'd like best to go to bed."

"May I carry your mattress up for you?"

"I'm not sleeping on deck. I couldn't sleep among so many people," she said, and, after a hurried good night went below.

As she paused at her cabin door she heard a little noise and guessed that Jimmy was within. Opening it quickly, without switching on the light, she cried, "Here comes a big bear to eat you all up," as Jimmy often did to her. She grasped someone, and cried out in fear. It was someone grown up, kneeling on the floor.

She switched on the light and saw Louis looking up at her, blinking in the sudden glare.

"Oh, it's you. What do you want?" she said, breathlessly, though she knew quite well. In his hand he held her little bank bag of orange canvas in which the doctor had put ten pounds for her to spend on the trip.

"I w-want m—my—my m—money," he began, trembling and afraid to meet her eyes.

"To buy more whisky and make yourself more horrible than ever?" she cried, standing with her back to the door. "Well, I'll not give it to you, and if you knock me down and fight me I'll not give it you even. I'm a better fighter than you."



“I w-want it—to—to—pay him back,” he cried and began to sob, violently dropping the money on the floor. “He—he said—you’d been in his cabin and—and—and in m—mine! He s—said dev—devilish things. And I punched his ugly head for him! All for you! Be—be—because you’re—you’re—Oh God, give me the money and let me pay him and then cut him dead.”

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"Do you mean that you owe Ole Fred money?"

"Of c—course. How on earth have I managed since N-naples?"

"How much is it?"

"He's paid for a lot of drinks, but that doesn't count. I w-won a good bit at poker, too. I b-borrowed sixteen pounds from him."

"But, Louis, you hadn't sixteen pounds to pay him back with," she cried.

"Do you think I cared? Do you think I ever meant to pay him back? Anyway, he's helped spend it, and when we get to Sydney I shan't have to face him again, so I don't care a damn. I've g-given my credit note for ten pounds when I land to—to—the barman, too. I'm b-broke, ole girl."

He sobbed helplessly.

"He offered me the money. People always do. They all think I'm well off when I tell them who the pater is. And so I should be if he wasn't such a stingy old devil."

His sobbing ceased, his face looked hard and cynical again. Marcella watched him in amazement. She was not sure whether to be disgusted with him or sorry for him.

At last she spoke.

"Louis—I don't understand a bit. Why did you do it?"

"Because he said rude things about you! He hates you! I only made him my enemy for your sake—and now you won't let me cut adrift from him. That's just like all women! Once they get their claws on money there's no getting them off again."

"I'm not asking why you fought him, you idiot. I'm asking you why you made such an idiotic mess of things at Naples."

He sobbed for awhile, sitting on the floor, leaning his head on her trunk where the broken lock dangled. She laid her hand on his head with an uncontrollable impulse of pity; his hair was matted and dull as though it, had not been brushed for years.

"I c-can't explain it, even to myself, Marcella. But I—I th-think it w-was because I g-got a bit huffy with the idea th-that I was depending on you for everything. I f-felt as if I was tied to your apron strings. I felt as if I was being a g-good little b-b-boy, you know. So I thought I'd kick a bit! But I w-was trying damned hard before. You know I was."



She knit her brows and said, very slowly, as though she had not known the end of the sentence when she began to speak.

“Louis—don’t you—perhaps—think it’s wrong—to try so hard? I mean, it’s morbid to be always saying ‘I’m a drunkard. If I don’t keep myself keyed up every minute I’ll fall—’ Don’t you think it would be better if you forgot all about it, and just said, ‘I’m Louis Farne, the biggest thing that ever was in the annals of humanity.’ I don’t know, but that seems more sensible to me. You see, you’re rather a self-willed sort of person, really. You like to have you own way. Then why on earth not have your own way with whisky.”

He stared at her and started in surprise, his jaw dropping. She looked at the streaks of dust and blood on his face, through which his tears had made blurred runnels.

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"I n-never thought of that before. Of course you're right—I ought to have thought of it—even from the point of view of a psychologist."

"I don't think it's anything to do with any 'ologists at all. It's just common sense. Louis, I've been thinking a lot this week. You know, when father used to get—ill—no, drunk (Why should I be afraid to tell the truth, in spite of your sneers about poor father?) I was too wee to know very much. But knowing him as I do, I'm certain he tried and tried again. After mother died he left whisky alone, though he still had it in the house. He took to reading philosophy instead. You see, he was not like you. There was a hardness, a bravery in him that you haven't got. You have cussedness instead and cussedness is a thing you can never be sure of. You see," she went on, flushing a little, and suddenly tossing her head proudly, "you don't understand this, and it may sound most appalling snobbishness to you. But my father's people have always been rulers—little kings—fighters, while yours have been just ordinary, protected folk. My people have had to fight for everything, even their food, their lands, their home. Yours have had shops and investments and policemen round every corner—there is a difference—Louis, am I offending you?" she asked anxiously.

"Go on!" he said hoarsely.

"Well, father tried. But trying wasn't any use. He read philosophy to get himself interested in something. But philosophy wasn't gripping enough. It seems we've all got to find something to anchor on, and it's different for almost everyone. That's where we can help each other by trying to understand each other's needs and offering suggestions. Like sailors do—with charts and things. All this philosophy of father's! It reminds me of a horse I saw once at Carlrossie Fair. It had a most horrible ulcer on its shoulder and they'd tried to hide it up by plaiting its mane and tying it with a great heap of ribbons. That doesn't cure anything! You know there's a phrase we use often about people who are miserable—we say, 'Oh, he needs to be taken out of himself.' Isn't that a vivid way of putting it, if you stop to think?"

He nodded, and still stared fascinated at her, drinking in every slow, halting word.

"I suppose father brooded just like you do. He used to get very grumpy, and very, very unhappy. He begged and pleaded with me for understanding, and I couldn't give it to him. Then one day he got dreadfully drunk, after a whole year away from it. And mother's cousin came. He talked to father for five or six hours while Aunt and I kept shivering and thinking father would murder him. Our people usually do murder people who annoy them. But Cousin came out of the room and said, 'Andrew has cast his burden on the Lord.' He said it as if he was saying, 'Andrew has sneezed, or put some coal on the fire'—the most ordinary way you can imagine. And that was the end of whisky for father. After that he tried to make everyone he knew cast their burden on the Lord. I rather felt like laughing at the time. It seemed rather silly, and just a bit vulgar—

most religion is, isn't it? But since I've been worrying myself to death about you I've understood all about poor father."

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"I don't see it," he said hopelessly.

"Listen. Until father gave up trying himself and realized that he was weak, he was—was—sort of hiding the ulcer with a bunch of ribbons. But the minute he gave up, everything was different. He didn't say any more, 'I'm Andrew Lashcairn, the son of generations of drunkards and madmen.' He changed it and said, 'I'm God's man—I've given Him my homage and made Him the Captain of my life.' And then, don't you see, he stopped being shut in inside himself any longer. He began to love me and be gentle to me. Louis, do you know, I believe you're tackling this worry in the wrong way. It can't be right—being rude to me, growling all the time about your father and mother—thinking, thinking, thinking all the time about yourself and your weakness until the whole universe is yourself and your weakness. Can't you see how bad it is, you who are a doctor? You know the old saying about giving a dog a bad name and hanging him. Louis, you're giving yourself a bad name, and hanging yourself."

"Oh, I say, Marcella," he gasped. "Do you think—" he broke off, and groaned again.

"Louis, I *know*. I don't *think* anything about it! The other day I was reading a most extraordinary book the schoolmaster lent me. It was about St. Francis of Assisi. It said that, by contemplation of the wounds of Christ, in time he came to feeling pain in his hands and feet and side—"

"Balderdash!" muttered Louis impatiently. "Auto-suggestion!"

"Auto—what's that?" she asked. He explained and she cried out eagerly:

"Well, can't you see you're doing exactly the same thing? And you call it balderdash when other people do it! Those wounds of St. Francis were called the Stigmata—can't you see that you're giving yourself the stigmata of drunkenness?"

"I've got them," he cried hoarsely. "I'm done. I'm even a thief."

"Oh, you idiot! How sorry I am for my father! He used to call me an idiot, and have me to put up with. And now I've got you, and you're a thousand times denser than ever I was! You're neither a drunkard nor a thief, Louis. Look here, to begin with, how much do you owe Fred? You shall have all I've got. If I give it to you you can't be a thief any more."

Between them they had just enough money for Fred and a few shillings left. He wept as she fastened it in an envelope and asked him to take it along to Fred's cabin at once.

"I—I s-say, Marcella. I—I—d-daren't," he groaned. "He'll ask me to wet it. And I'll not be able to say no. And oh my God, I don't want to do it any more."

“Then I’ll take it,” she said promptly, and darted along with it to Number Fifteen, listened while Ole Fred said every insulting thing he could about Louis and all Louis’s ancestors and then calmly asked him for a receipt for the money.

Louis was still sitting on the floor. He looked up, his bloodshot eyes appealing as he looked at her.

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"I say, M-m-marcella. I'm sorry I said all those nasty things about your father."

"There you are again, Louis! Forget them all! Forget everything but the future now. I can't imagine where I've got this conviction from, but it's absolutely right, I know. If you'll wipe out all your memory and start clean, you'll be cured."

"I could never do as your father did—all that religion business."

"I don't think I could, Louis. Father saw God as a militant Captain, someone outside himself. I'd never get thinking that about God. But it seems to me, in your case, you want to find someone you could trust, someone who would take the responsibility from you. Just as God did for father. Even if we say there is no God at all, he thought there was and acted on his thought—I suppose it's when we feel weak as father did that we get the idea of God at all."

"It all seems rot to me," he told her. "I laugh at God—as a relic of fetishism."

There was a long, hopeless silence. At last he said dully:

"There are some doctors—our old Dean at St. Crispin's, that I could throw myself upon as your father threw himself upon God. But they're not here."

As she sat, frowning, trying most desperately to help him, finding her unready brain a blank thing like the desert, realizing that, in all her reading there was nothing that could help, since there was no strong helper in the world save that Strong Man God who had gripped her father's imagination and could never grip Louis's, a whole pageant of dreams passed before her; dreams, intangible ideas which she grasped eagerly—visions—she saw herself John the Baptist, "making straight the way of the Lord"—she saw Siegfried, King Arthur—and, with a heart-leaping gasp she asked herself, "Why should not I be Louis's Deliverer? Why should not I be God's pathway to him? Why should not I be Siegfried?" And all the time her brain, peopled with myths, saw only the shining armour, the glittering fight; she did not see the path of God deeply rutted by trampling feet, burnt by the blazing footsteps of God. She heard herself as John's great crying voice and heeded the prison and the martyrdom not at all: it was a moment's flash, a moment's revelation. Then she turned to him. Her eyes were very bright. She spoke rapidly, nervously.

"Louis—that doctor you know—the Dean. Do you think they are the only wise folks on earth? I mean, do you think wisdom begins and ends with wise people? I don't, you know." she paused, frowning, not quite sure where this thought was going to lead her.

"They're the best chaps on earth," he murmured. "I c-could have b-been like them."

"But what is it makes them wise and fine? It's—I think—because they get rid of themselves, and let God shine through them to other people."

He turned impatiently. She caught his hot, damp, dirty hand in hers.

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"Louis, I don't know very much. I've proved I can't hold you very well already, but I care an awful lot. Louis—how would it be if you threw it all on to me for a while till either you believe in God or in yourself? And I've a sort of belief that, whichever you believe in first, you'll believe in the other automatically—I'm not a bit clever, Louis. I never was. Always I get puzzled, always I realize how utterly unlearned I am. Always father called me an idiot and threw things at me for it. But in spite of being a duffer I'm sure I can help you."

"You could if you were with me every minute. I'd rather be with you than most people. But the minute I'm away from you I get dragged."

"Well, why shouldn't I stop with you the whole time, never leave you a minute? Let's be married, and then I could."

She looked at him anxiously. There was not a glimmer of shyness or excitement about her. She was still in her dream world; she knew that marriage would keep them together always. So she suggested marriage. She was not, yet, consciously in love.

He stared at her, stammered a little as he tried to speak and then, suddenly sobered, snatched at her hand.

"Do you mean it, knowing what I am? I'm an awful waster, Marcella—there's nothing on earth I can do for a living."

She frowned a little.

"But that's nothing to do with it. We'll find some way of living. You know that. We'd have to if we were not married, wouldn't we? And stop all this about being a waster. You're not anything of the sort. You're not anything but what you're going to be."

"And you really, really, won't go back on it? I make so many promises and break them. I can't believe other people much."

"Of course I won't go back on it. I want to stay with you. I never want to be with anyone else at all on earth."

"But why?" he asked, humble for the first time in his life.

"I haven't the slightest idea. You seem very clever to me. That's one thing. And—and the way you *depend*. Oh dear, I feel I've got to kidnap both you and Jimmy and run away with you to some safe place."

"Good Lord!" he said, laughing harshly. "I'm just thinking of Violet."

"Why? She can't mind, now she's married."





"No. It was the idea of Violet's trying to kidnap me, and loving me because I depended on her. Lord, she did the depending."

"That was why she wasn't any use to you, I suppose. Besides, Louis, you know, I love you when you're not—not ill. And I love the way your eyes look."

"Good Lord," he cried again, and started up sharply. "I say, Marcella, I'm off to have a bath. Wait here for me—" He peeped into her mirror. He had not shaved for a week and looked thoroughly disreputable. Holding out his hand he looked at it earnestly. It shook, as he had expected.

"Oh, I say, what a waster I look. I do hope to the Lord my hand's steady enough for a shave."

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"Let me do it," she said. "It would be fun."

"I'm damned—Oh, I beg your pardon, old girl!—but I'm hanged if I'll not make my hand steady. I'll do it, I tell you! If I cut myself in bits, serve me right! I'll be half an hour and then—then—well, wait!"

She heard him in his cabin, whistling as he dragged out his trunk, pushed it back roughly, dropped and smashed a tumbler and then rushed along the alley-way. After awhile she heard him come back, heard the sound of violent brushing, heard him kick things and swear, drop things, bundle things about. She sat down on her trunk suddenly weak as she realized what she had done. She had never thought of being married before; marriage seemed a thing for elderly people; there seemed something ungallant, something a little dragging about marriage that rather frightened her. Her mother's marriage, she was beginning to understand, had been a thing of horror. She thought of those stifled cries in the night at the old farm, cries that she had thought meant that ghosts were walking; she heard with terrible distinctness the voice of the Edinburgh specialist as he said, "In my opinion the injury was caused by a blow—a blow, Mr. Lashcairn." Then, quite suddenly she laughed. It was quite amusing to think of Louis's making anyone ill by a blow.

"He'd never have fought Ole Fred if they hadn't both been drunk," she said slowly, staring at the boards of the floor, and her quick imagination showed her the two of them, fighting ignobly, all dust and sweat and ill-aimed blows. They could only hurt each other because both were too unsteady to dodge futile lungings. There was nothing of the Berserk about Louis.

Panic came to her. The things she realized about marriage were that it was irrevocable, and that it meant a frighteningly close proximity; and in that swift vision of Louis's fight—even though it had been in defence of her—she had realized that it was utterly impossible for her to be with him for the rest of her life.

"Oh how could I? How can I? How can I be glittering and shining with a man who is always crying? How can we be—be conquerors together when I never, never think of him except as 'poor boy' or 'silly idiot'? Oh no—no—I can't! I can't! Even if I do save him, what is there in that for me? I want to shine—I daren't have hot, dirty, damp hands dragging at me. I can't. I must be free, uncaught—"

The cabin became a cage; she wanted to push out the strong steel plates and get out into the night: Louis's weakness, which had been all his appeal to her, seemed an intolerable infliction, a cruel hoax on the part of fate, just as though, for her shining lover, someone had substituted a changeling stuffed with sawdust.

"I must tell him. But it's so cruel of me. I'm cruel—but I must tell him."

In the next cabin he began to sing, rather jerkily, a song everyone on the ship was singing just then.

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"Won't you come back to Bombombay?  
Won't you come back to Bombombay?  
I'm grieving, now you're leaving  
For a land so far away.  
So sad and lonely shall I be,  
When you are far away from me."

It was not the tipsy singing she had heard in the morning; it was jumpy, tuneless singing; she guessed that it was assisting in the process of shaving, for she heard a few "damns" peppering the song, which suggested that his shaky hand was wielding the razor badly. And with the song came pity that swamped disgust and disillusion. It seemed so sad to her that, when hope dawned upon him, he should celebrate it by singing a piece of sentimental, however haunting, doggerel. To go there and tell him that she, too, was going to break promises, to change her mind—it was impossible. It was like breaking promises to a little child. Came a blinding flash of self-realization.

"Marcella Lashcairn," she said, standing under the white flare of the electric light and facing herself squarely in the little mirror, which showed her two scornful grey eyes, "You're a hypocrite! You think it's very splendid and grand to save a big, grown-up man from getting drunk. That's only because you're a girl and are flattered at his dependence on you. If you saw any other girl acting as you do you'd say it was sheer impudence! And you think it's very wonderful that anyone so clever as Louis should notice you. You're flattered, you see—that's self-love, not Louis-love! Oh very beautiful! And you're such an illogical sort of idiot that you want to save him, and yet you want him so splendid and shining that he doesn't need any saving. Oh go—get out—all of you!" and she waved her hand to her dreams and sent the shining Lover riding on on his quest without her. It was just as she used to talk to the gulls and the winds on Ben Grief—when she was having things out with herself before. "I've taken the man I want—as all the Lashcairns do unless they are like Aunt Janet and—Oh, anyway, I'd rather be killed than be like her. It's rather illogical to growl at my choice the minute I've made it."

Before she could stop herself she was out of the cabin; she did not stop to think that Louis might be embarrassed: she dashed into his cabin. He was fastening his tie.

"Louis," she cried, and stopped breathless. He seemed very different as she looked over his shoulder into the mirror. Cold water had removed the traces of a week's neglect; the razor had done a good deal, too, and a clean suit had transformed him. His eyes were different: there was a light of resolution in them and they met hers direct. She scarcely knew him.

"Hello!" he said and let the tie hang as he stared at her.

“Where’s the other man who used to sleep in here?” she asked. That was not what she had intended to say when she came in.

“He’s gone. He was on the way to Cairo. I’ve got it to myself now.”

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“Oh—”

“Marcella,” he said solemnly. “You really mean it? You’re not going to let me down? Violet let me down—and I’m always letting people down. I can’t trust people now.”

“Supposing I’d wanted to marry Violet, I’d have married her,” she said, her brow puckered. “And I wouldn’t *be* let down.”

“No, I suppose you wouldn’t,” he said, slowly.

“Louis—” she began again, breathlessly, and then let the words out in a torrent. “Louis, I *know* I’ve got to marry you. Do you understand that? It’s—it’s inevitable. It was from the minute I met you. You’ll never understand that, not being a Kelt, though. I know it quite well. And I’m afraid I’m going to shy at it. And, for my sake as well as yours, I’ve not to shy. Louis, will you grab me tight?”

He stared at her, utterly at a loss. He did not begin to grasp what she meant. To him she was just “fickle woman” always changing her mind. He had, all his life, generalized about woman; he had never known a woman who was not rather vapid, rather brainless; he had the same idea of women as Professor Kraill had ventilated in his lectures—that they were the vehicles of the race, living for the race but getting all the fun they could out of the preliminary canter, since the race was a rather strenuous, rather joyless thing for them. And it was in men they found the fun. Yet here was Marcella, who was quite different from anything feminine he had ever seen or imagined, suddenly appealing to him not to let her be fickle. Immediately he felt very manly, very responsible. Then he laughed.

“*Quis custodiet ipsos custodies?*” he said, looking into her eyes.

“Father often said that. What does it mean?”

“Who’ll look after the looker-after?” he said, with a laugh. “Here’s me begging you to look after me and save me from going to hell. And here’s you asking me to grab you for fear you’ll change your mind. I wonder which is going to have the hardest job?”

She looked at him and said hurriedly:

“Louis, couldn’t we be married now—to-night? In Scotland we do, you know—just in any room without church or anything.”

“But—I wish we could!” he said, his hands beginning to shake.

“I want to be sure—”

"I'm afraid we can't," he said, anxiously. "I'm afraid we'll have to wait till we get to Sydney."

Unexpectedly memory brought back the thought that when he became engaged to Violet he had kissed her and held her in his arms; he remembered it very well. To get to the necessary pitch of courage he had had to get very drunk on champagne, for champagne always made him in a generally kissing and love-making mood that involved him often with barmaids and street ladies. He knew very well that he would never have thought of making love to Marcella: if she had not taken things into her own hands, they would have parted in Sydney, necessary as he considered her to his well

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being, much as he liked to be near her. He had, even through his self-satisfied alcohol dream, seen her disgusted looks at Naples when he had spoken to her. He guessed that the sort of half-maudlin love-making that had won Violet would never suit Marcella. And he knew beyond the shadow of doubt that no power on earth save whisky could ever get him to make love to anything—even a young girl who seemed in love with him already.

He was extraordinarily shy with and cynical about women. He had always been detested by the servants at home—more or less unjustly. He spoke to them abominably because he was frightened of their sex. Had he not bullied them when he wanted small services performed, they never would have been performed at all, for he would have had no courage to ask civilly for anything. To his sister's friends when he was forced into their company he was boorish, simply because girls put him into such a panic of inferiority that, in self defence, he had to assert himself unnaturally. Years ago his sister had refused to make one of a theatre or concert party that included Louis; either he got drunk in the interval and rejoined them later, making them conspicuous by his behaviour, or else he sat at their side glowering and boorish, afraid even to look at the players on the stage, too shy even to negotiate the purchase of chocolates or programme. The last time he had been at the theatre with his sister and Violet had been after a whole fortnight without whisky. They were rather late; the play had begun. His sister had whispered to him to get a programme. Afraid of being conspicuous he had refused; she had ordered him to get it. People behind had hissed "Hush" indignantly and finally Violet, with a contemptuous smile, had bought programmes and chocolates for herself and the sister, cutting Louis dead.

But whisky transformed him from a twitching neurotic into a megalomaniac. He imagined that every woman he met was in love with him indecently and physically; without whisky he saw women in veils and shrouds; whisky made him see them with their clothes off, their eyes full of lewd suggestion. Even to the elderly suburban ladies who visited his mother he was tipsily improper. To find a girl like Marcella, who did not put him either in a fever or a panic of sexuality was supremely reassuring: she seemed to him like a nice man friend might be—though he never had been able to acquire a man friend. He was intensely grateful to her for marrying him: he was not her lover; he was her dependent: he was treating her as he might have treated the old Dean at the hospital, or as her father had treated God. But—his conventional sense told him to kiss her and make her "just a girl."





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He took both her hands in his and drew her towards him. Her eyes, which began by being startled, grew suddenly soft, as his face came close to hers and his eyes looked into hers for a wavering second before they dropped awkwardly and looked at her cheek. And then he kissed her. It took a long time. It took just as long as it takes to transform a whole system of reasoned thinking into something chaotic, nebulous. The chances are that, had that kiss never happened to Marcella, she would have gone on with her dreams of deliverance, her ideals of a high road through life. Louis's lips opened a locked door in her personality. When he let her go again she looked at him, rather frightened and bewildered. She was trembling almost unbearably; her face, usually the fairest white, made gold by the sun and the wind, was flushed; her grey eyes were deep blue; her mind, for the while, was a blank.

"Oh Louis!" she gasped.

"Marcella—" he began but she seized his hands again.

"Oh Louis, please do it again." That time she closed her eyes and was only conscious of thinking that, if the ship went down, it would not matter just so long as nothing interrupted the kiss.

"Dear little girl," he whispered, and ceased to feel frightened of her. As he saw the tremendous effect his kisses had on her, masculine superiority put pokers into his backbone and made him feel a very fine fellow indeed. He had no time to think what his kisses had done to Marcella. All that he grasped was that she was not like Violet who had drawn away from him to lead him on further; who had flirted with him and teased him seductively, and made him pay dearly for kisses by pleadings and humiliations: who had never given anything, and had never come one inch of the way to meet him.

"I say, Marcella," he said, as he let her go. "Don't you know anything at all about the art of lying? Can't you lie?"

She frowned at him. He went on quickly.

"I've never met a girl yet who admitted that she liked a man to kiss her. They lie and lie—they put up barriers every minute."

"There can't be barriers between us, Louis. I'd rather die than have barriers," she said quietly, though she did not realize why, or what she implied.

## CHAPTER XI

Looking back in after years on the six weeks of the voyage Marcella saw them as days and nights coloured by madness and storms through which Jimmy went like a little wistful ghost, hanging on to her hand, the only thing in grey tones amidst splashes of

wild colour. Many a time in the sun-drowned days and windless nights Marcella was reminded of those old tales she had heard on Lashnagar from Wullie's lips, of the hot summer when the witch-woman came and men went mad just before the destruction came on the village. It was as though the *Oriana* went on ploughing through the waters, with the Dog-Star hitched to her masthead

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inflaming men's blood. Marcella was in a state of puzzlement. She was puzzled at herself, puzzled at Louis, puzzled at the people round her. Men went about barefoot in pyjamas, women in muslin nightdresses all day after Suez; in the Indian Ocean, one blazing day, they ran into the tail of a monsoon; the lower decks were swamped and the steerage passengers were sent on to the upper decks, where Marcella and Louis sat surrounded by half a dozen forlorn children whose parents had succumbed to the pitching of the ship and the heat. Great walls of green, unfoaming water rose sullenly and menacingly higher than the ship, which tossed like a weightless cork; seas came aboard with an effect of silence; down in the saloon glasses, crockery and cutlery crashed to the deck with a momentary fracture of the deadly quiet which seemed all the more silent afterwards: occasionally a child screamed in fright and was hushed by an almost voiceless mother, while stewards went about with trays of iced drinks, slipping to the deck in a dead faint now and again with a momentary smash that was swallowed to silence immediately. Underneath the sulky, heaving water lurked death, silent and sharp, from which the shoals of flying fishes escaped for the moment by soundless, silvery, aimless poising in the blue air, only to fall back exhausted again into the green water and the waiting white jaws. Some of the fishes flopped on board, and were put out of life by the blows of the sailors who dried and stuffed them and sold them afterwards to the passengers. To Marcella everything seemed cruel and mad and preying. The passengers were cruel—to each other and to the stewards; one day, going into the saloon by chance, she found Knollys leaning over a table looking white and sick, as he tried to polish spoons and forks.

"Are you ill?" she asked him.

"There's only two of us—including me—that haven't crocked up," he said; "people don't seem to think it's hot for us, or that we feel fed up at all. That Mrs. Hetherington seems to think I'm a private sort of lady's maid to her alone. All these women do—sitting about in deck chairs calling 'Steward' all day long! In the third class alone there's six stewards in hospital! And only yesterday I caught it from the Chief because the cutlery hadn't been polished—not that that's my job at all, really—"

The next moment Knollys fell over in a dead faint, and copying what she had seen him do when passengers fainted, Marcella fetched a pillow from her cabin, laid it under his back on the floor and left him while she polished the cutlery. Louis found her there and they came near to fighting about it.

"What on earth are you doing?" he asked in amazement.

"Poor Knollys has gone down," she said, thinking that adequate explanation.

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Louis looked at him casually. Marcella was coming to understand that he looked upon illness with a certain hardness and lack of pity that surprised her; he was immensely interested in it, he liked to dabble in it, but not from a passion of healing nearly so much as from curiosity and technical interest. To him, in illness, curing the patient mattered infinitely less than beating the disease. He had a queer snobbishness about illness, too, that amazed her. To him Knollys, a steward, ill meant infinitely less than the illness of a member of his own class would have meant. This struck Marcella as illogical. To her it seemed that, in illness at least, all men were brothers.

"There's a stoker just died of heat apoplexy: there'll be a funeral presently," he said coolly. "What on earth are you doing?"

"People are so unkind. Knollys got into trouble yesterday because these silly things were not clean," she said, polishing away furiously.

"But you can't do the work of a servant," he said, aghast.

"I can. Of course I can. I often have. I've worked in the fields with the men, and I've milked the cows and made the butter. Oh, lots of things—"

"Oh well, I suppose a farmer's daughter can do those things, Marcella. But, look here, old girl, when we're married you'll have to be on your dignity a bit."

She flushed a little and the storm light came into her eyes. Louis did not see it. He sat on the edge of the table, and expostulated with her for a long time. But she went on until the last spoon was polished.

"Don't you think we'd better get something for Knollys? Sal volatile or iced water, or something?" she said at last, looking at her black hands.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, leave him alone. It's typical of the servant class to be bowled over on the slightest provocation. I expect, as a matter of fact, he can hear what we're saying now. He's got you taped pretty well and knew that if he worked on your sympathies you'd do his work while he miked about. The working class is always like that—no backbone."

She wondered if he were joking, but she saw from his solemn face that he meant it all, and she gathered that he considered himself very much better than Knollys. He did not see the contemptuous amusement in her face, and went on, stammering a little because he had at last brought himself to say something that had been on his mind for days.

He lit a cigarette nervously, fumbled with a bunch of keys in his trousers pocket and then, looking at her dirty hands, said:



“L-I-look here, old girl. I d-don’t w-want to quarrel with you. But I w-want you to f-face things a bit. Y-you s-see—you’ve been used to a class of society quite different from mine. You know—look here, I say, I don’t want you to go making *faux pas*.”

“What do you mean?” she asked ominously.

“That’s French for mistakes, don’t you know—mistakes in—er—well, what one might call breeding, don’t you know. Y-you know—associating with stewards and—and—common people like Jimmy, for instance. He’s the very lowest bourgeois type.”

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“Much lower, I suppose, than Ole Fred, and those drinkers in New Zealand, isn’t he?” she said calmly, her eyes glinting. He flushed hotly and looked hurt. Immediately she was sorry.

“There, I’m sorry, Louis. I ought not to have said a thing like that. It was unforgivable. But you do talk like an idiot. How on earth can one make mistakes in breeding? Oh, you and I talk different languages, that’s all, and it’s not any use at all trying to think and talk the same.”

“Well, I know more of the world than you do, and you must let me teach you, Marcella. Oh, I know you’re—you’re braver and stronger morally than I. But, you know, when we get to Sydney and are married we’ll have to stay in hotels and—and—I don’t want my wife making *faux pas*. It’d be just like you—you’re such a dear, really—to go doing things servants ought to do—in public, I mean, and make a fool of me.”

She looked at him and smiled reminiscently and rather cruelly. But he looked so solemn, so serious that, in sheer mischief, she told him that she would be very careful not to make him conspicuous by her blunders. And then she asked him an unexpected question.

“Louis, did you write and tell your father you didn’t want any more money?”

He took out his packet of cigarettes—he never possessed a cigarette case, such things were to be turned into money too easily. His hands were trembling as he struck a match.

“Yes—I—t-told him,” he said jerkily.

“What did you say about me?” she asked curiously.

He pondered for a moment. At last he decided to be honest.

“I didn’t tell him.”

“Didn’t you, Louis?” she said, looking hurt. “Why?”

“He’d only think you were a waster. He wouldn’t think anyone but a waster would marry me. If I told him you were a Scotch farmer’s daughter he’d picture something in short skirts, red cheeks and bare legs that talked like Harry Lauder. Or else he’d think I was lying, and had got off with a barmaid and wasn’t married at all, and was living on some girl. They’d always think the worst of me, at home. I’m not even going to tell the Mater —”

She thought for some minutes.

"I don't much care," she said at last. "I think your father's rather a horrible man, but I may be wrong about him. My impressions of him are formed from yours, you see. It seems that no one but a most inhuman man could kick his son out. But then—well, I don't know just how much you worried him. But I'd have liked you to tell your mother. She looked so grieved that day on the tender, and she was crying so miserably. I'd have liked her to know you were taken care of."

"She wouldn't believe it, either, Marcella," he said gloomily. "And you don't know my Mater. The very fact that you were in the steerage would make her think you couldn't possibly be any good in the world. If I told her you cleaned spoons and forks for a steward she'd think you did it from habit because you'd been someone's servant. They've no imagination—"

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"All mothers have, I'm sure," she told him. "I'd have liked your mother to be my friend. I'd have liked to write to her about you—"

"God forbid," he said fervently, and once more she gave way.

Later on that day they discussed ways and means. His definite picture of getting married and staying in hotels in Sydney had made the dream concrete. She had hitherto simply seen them both glittering along in an aura of Deliverance. Right at the back of her mind she still clung to pictures of knightly mail, obtained from she had not the slightest idea where. But that fitted badly with hotels in Sydney and conventions he was going to teach her. In the evening they went to their favourite seat on the anchor and watched the phosphorescence shimmering away in ghostly paths to the star-splashed sky.

"Louis," she said hurriedly, "how much does it cost you to get married in Australia?"

"Lord knows, I don't," he said, sitting up sharp. "There's a music-hall song about 'She cost me seven and sixpence; I wish I'd bought a dog.' But that's in England. I've a hazy notion that it's much more expensive in Australia than England. Why?"

"I'm wondering how we're going to do it. We've about eleven shillings in the world—you see, uncle is meeting me in Melbourne. I had a cable at Port Said to say so. And I'm afraid I'll have to do a little evasion. I don't know him at all, but he may think it his duty to see that I go with him to Wooratonga. Or he may enquire into your prospects like uncles do—"

"Good God!" he said, throwing his cigarette overboard and staring straight at her in horror. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Nor had I. It was all just romance till you mentioned it to-day, and then—probably because I was doing such a prosaic thing as cleaning spoons and forks, I saw all the details for the first time. Wedding rings are made of gold. They must cost a tremendous lot of money. And if being married is only seven and sixpence, I don't see how we are going to spare seven and sixpence out of eleven shillings—we've got to eat something, and live somewhere. You can't eat marriage licences, nor use them as shelter. I've seen one once, belonging to Mrs. Mactavish. She kept it sewed inside the lining of her bodice, all among the bits of whalebone that made her stand up straight. It's a crackly thing like a cheque—"

"Oh, do stop talking nonsense," cried Louis, suddenly desperate when faced with a problem. "Marcella, what are we going to do? Oh, why did I spend that money? Why were you such a fool as to pay it back to Fred? He's drunk it all by now. It did him no good, and think how useful it would have been to us!"



“Don’t be so idiotic! As if I’d be married with money belonging to him! My goodness! The best thing is not to be married at all, until we’ve worked for some money.”

“Oh yes,” he cried bitterly. “Just like a woman, backing out now things are a bit difficult! I tell you, if we’re parted when we get to Sydney I’ll be in with the first waster that comes along and start the whole beastly pub-crawl again—”

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"But—eleven shillings, Louis!" she said, laughing at the absurdity of it.

"We've *got* to get the money!" he cried wildly. "If I do a burglary! Look here, Marcella, the only thing is for me to get boozed and borrow it! If I had half a dozen whiskies I'd go to the Governor-General himself and get it out of him! But if I were not boozed I couldn't ask—ask even for the job of gorse-grubbing or road sweeping. I haven't even the courage to ask you for a kiss if I'm not boozed."

He looked at her. His eyes were infinitely pathetic.

"Is there anyone about?" she whispered.

"Only the man in the crow's-nest," he said, "why?"

"Never mind him—give me a kiss, Louis. I'm not frightened, if you are!" she whispered softly, and half awkward and shy he held her in his arms, gathering courage as he felt how she trembled, and guessed how his kisses made her soft and helpless in his arms. "Let's forget worries for a while—we'll never be sitting on an anchor in the Indian Ocean again, in a sea of ghost lights, shall we, Louis?"

"Say 'Louis dear,'" he ordered, gathering courage, kissing her hand. She said it, a little hesitatingly.

"We never say words like that at home," she whispered. "Only mother did, because she was English—"

"I'm English, too. I like words like that. Now say 'Louis darling.'"

"It sounds as if you're a baby."

"So I am—Marcella's baby," he whispered. "Say 'Louis darling.'"

"I can't, Louis," she said uneasily, "I can't say love things. I can only do them. I love you—oh, most dreadfully, but I can't talk about it."

She buried her face on his shoulder. Through his thin canvas coat she could feel his heart thumping as hers was.

"I'm going to kiss that funny little hollow place at the bottom of your neck," she whispered in a smothered voice. "What a good thing you don't wear collars in the Indian Ocean! Louis, tell me all the funny Latin names for the bones in your fingers, and I'll kiss them all—I can't say silly words to you like—like Violet could."

After a while he tried to carry his point.

“Now say ‘Louis darling,’” he insisted.

She shook her head.

“Why can’t you be like an ordinary girl?” he objected, holding her tight so that he could look into her face. “Ordinary girls don’t mind calling a chap darling.”

“I can’t, anyway. I *never* can talk much, unless I’m simply taken out of myself and made to. I can’t imagine what we’ll find to talk about all the time when we’re married. But—do you know, whenever we get up here in the dark like this, I always wish it was Sydney tomorrow, and we could be married. I hate to be away from you a minute; I wish we could be together all day and all night, without stopping for meal times—”

“You’ve got the tropics badly, my child,” he said, laughing a little forcedly, as he tried to light a cigarette with trembling fingers and finally gave it up.

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"Why? Do people love each other more in the tropics?" she asked. "You love me, don't you?"

"Of course I do. But girls are not supposed to talk about it like men do. Girls have to pretend they don't feel all wobbly and anyhow, because it's more fun for a man when a girl doesn't hurl herself at him."

"But why pretend? Why not be honest about it?" she said, her voice a little flat. "You want me to love you, don't you?"

"Course I do. But you're so queer. Most girls let a chap do the love-making. They dress themselves up—all laces and ribbons and things, and pretend they're frightened to make a chap all the keener."

She thought it out, sitting up as straight as possible.

"I couldn't, Louis," she said decidedly. "I've read that in books, years ago. I didn't understand it then, but I do now. And I think it's horrible. Father had a lot of books about those things and I read them to him when he was ill. I was looking one up again the other day—that day you threw the teapot in the sea." And she told him about the "preliminary canter."

"Well, that's absolutely right," he said coolly. "Women are like that. They're specialized for sex. Don't you admit that you've no brains? You've told me so many a time, and your father always said you were an idiot. And don't you admit that when I kiss you—especially here in the tropics where everything is a bit accelerated—you feel different—all wobbly—?"

She nodded, looking startled.

"Well, what does it mean? It simply means you're specialized. Yes you are, Marcella. Specialized as a woman. All this—this liking to be kissed, and feeling wobbly. They're Kraill's preliminary canter."

"Oh no—no!" she cried in horror.

"Oh, yes, yes!" he mocked, laughing at her gently.

"But Louis, how horrible!"

"Well, you're always preaching honesty and facing facts," he said bluntly.

"Yes—" she said thoughtfully. "But—I don't like it. I hate it. I don't believe Kraill thinks like that, really—I've read three of his courses of lectures and in all of them he doesn't

seem to approve of women being like that. Just vehicles of existence or bundles of sensation. He seems, to me, to resent women."

"Yes—after many love adventures," he began.

"But—don't you think all the time he was just getting his education? Like I am? A month ago I'd have been horrified at the thought of kissing you. Now I like it. A few months ago I loathed the thought of having a body—and just everything connected with it. Now, ever since that day I was getting my nice frock ready to go with you to Pompeii I've not minded it a bit. All the time, now, I wish I was nicer."

"Because you've fallen in love, my child," he said, smiling in supreme superiority. "And falling in love instructs even fools."

"It's taught me some very lovely things the last few days, Louis," she said dreamily. "It's taught me that I've to be very shining, for you. And it's taught me that I'd die for you very happily. But what you've just said—about kissing—has suddenly taught me something very beastly. I wanted to love you with my soul and my mind. And now you say it's the hot weather!"

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"Well, so it is, dearie. Love's not a spiritual nor a mental thing. It's purely physical. A love affair is always a thousand times swifter under the Southern Cross than under the Great Bear. And it's a million times swifter on board ship than anywhere else because people are thrown into such close contact. They've nothing to do and their bodies get slack and pampered, and they eat heaps too much. It's like the Romans in the dying days of Pompeii—eating, drinking and physical love-making. One day I heard Kraill say in a lecture that men and women can't work together, in offices or anything, or scientific laboratories because they—well—they'd get in each other's light and make each other jumpy."

"And do you believe it?"

"Course I do," he said. "Even if you had the brains or the knowledge for—say research work, I couldn't work with you. I'd be thinking of the way your lips look when they're getting ready to kiss me; and of your white shoulders that I can just catch a peep of when you sit a little way behind me, in that white blouse with little fleur-de-lys on the collar. Naturally if I tried to work then, the work would go to pot."

"But—" she tried to control her voice, which shook in spite of herself, "do you—think of those things—about me?"

"Of course. All men do about their women."

"It's horrible," she gasped, frowning at the Southern Cross. "And doesn't it mean that men are specialized, too?"

"Not a bit of it! Men have to do the work of the world. Women are just the softness of life."

"Cushions for men to fall on?" she said mischievously.

"No, half-holidays when he's fed up with work." He looked at her, laughing at her indignant face. "Why be superior, Marcella? You're just as bad as anyone else, only you're not used to it and haven't thought of it before. Who likes being kissed?"

"Oh, but it wouldn't get in the way of my work," she cried, flushing hotly.

"Wait till you try it, dear child. The first time I ever got the fever taught me a lot. It wasn't love, of course."

"When you loved Violet?" she asked in low tones.

"Oh Lord no! This was a little French girl who picked me up when I was squiffed after I'd passed the First. About twenty of us—all from St. Crispin's—had been up for the First. We all passed but two, and we all had to get drunk to buck those two up. We went to



the Empire and kicked up such a gory din that we were helped out. A little mamzelle from the Promenade took charge of me. I—I hadn't thought about those things much before. At home they were taboo. I'd always been terrified of girls—If I hadn't been drunk then I'd never have done it. I thought it unutterably beastly. For months after that I was afraid to look the Mater in the face. I thought she was unutterably beastly, as well, just because she was a woman. It made a tremendous dint on me."

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Marcella grasped about a tenth of what he meant. The rest sank into her mind to puzzle her later. But something sprang to the top of her consciousness and raised a question.

“Louis,” she said quickly, “That night at Naples—when you were naughty. You talked French to me. I don’t know what you said, but the schoolmaster looked shocked.”

He flushed.

“Yes, I’ve been told that before. I always do talk French if I meet a girl when I’m boozy. I used to, to Violet, and she was—oh frightfully disgusted. And once I did to my sister! She, unfortunately, understands French. I suppose it’s a good thing you don’t.”

“Louis, do you say—*wrong* things in French” she whispered. “Things—you know, beastly things?”

He hesitated a moment and an impulse of honesty made him tell her the truth.

“Yes, I believe I say perfectly appalling things. You see—it’s like this. I’m a queer inhibited sort of thing, dear. I’m always—till you took me in hand—fighting drink. I’m in a state of fighting and inhibiting. I’ve always been like that. Even when I was a little kid I was afraid to be natural because I was taught that the natural impulse was the wrong one. I sometimes want to say something frightfully charming to you, and don’t for fear it’s silly. I’m always wondering what people will think of me—because I’m so often wrong, you know.”

“I just don’t care what anyone says or thinks,” she broke in.

“There’s the difference between us, then. Well, you see, being an ordinary, average sort of human being, I think a lot about girls and all that. Only deep down is the puritanical old idea that it’s wicked to do so. Really, honestly, Marcella, I’m not pulling your leg—when I first started dissecting at the hospital, I felt horribly indecent. It was a female thigh! I felt as if it ought to be clothed, somehow—I sort of kept thinking the Pater or someone would come into the lab, and round on me for being immoral. If it had been a male thigh I wouldn’t have cared a brass tanner!”

“It must be awful to have barriers in your mind,” she pondered.

“It was just the same with booze. If I had a beer or a whisky in the club as all the others did, I saw the Pater disembodied before me, and had another to give me the courage necessary to face him. Everything, you see, everything—girls, drink, curiosities, courtesies, kindness—all got lumped together as things to keep in hand. I got in a fever of self-consciousness. I do now. I think everyone is watching and criticizing me. Then, you see, when I’m drunk, the watch I set on myself is turned out to grass and I get a damned good rest. I let myself rip! In my sober moments I daren’t go and order tea for the Mater in a bunshop because I’m petrified with terror of the waitress. When I’m



drunk I'd barge into a harem. That first affair—with the French girl—was a tremendous thing to me. Most boys have played about with that sort of thing before that age. They looked down on me because I hadn't. But it made such a deep dint on my brain that whisky and sex and French are all mixed up together and the one releases the other."

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She sighed.

"I do wish Dr. Angus was here, Louis," she said. "I wish I understood better."

"You understand better than Violet did. She used to stay at our place a good deal, you know, and go with us to the seaside and to Scotland. Even when I was right off whisky she used to drive me to it. Evening dress, you know. Oh, frightfully *evening*! And—in a queer old place we stayed in in Scotland once there were heaps of mice. She used to run out of her room in the middle of the night saying she was frightened of them. And then I had to carry her back, and rub her feet because they'd got cold. She was rather a maddening sort of person, you know. She'd lead one on to biting one's nails and tearing one's hair and then she'd laugh and kiss her hand and run away with my sister into her bedroom. And they'd both laugh. She understood the value of being a woman, did Violet. And she didn't let herself go cheap—I used to get the key of the tantalus and cart a whole decanter of whisky to bed to get over it. If she'd just have let me kiss her —"

He paused, frowning reminiscently.

Marcella sighed, and laid a cool, firm hand on Louis's.

"Louis—I think I'm—cheap."

"So are air and water, dearie," he cried, with sudden passion that surprised her.

"I don't think I'll ever understand men, though. Wine, women and song they seem to lump together into a sort of tolerated degradation."

"I don't know much about song, but women and wine are certainly to be lumped together. They're both an uncontrollable hunger. And they give you a thick head afterwards! You say that Professor chap in his lectures resents women. Of course he does. Don't you think I resent whisky? Wouldn't any man resent the thing that makes dints in him, makes him undignified, body and soul, and gives him a thick head and a sense of repentance? I guess I look a pretty mucky spectacle when I'm drunk. I see myself afterwards, and can imagine the rest. Well, a man in the throes of a woman orgy is just as undignified—even if he doesn't lurch—oh and slobber! I've never heard that your Professor drinks. That doesn't happen to be his hunger, you see. But if he drank to the same extent as he has love-affairs he'd be in an asylum now; and if he were a woman he'd be on the streets! No woman—even if she were a Grand Duchess—would be tolerated with the same number of sex affairs as a man can have. She'd just have to be a prostitute out and out—without choice—or else keep herself in hand."

"Like Aunt Janet," murmured Marcella to herself, "and come to acid drops."

Aloud she said. "Louis—I wish you wouldn't tell me. I always think of clever men like Kraill as gods and heroes—I hate to think they have holes in them. They have such wonderful thoughts."

"That's the devil of it. I know they have. He has—Kraill. I've been to his lectures and felt inspired to do anything. They most of them think much better than they can do, that's about the size of it! I suppose we all do that more or less, but we don't put it on paper to be used in evidence against us. We think fine things and do smudged ones, and so the world goes on."

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There was a long silence. She crept a little closer to him and put her hand into his. He held it tight. It was almost as if her world were shaking about her and even his unsteady hand seemed some support.

At last she said, as if talking to herself.

“Louis—can’t something be done for us all? Can’t we have these things cut out of us like cancers? Can’t we get rid of these horrible desires as we’ve lost tails and hair and things we don’t need? Then in time people would be born without them. Louis—you don’t think—think of me like that, do you—as a—a hunger? As something you must have if you don’t have whisky, or as something that will drive you to whisky if I go away as Violet did?”

“I’m—I’m afraid I do, old girl,” he said. “It’s natural—I say, Marcella—you’re only a kid. I don’t believe you quite realize what you’ve taken on—in that way.”

She looked startled. Then she laughed gaily.

“I’m not afraid of my part of it, Louis,” she said, “but I can’t help thinking that if I’m to be—as you put it—a sort of hunger substituted for whisky, we’re all wrong. Suppose I died, for instance?”

“Marcella, if you die I shall die too. Anything else is unthinkable. I can’t face life without you, now. I can’t be a pariah again. You’re a hunger to me. I’ll admit it. But you’re more. You’re a saviour. And—you don’t know anything about it, dearie. But when we’re married you will, and I suppose I’ll be just the same sort of hunger to you, then. It’s no use blinking your eyes to it. And—be damned glad I love you, and am not like some sort of men. Otherwise—well, Lord knows what would have happened to you. You’re so honest that you think everyone else is. And yet, transparent little fool that you are, in common-sense things, I know that you’re going to keep me straight.”

Back came trooping all the visions of Deliverance, a rich pageantry shutting away the footmarks of the beast she had just glimpsed.

As every beat of the engines brought them nearer and nearer to Sydney consideration of ways and means became even more anxious. Louis spent glowering days. Marcella was quite certain that everything would turn out well.

It was in the dull run between Colombo and Fremantle that they decided upon a plan of action. The nights were getting colder now; they had to sit in thick coats in the evenings. This particular evening it was raining greyly, but they could not sit in the saloon because Ole Fred and his gang had started a smoking concert, and Marcella and Louis would have been ejected forcibly.

“You’re such a fatuous optimist, Marcella,” he said impatiently. “Lord, I wish I’d never started on this business! Everything’s against us—I knew it would be! We’ll give it up. You go off into the back blocks where you will at least be sure of food and a roof. And I’ll go to the devil in the same old way as quickly as possible.”

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"Oh, I could shake you!" she cried. "You know quite well I'm not going to leave you, if we have to live on eleven shillings for the rest of our lives. It isn't eleven shillings now, either. I gave Jimmy half a crown to spend at Colombo."

"Fool," he muttered gloomily.

"Who spent fifteen pounds?" she retorted.

"I say, I'm sorry, old girl, but my nerves are a bundle of rags! I've never had a wife to worry about before—and I can't see how I'm going to make enough money to make her my wife yet—"

Marcella knew nothing whatever about money. She had a few jewels of her mother, but it did not occur to her that they were worth money. Louis had absolutely nothing of value. Guided by past experience his mother had given him the barest necessities for clothes; his watch and most of his clothes he had sold before he sailed. What made him so irritable with Marcella was the knowledge that he could easily get the money by being drunk. Publicans are proverbially open-handed; most publicans would have lent him ten pounds to spend in their establishment if he had thoroughly and courageously drunk and pitched some tale about expecting money by the English mail. He certainly looked worth ten pounds and his father's name as a publisher was fairly well known even in the Colonies. He had frequently "raised" twenty or thirty pounds in this way in New Zealand. Once or twice he had borrowed a few pounds from a doctor by telling him a pitiful tale, but most doctors recognized his symptoms and refused to help him to hurt himself.

Suddenly Marcella gave a little giggle of sheer amusement.

"I don't see much to laugh at," he growled.

"I'm thinking of how worried you were about my dignity as your wife and afraid I'd disgrace you in hotels by being friendly with the servants," she said. "It doesn't look as if we're going to get a tent even."

He read unkindness into her chaffing words and flushed hotly.

Suddenly his silly pride that had lain asleep, for the most part, since Port Said, gave a little struggle and came to wakefulness again. He could not have her laugh at him however good-naturedly. Just as he had not realized he was lying to her when he told her highly coloured versions of his surgical exploits, so he scarcely realized he was lying, as he said, mysteriously:

"Don't be too sure, my child. You won't be laughing at me soon. I may be a bit of a waster, but I'm not the sort to marry a girl without knowing how I'm going to support her.



How do you know you won't be the guest of the Governor-General as soon as he knows I'm in Sydney—"

"Whatever do you mean? Oh, Louis, don't tell me stories! And I don't want to go and see people like Governor-Generals. I want to be alone with you."

"You probably will, my dear girl. But you must remember that a secret service man has to cover up his traces in every way. He has to hide everything, even from his wife."

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"Louis," she said in real distress, clutching his arm, "are you really in the secret service? I'll—I'll forget it all, if you're telling me lies. I'll never think of it again. But it so awful to think you are lying to me!"

"Why should I lie, my darling?" he said, looking hurt, but staring at her mouth instead of looking into her eyes.

"You—you told me—never—to believe you, Louis. Oh, you do make it hard for me. I don't know what to believe. If you're in the secret service don't they pay you any money?"

"Of course—they pay me enough to keep myself going. But it's a patriotic work, you know. And as for not believing me, I told you not to believe me about drinking. That was all."

"But Louis, if you have money, why are you so worried about it now? And—didn't you tell me your father sent you out here?"

"Yes, he did, dearie," he said earnestly. "It's quite true. I was a rotter and he got fed up with me. But I've done a lot of secret service work and didn't dare even tell him. I'm under an oath of secrecy. The times I've had to let him think I was out all night, simply too squiffy to get home when in reality I was working—for England—"

"And you really, truly mean it, Louis? Louis, it would break my heart right in two if I thought you were lying now."

"I swear it, on my love for you. I can see, now, that I ought to have told the Pater all about it. But I thought when he was so unbelieving I'd take his bally pound a week. After all, it isn't much. It's what he spends on one dinner often, and it would keep me in cigarettes, at any rate. So I thought I'd stick to it, as well as my secret service screw. Besides—supposing he wasn't my father at all? Supposing he'd been paid by someone—someone very much more exalted than he, to bring me up?"

"Whatever do you mean, Louis?" she cried.

"Oh, never mind, never mind, old girl. But some day, perhaps, you'll know all I've had to go through—"

There was a pause full of strained thinking. At last she burst out nervously, "But you've told your father not to send any more money, haven't you?"

"Yes, of course. I felt I couldn't be married to you on money I didn't earn. But this secret service—it is all so confidential—we have to guard our orders most carefully in case they get anything—"





"They? Who are they?" she asked quickly.

"The enemy—Germans and Chinese. There's quite a conspiracy on foot in Australia," he added, looking important. But he would tell her no more.

"Shall you be at work as soon as we get to Sydney?" she asked.

"It all depends on my orders. If we can stagger through the first few weeks, till I can get some cash—I say, Marcella, why shouldn't you ask your uncle for some money?"

"Because he'd make me go home with him if I did."

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“But couldn’t you tell him you’d changed your plans, and had a good job in Sydney? We can make up a tale for him. Just think how jolly it will be to be together, darling! I know it isn’t nice to ask people for money, but—it’s worth it, isn’t it? You need never see him again. Anyway, if you went to live with him you’d cost him a considerable amount, wouldn’t you? Why shouldn’t he give you some money now instead of that? After all, it’s up to well-to-do relations to help a girl who’s all alone in the world. Your father’s dead—”

It took him all the morning to persuade her. It was only when he told her how he went all to pieces if he had to worry about money, and a moment later painted glowing pictures of the month they would have together if his orders permitted, before they attempted to do anything definite, that she consented. He very rapidly sketched a tale for her to tell her uncle; Marcella hated the lies, for they seemed unnecessary until Louis told her that no uncle in his senses would let her marry a man she had only known six weeks.

“But if you talked to him, Louis,” she pleaded, “I’m sure he’d like you.”

“I’m not. He’d ask what my job is, and if it was known that I’d given away the fact that a secret service agent was in Sydney I might even get shot as a spy,” he said earnestly, and at last, in a maze of worry, she gave way.

The night before Melbourne she gave him her father’s signet ring—a heavy gold thing that Andrew had given her just before he died, telling her it must never leave her possession. He seemed very pleased with it, and told her laughingly that if they could not afford to buy a ring she would be married with that as a temporary measure.

## CHAPTER XII

It was a wet, miserable day when they drew alongside at Port Philip. Louis took the communal eight shillings, Marcella kept sixpence for luck. He went ashore before most of the passengers; she waited on board for her uncle.

When he came he was not at all what she had expected him to be. To begin with, he was very chilly—a queer, nervous man who told her he had not been in Melbourne for ten years and found great changes. He seemed to live so much alone that he was frightened to talk to anyone. His hands were hard with labour, but he told her casually that he had a sheep run bigger than Yorkshire and a hundred thousand sheep. His wife had been dead for five years: his house was run by his three daughters.

“We live seventy miles from a station, and fifty miles from the nearest neighbours,” he said, looking at her doubtfully. “You don’t think you’ll be lonely? It’s a hard life—I had

no time to tell your aunt the many disadvantages, for she said you'd started when she cabled."

Marcella saw quite well that she was not wanted and felt immensely relieved that there was no necessity for her to go to Wooratonga. Haltingly and stumblingly she asked him for the money, without telling him Louis's chain of lies at all. He took little notice of what she said. Money means very little in Australia where things are done on a large scale. Looking immensely relieved he said it would no doubt be much happier for her to go to stay with her friends—and how much money did she want?

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Marcella thought ten pounds—she really did not know. But he laughed at that and, taking her along to his bank, gave her fifty pounds. It seemed a lot of money to her, but he waved her thanks away, telling her a long tale about catching fresh-water oysters in the creek near his homestead. He seemed frightened of the traffic, frightened of the people.

“I’ll be very glad to get back,” he said, as they stood outside the bank watching the street cars clang by. “I’ve lived in the back blocks so long that houses suffocate me and people all look like monstrosities. I’m glad to have seen you, though. I was very fond of Rose, as a boy.”

But he asked no questions about her or Andrew. He simply took for granted all that Marcella said, and was immensely interested in his sheep and his garden. He had recently imported a Chinese gardener who was going to do wonderful things.

“I ought to take you somewhere to get lunch,” he said doubtfully, looking at the crowds of people and then at his watch. “There’s a train in one hour that will let me catch a connection at midnight.”

“Then I’ll take you to the station,” said Marcella promptly, and added on impulse, “I’m a bit sorry I’m not coming with you, though. I’d have liked to see my cousins—”

“I don’t suppose you’d like them much. They are nothing like Rose. I married an Australian, you know, and the girls are like her. They have had very little schooling. They are good girls, very good girls, but just a little hard,” he sighed a little, and Marcella felt a quick pang of regret for his loneliness. Obvious though it was that he did not want her, she wished, for a moment, she could have gone with him to cheer his solitude.

“But Ah Sing makes all the difference to me,” he added hopefully. “He’s growing strawberries, and next week, I hope, we shall see the asparagus peep through.”

So she left him on the platform to dream of his sheep and Ah Sing his only friend, while she dreamed of what next week would bring.

She felt it was almost impossible to wait to tell Louis the good news; she wished she had arranged to meet him in the city; she wished all sorts of things as she wandered, solitary, round the streets, feeling very unsteady on her feet after so long on a buoyant floor, and expecting the pavement to rock and sway at every step. She went into the Post Office and despatched letters home. As she was going down the street again rather aimlessly she caught sight of Mrs. Hetherington and Mr. Peters coming out of a restaurant, and was reminded forcibly of Jimmy who would be alone in the drizzling rain on board.

Buying a great box of chocolates, a basket of peaches and a clockwork train she hurried back to the ship, feeling very wealthy.

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It was a dreary day. Great Customs House buildings blotted out any possible view, reminding her very much of the ugliness of Tilbury. The rain drizzled down, warm rain that covered the walls of the cabins in streams of moisture; the sailors loading and unloading cargoes with loud creakings of donkey engines swore in sheer irritation; somewhere on the wharf sheep kept up an incessant and pitiful bleating all the day while sirens shrieked out in the stream. Jimmy was the only happy person on board, loading his train with chocolates and unloading them into his mouth after a tortuous trip along the dining table amongst glasses, knives and forks. It was the longest day Marcella had ever known; as the swift twilight passed, the passengers came aboard damp and damped; most of them were grumbling; all looked thoroughly pessimistic about Australia. The schoolmaster was one of the first to come solemnly along the deck under an umbrella. He had avoided Marcella rather pointedly lately, but he came and talked quite affably for a while, didactically contrasting Melbourne with Naples and Colombo.

The *Oriana* was to sail at eight o'clock; Marcella would not let herself be anxious; she had resolved that she must trust Louis now, and, knowing that he had scarcely any money and no friends, she could not imagine he would get into mischief. But as the last passengers came aboard and the first warning bell rang out, she began to grow cold with fear. The rain was pouring now in a sheet of water; she stood on deck in the green white glare of the arc lamps, which only lighted a circumscribed pool of radiance, and made the surrounding darkness blacker.

The second bell went; she heard the engine-room telegraph ring and the ship began to vibrate to the throb of the engines. She was feeling choked with fear: a thousand apprehensions went through her mind: he had been run over and was dead: he had lost his way: he was ill in hospital, crying out for her.

"Has your friend not come aboard?" asked the schoolmaster at her elbow.

She shook her head. It was impossible to speak.

"I suppose he has mistaken the time of sailing," said the schoolmaster soothingly.

"Do you think I ought to go ashore to look for him?" she cried, articulate at last in her misery, and ready to take advice.

"I think he should be able to take care of himself," he said carefully.

"Ah, but he isn't. I must go and find him," she cried wildly. "What sort of hands will he get into if he's left to himself?"

At that moment the last bell rang, and the boat began to move very slowly away from the wharf—perhaps a minute early. Knollys told Marcella afterwards that he guessed



the captain had sailed early on purpose, for just at that moment he saw a group of four people dripping with rain rush on to the slippery boards of the jetty. They were four who had been pretty noticeable as law-breakers during the whole trip—at least, so the captain thought. Marcella gave a cry of hapless disappointment as she saw Louis with Ole Fred, the red-haired man and another. They were laughing wildly, and almost close enough to touch the rails of the ship.

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"Jump, Louis," she cried wildly.

"Some flow's—for you, ole girl!" he cried, grinning loosely. "Mished bally boat! Catch, ole girl—flow's," and he threw a great bunch of bedraggled-looking flowers that had very obviously been dropped several times in the greasy mud. They fell helplessly into the water. Marcella could not stop to think of anything sensible. All she could see to do was to jump overboard to him and snatch him from the grinning men who were lurching at his side. But as she put her hand on the rail the schoolmaster drew her back.

"Thass ri! Come on, ole girl! Marsh—Marshella—come an' sleep in—sh-sh-shstreets! Got no money, ole girl. Marsh—Marshella! *Parlez vous Franshay?* Eh? Ah, *oui, oui*. Marsh-la! I wan' a woman! Beau-ful wi' shoulders—"

"Oh—oh," she cried, burying her face in her hands in horror.

"I should advise you to go below," said the schoolmaster's restrained voice.

But she was irresistibly drawn to look at Louis, to plead with him with her eyes, though her voice refused to work. And at that moment his unsteady foothold on the streaming planks gave way, and he sat down heavily. There were six or eight feet of black water now between the ship and the quay, but Marcella could hear plainly the foolish laughter of the other three as they tried to lift him to his feet. Ole Fred fell beside him, smashing a bottle as he did so, while several cans of tinned stuff went rolling out of his arms into the water. Louis sat, laughing helplessly until he realized that Marcella's white face was vanishing and he kissed his hand to her solemnly.

"Goo' ni' ole girl. Going fin' woman. Meet thee at Philippi! Ah, *oui, oui*! Marsh—ella! Look! Noblest Rom' of them all! Elements so mixshed—mixshed—can't stan' up, ole girl."

She heard no more for the laughter of the others who were all sitting heaped together on the slippery boards now. Sick and aching she stood there in the rain, scarcely realizing when the schoolmaster wrapped his raincoat round her; she was wondering whether she would have been happier if she had known he was lying dead in the mortuary, or ill in the hospital instead of sitting, too drunk to move out in the rain on the quay. And suddenly she knew quite well. He had said love was a hunger, and she would understand some day that it was as tigerish a hunger as drink hunger or any other. In that moment of utter disgust and pain and despair she understood that that hunger had come to her though she did not yet comprehend it. It had taken hold of her now—she writhed at the indignity of the thought, but she knew quite well that she actually wanted his presence with her whether he were rude and overbearing, weak and appealing, superior and instructive or drunk and filthy. She simply hungered to have him about her. Always ready to query, to examine motives, she asked herself whether this were not, after all, merely a species of vanity in her that wanted to hold and save



this helpless man who, it seemed, could not live for a day without her. And she got no answer to the question—the black water rushed past, chill and pitiless: the rain-swept sky was starless, the streaming decks deserted.

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At last she went below, and found it impossible to pass his cabin door. Everybody else was there, about the alleyways or in the saloon, safe and happy: only Louis had to bring himself to disaster every time. Opening his cabin door she went in. His things were all thrown about, his shaving tackle on the bunk, his pyjamas on the floor. Taking them up with hands that trembled she noticed that there were no buttons on them. The pathos of this was more than she could bear. On the floor were the two cups in which he had made tea before they reached port that morning. The teapot they had bought at Gibraltar lay overturned. Quite mechanically she cleaned up the tea-leaves and washed the cups. Then she could bear it no longer and, throwing herself on his bunk, she buried her face in his pillow and sobbed until she was exhausted.

### CHAPTER XIII

There were things to be endured the next few days. The purser came along, got Knollys to pack Louis's things and then sealed them. This meant that Marcella was shut away from all association with him; it seemed an unwarrantable interference with what she considered her property. The schoolmaster was surprisingly comforting and kind; he went out of his way to entertain her: Knollys brought unexpected tea in the morning in an attempt to make up for the loss of Louis. A young Scotsman, a sugar planter going out to the Islands, to whom she had talked until the fact that she was "another man's girl" had put a taboo upon her, insisted that she should, in the cold evenings on deck, wear his fur coat which he had brought rather unnecessarily; Jimmy tried to comfort her with apples. Mrs. Hetherington, whom the end of the voyage had left nervy and cross, said cattish things. She thought Marcella had shown very little tact in throwing herself at Louis; she advised her, with the next man, not to tire him out.

"Oh, you're an idiot," cried Marcella, her eyes full of tears, and decided that this was an occasion for her father's favourite epithet. "A double-distilled idiot! How have you managed Mr. Peters except by never leaving him alone for a minute?"

"I am a woman of the world, and understand men," she said airily. "I wove a net about him—in ways you would not understand, my child."

"Don't want to," snapped Marcella. "I'm not a spider!"

They anchored out in the stream in Sydney Harbour, going ashore in tenders. Marcella scanned the quay anxiously to find Louis, though Knollys told her that he would, most probably, be in by train to-morrow at noon. But she had an idea that he might have got through earlier, and hurried up to the General Post Office, which he had told her was his only address in the Colonies, to which his letters were sent. But it was a fruitless errand. Enquiry at the station told her that, as Knollys had said, the next train possible for Louis would be in at noon to-morrow.

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She turned back through the streets that were so extraordinarily like London in spite of Chinese, German and Italian names. As she passed the Post Office for the second time it occurred to her that there might be letters for her there, and found quite a bundle of them in a little pigeonhole high up. There was also a cablegram that had been waiting two days. She opened that first. It was extravagantly long; the name "Carlossie" at the head of it gave her a sickening pang of homesickness for a moment. She read:

"Letter from Port Said arrived. Very anxious. Only way you treat drunkard is leave him alone. Impossible cure. Above all do not marry him or shall blame myself. Writing. Await letter I implore you.—Angus."

It was extraordinary extravagance for Dr. Angus. She felt guilty at having worried him.

"But I never mentioned marrying Louis! I simply said he was one of the passengers I was interested in."

There was a letter from Aunt Janet written after the *Oriana* had sailed and sent overland to Marseilles.

"I certainly miss you," she wrote, "but I shall get over it in time, I expect. One gets very used to everything in time. I wonder if you will ever come back? I expect so. Wullie the Hunchback came along with fish for me twice. He misses you badly. You were always a great deal with him."

Letters from Mrs. Mactavish and from Wullie, dictated to and written by Bessie, said that she would be back soon; standing under the portico of the Post Office, surrounded by the flower sellers with their bunches of exuberant waratah, feathery wattle and sweet, sober-looking boronia, she let her mind travel back to Lashnagar and the acrid smoke of the green-wood fires, the pungency of the fish, the sharp tang of the salt winds pushed the heavy perfume of flowers aside. In a moment the last six weeks of mad, unhappy dreaming and hoping vanished; she saw herself back again in her own sphere among her own people. She tried to picture Louis there, too, and realized horribly that he would never fit into the picture. Against Wullie and the doctor and her aunt he would look so vulgar, so pretentious, so tinsel-coloured. And how they would laugh at a man who could not master himself, a man who cried!

"Why, I'm a snob! I was hurt when he thought I'd disgrace him by my bad manners. And now I'm being just as cruel!"

Then she jerked herself away from Lashnagar and stood with the last letter in her hand, afraid to open it. It was postmarked Melbourne and had come in that morning. It was in Louis's writing, and gave her an acute sense of distress. She stood still by a shop

window, looking into it blindly until she realized that she was looking at a crocodile and some snakes squirming about in tanks in a naturalist's window. The straggly writing reminded her of the ugly snakes: it told her that he was drunk more or less when the letter was written; she looked from the letter to the snakes. One of them crawled writhingly over the others, lifted its head and put out its tongue at her: shivering, she opened the letter.

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“MY OWN DARLING,

“Wasn’t it a sell? That damned captain’s had a down on me all the trip. I reported him to the shipping company and I’m trying to get a free pass from them by rail. Otherwise I should come by the train that has brought this letter. By great luck I ran into an old girl I knew in New Zealand. She’s a nurse who saved my life once when I was in hospital there. She’s a dear—Oh quite old; don’t get jealous, my pet! I’m staying the night at an hotel in Little Collins Street. The landlord has lent me a fiver, so don’t worry about me. One thing I’ve to tell you—a terrible confession. I lost your father’s ring in my haste the other night, but never mind. I’ll buy you another. I hope your Uncle stumped up. Australia’s a damnable place to be hard up in. Will you tip my stewards for me and see my things through the Customs? Give Knollys and the other chap ten shillings each. They haven’t killed themselves on my behalf, or it would have been a quid. Tell them I sent it. I don’t want them to know I’m hard up. If I hit up that railway pass I should be through before lunch on Saturday. And then, old girl, there’ll be doings! I hear you can get hitched up in Sydney for about twenty-seven bob, without waiting for notices of any sort. Till then, all my love and all my thoughts are for you.

“Your own Louis.

“P.S. (Just like a woman) You’d better get something decent and not Scotch to wear if your uncle came down decently. And book us rooms at the Hotel Australia. They do you very well there.”

It was her first love letter. She felt, vaguely, that it lacked something though she did not quite know what. She hated the talk about money and about her uncle. She hated that he could borrow money so casually from a nurse who had been good to him. She wished that terrible hunger he had predicted had not happened to her. She knew, with absolute certainty, that Dr. Angus had gauged her fatal habit of conceited anxiety to help other people when he cabled to her not to marry a drunkard whom she had merely put to him as a hypothetical case. And she knew the doctor was inevitably right about the folly of marrying a man like Louis.

“But he’s wrong about there being no cure. When he is with me every minute and I can look after him as if he is my little baby, he won’t be able to do it. I’ll be a gaoler to him—I’ll be his providence, his mother, his nurse, his doctor. Oh everything—I’ll be what God was to father.”

Down on Circular Quay she felt she could not go aboard the Oriana yet. In spite of the unsteadiness of her feet it was very pleasant to be walking about in a new land, so, taking out Louis’s letter again she went on rather blindly through the wharves, reading it. A Japanese boat was loading; smells of garlic and of spice and sandalwood were wafted to her from the holds and weaved into her thoughts of Louis; a little further along there was a crowd of

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stevedores clustered in the roadway round a violent smell of whisky. She turned away, sickened by her memories of that smell, with her father's ghost and Louis's at her side, but uncontrollable curiosity made her press on again. A great barrel—like the barrel at Lashnagar—had been broken by falling from the top storey out of the clutch of a derrick; there was a pool of blood, dreadful and bright in the roadway and men were lifting the crushed body of a man into an ambulance; quite close to the pool of blood was one of whisky that was running into the gutter. Two big, bronzed, blue-shirted men were kneeling beside it, dipping their hands in it and licking them greedily; trembling at the same time and looking sick with the fright of sudden death. From a warehouse near by came a heavy smell of decay—sheep skins were stored there in great, stiff bales. She went on, feeling as though horror happened wherever she went. But along by the sea wall it was very peaceful; only the soft lapping of the landlocked tide against the stone, the slow gliding of ferry boats, the lazy splash of oars and the metallic clanking in the naval dockyard on Garden Island came to her. On a man-of-war out in the stream the sailors were having a washing day; she could hear their cheery voices singing and laughing as they hung vests and shirts and socks among the rigging, threw soapy water at each other and skated about the decks on lumps of soap.

A little further along by the wall was a great garden; she went in in a dream; unfamiliar flowers covered unfamiliar bushes with pink and scarlet snow; a bed of cactus looked like a nightmare of pincushions and tumours. She sat down beside them, under a low, gloomy leaved eucalyptus and dreamed. The champagne quality of the air, the sunlight dancing on the blue water, the great banks of dark green trees on the opposite shore, with prosperous, happy-looking little red houses nestling among them brought about an effect of well-being that soft weather and beautiful surroundings always gave her. She had, all her life, been able to escape from unhappiness by the mere physical effect of going into the sunshine and the wind—and then unhappiness and grief seemed impossible, incredible. Sitting there with half-closed eyes she dreamed of the future; the disgust of Melbourne had gone; the disillusionment of Louis's letter had gone, and yet she had very few delusions about what was going to happen to her.

She wished she had the courage to run away now, to her uncle, or anywhere away from Louis. And she knew quite well that nothing on earth would make her leave him. She was beginning to realize, vaguely, what marriage to him might mean; she had flashing visions of him, drunk, dirty, foolish and—bestly. She shrunk from him fastidiously; even thinking of him made her heart thump in sheer horror; she felt that, to be shut up in a room with him when he was drunk would be an indignity, a disgust too horrible to contemplate. And he had hinted things that frightened her, about her “having her work cut out” about her “not realizing what she had taken on.” Next minute the soft sunlight and the fluttering leaves made her think of him when he was not drunk, and she frowned; she so hated his air of superiority, his calm pushing aside of her opinions as not worth notice, his cool insistence on her inferiority as a woman.

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“Still, he’s awfully clever,” the dancing water told her. But she knew that he was not more clever than very many other people and that his cleverness had never been of any use except in getting money.

“He’s grown up—a big, grown up man, and you’re only a girl,” said the soft, exhilarating breeze that sang in her hair. And that thought allowed no answer, it was so flattering, so satisfying.

“And—he needs me. He says he’ll die without me,” she told herself, and that was unanswerable.

Suddenly she stood up and looked over the sea wall. There seemed to be two Louis in her hands, being weighed and, all at once, she felt a little helpless and leaned rather heavily against the sea wall.

“It isn’t a bit of use. I don’t honestly believe any of these things are the real reason I’m going to marry him. I honestly believe I want to, so what’s the good of lying to myself about it? But—oh what an idiot I am! It seems to me—there’s something a bit degrading—in marrying a man like Louis—simply because—because—you *want* to.”

She walked round and round the big eucalyptus as though she were in a cage. Then she came back and stood against the wall again, watching the sailors on the man-of-war with unseeing eyes. She felt hot and flushed and a little ashamed of herself. She felt that there was something rather disgraceful in wishing Louis were there to kiss her; something a little humiliating in longing so utterly that to-morrow might come when they could be together.

“I never, never, never thought I’d be such an idiot! I thought I’d fall in love with a king, or something—Oh my goodness, what a mess!” Her father came into her mind, striding giant-like over Ben Grief in his shabby old tweeds; she frowned and bit her lips and told herself, in bewilderment, that if only Louis had been like him she would have married him without any feeling of humiliation. And she had the uncomfortable feeling that, had her father been alive, she would never have dared to marry Louis. Andrew would have put him in the sea, or something equally final and ignominious.

She stared fixedly at the rippling water, with tight lips, and nodded her head at it.

“Yes, it’s perfectly disgusting. It’s degrading—it’s—it’s beastly to be shutting myself up like this with a drunken man. I believe I’d be better dead—from a selfish point of view —”

Next minute her eyes softened.

“But think how eager he is—what a boy he is—like Jimmy! And how he trusts me not to let those awful miseries happen to him any more.”

She turned round, shook herself together and began to march back to the ship, her father's eyes shining through hers for a while.

"Marcella Lashcairn," she said solemnly, "you're going to stop asking yourself rude questions for ever and ever, Amen! You haven't time to waste on introspection. You love him. That's a good thing, anyway. Never mind how you love him, never mind if it's a John the Baptist love or a mother love or a fever produced by the tropics, as Wullie said, you've to do things as best you can and understand them afterwards, just trusting that God will burn out all the beastliness of them in the end. And—" she added, as an afterthought, "If he gets drunk I'll shake the life out of him."



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If Louis had seen her just then he would probably have shied at marrying her.

She went on board to a deserted ship, hating to stay ashore without Louis. Even the passengers who were going on to Brisbane had gone to sleep ashore. Knollys told her that Jimmy had cried desperately because he was being taken away from her, and that Mr. Peters was drunk in his grief at ending his acquaintanceship with Mrs. Hetherington. Later, seeing her standing lonely on deck, watching the lighted ferries go by, Knollys came up to her.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he said, deferentially, "but it occurred to Jules and myself that you might possibly care to join us in a game of dominoes?" and, rather than appear unfriendly, she played with them for an hour. She was very glad when morning came.

## CHAPTER XIV

Marcella hurried to her field of Philippi that day. She went up to the station to meet Louis at half-past eleven in alternating moods of trembling softness and militancy, softness to welcome him, belligerency for Ole Fred and the gang, and strange gusts of helpless, blazing, hungry joy at the thought of getting him away from them, all to herself. Almost she wished she could snatch him from life itself. As the train came in she caught sight of him, laughing foolishly, dirty and dishevelled from the long journey. She ran down the clanging platform on feet of wind to meet him. He tumbled out of the carriage with half a dozen draggled men after him.

"Oh—my dear," she cried, clinging to his hand, her face flushed, her eyes shining.

He stared, his eyes glassy and pale, almost startled.

"Hello, ole girl," he stammered. "G—g—good of you to mm—mm—meet me."

He stood awkwardly, undecided, the others edging round him.

"Louis, you'll never guess how awful it's been without you! I know what you meant, now, about not being able to do without each other—Uncle gave me the money—let's get away and talk—" The words all tumbled out breathlessly.

He gazed at her again, as though he scarcely knew her.

"These chaps have been awfully good to me," he said thickly. "We must—must—s-say good-bye. They s-sail for New Zealand this—safternoon."

"That's good. Then say good-bye now, and come away. We've a lot to do."

He stared moodily.

“Look here, where’s my baggage? Did you g-get it th-through the Customs for me?”

She explained about it, and said that he must go aboard for it when the Oriana came alongside during the afternoon.

“Right-o, then. I’ll say good-bye. Wait a minute.”

He went down the platform and stood talking to the others for a few minutes. They looked towards her and laughed several times, and at last trooped off together.

“I think a wash is indicated, don’t you?” he said, looking at himself. “Lord, don’t I want a drink! And don’t I just want to be alone with you a few minutes! What shall we do? Did you book rooms?”

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"No. I was so busy thinking that I forgot. There's plenty of time. I'll tell you what. Let us go back to the boat and get your things, and then you can get cleaned up and—change—" she added hesitatingly, for he was still wearing the suit in which he had fallen on the jetty at Melbourne. It was splashed with mud and rain; it had been obviously slept in, and smelled of tobacco and spilled whisky.

"Right. We'll have a cab and then we can talk on the way," he said. "By the way, I haven't a penny in the world. Broke to the wide! What did your uncle give you?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Lord! What a decent sort of uncle to have about. I haven't a relative who'd let me raise a fiver. Well, you'd better lend me some, old girl, till I get mine through."

"You can have it all if you like," she said quickly. "I don't want it if I'm with you." She was thinking that he had told her not to let him have money; but if they were to be together all the time there could be no possible danger, and something told her that it would be good for him to be trusted with all her worldly goods.

In the cab, as soon as it started its two-mile crawl, she handed it to him solemnly. He seemed to make an effort to pull himself together as he put the money into his notecase.

"I say, Marcella," he jerked out, "you'll not let me out of your sight, will you, darling? It's no end risky, with all this money."

"Poor little boy," she whispered softly. "You couldn't be naughty to-day, could you? Besides, you've me to look after now, as well as yourself. You've been here before. I've never been away from home in my life."

He caught at her hand and held it tightly.

"I'm just dying to kiss you, darling," he whispered. "Oh, I wish we needn't waste time on that bally rotten ship. I want us to get away from everywhere."

On the ship they found that he could not get his things until the purser came aboard at seven o'clock in the evening, as he had them sealed up. But Knollys provided him with clothes brush and toilet apparatus while Marcella waited.

"I've found out all about getting married," he explained when they got outside on the quay again. "It's frightfully simple. Knollys has just told me where the Registrar's place is. Lord! Marcella, do you feel frightened?"

"No," she said, rather faintly.

“It’s worse for me than for you, after all. It’s fun for a girl to get married. But I’ve all the ordeals to go through, facing the Registrar, buying the ring—”

“Well, I’ll do it,” she said resignedly, “if you’re frightened.”

But as they passed the first jeweller’s shop he dived in suddenly without speaking to her. After a few minutes he emerged, his face flushed and damp, his hand shaky.

“Look here, come up a side way somewhere, old thing! They’ve given me a chunk of cardboard with little holes in it. You’ve got to poke your finger in till you see which fits. Lord, I’m glad you don’t get married more than once in a lifetime.”

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"Don't you like it, Louis?" she asked, as she fitted her finger into the little holes and found that she took the smallest size ring. "I do. I think it's frightfully exciting."

"I know you do. Women love getting married. They're cock of the walk on their wedding days, if they never are again. On her wedding day a woman is triumphant! She's making a public exhibition of the fact that she has achieved the aim of her life—she's landed a man!"

"Louis!" she cried indignantly, and next minute decided to think that he was joking as they reached the jeweller's shop again. She had been looking at the jewellery in the window: it was her first peep at a jeweller's shop, and she thought how expensive everything was. She noticed the price of wedding rings. When Louis came out with the ring in a little box which he put into his pocket, he told her casually that it cost something three times more than the prices in the window.

As they walked up the street he told her that he was tired to death, that he had not been to bed since the *Oriana* left Melbourne.

"I thought you stayed at an hotel that night," she said.

"No, as a matter of fact, my pet, we got run in, all of us. I don't know, now, what we did when we found the boat had gone without us, but we made up our minds to paint the town red. So we got landed in the police's hands for the night and locked up."

"Oh Louis!"

"It was a great game! The funny old magistrate next morning was as solemn as a judge. He read us a lecture about upholding the prestige of the Motherland in a new country. Then he made us promise him faithfully not to have another drink as long as we were in the state of Victoria. We promised right enough, and kept it—because we knew we were leaving Victoria in a few hours. Ole Fred was as solemn as the judge himself about it. But when we got to Albury—that's on the borders, you know—my hat, how we mopped it! I haven't got over it yet. But after to-day I'm on the water-wagon, Marcella. Lord, here's the marriage shop!"

It looked like a shop, with green wire shades over the glass windows, not at all a terrifying place. But Louis took off his hat, mopped his forehead and looked at her desperately.

"Look here, old girl, I shall never get through this without a whisky-and-soda. I'm a stammering bundle of nerves. I'll never get our names down right unless I have a drink to give me a bit of Dutch courage. If it hadn't been for that Melbourne madness I'd have been all right. But look at me"—and he held out a trembling hand. "Marcella, for God's sake say you'll let me—"

She felt she could not, to-day of all days, preach to him, but she could not trust herself to speak. She merely nodded her head, and without waiting another instant he darted into the nearest hotel, leaving her standing on the pavement. Her heart was aching, but every moment, every word he said made her all the more cussedly determined to see the thing through, and he certainly looked better when he came out ten minutes later.

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"That saved my life, darling," he said feelingly. "Now for it."

He vanished behind the green windows and came back in a few minutes looking jubilant.

"Nice, fatherly old chap. Asked me if I realized the gravity of the step I was taking and if you were twenty-one, because if you weren't I'd have to get the consent of the State Guardian. And by the way, Marcella, that reminds me. You'll simply have to do something to your hair."

"Why?" she asked, flirting it over her shoulder to see what was wrong with it. It was tied very neatly with a big bow of tartan ribbon.

"You'll have to do it up, somehow—stow it under your hat, don't you know—hairpins, old girl, smokers' best friends. You can't be married with your hair down, or they'll think it isn't respectable."

"Oh," she said meekly.

"By the way, I got the religion wrong. I simply couldn't think what you were, so I said an atheist, and he said as the Congregational clergyman hadn't a full house to-night we'd better go to him. Lord, what would the Mater say? She wouldn't think it legal unless you were married in church with the 'Voice that breathed o'er Eden' and a veil."

"But—to-night?" she questioned.

"Yes, half-past six. And I got our father's professions wrong. I couldn't remember what the Pater was for anything, so I said they were both sailors! Lord, I was in a funk—and at half-past six to-night I'll be married and done for. It's the biggest scream that ever was!"

They went to a restaurant for lunch. She was very hungry; he could eat nothing. He ordered lemonade for her, adding something in a low tone to the waiter who went away smiling faintly. She thought he was drinking lemonade too, but he began to laugh a good deal, and his eyes glittered queerly all the time.

She was a little overawed by the magnificence of the Hotel Australia when they went to book rooms; she wished very much that they could be at the farm; there were so many people about, so many servants quite inhumanly uninterested in them. At home Jean would have been fussing about, making them welcome.

It was the queerest, most unromantic wedding. The streets were full of the Saturday night crowd of pleasure seekers. The chapel was next to a Chinese laundry; glancing in at the door through the steam she got a swift vision of two Chinamen ironing collars vigorously. Outside the chapel door stood a gawky-looking group—a young sailor, very

fat and jolly-looking was being married to a rather elderly woman. Both had short white kid gloves that showed a little rim of red wrist; their friends were chaffing them unmercifully; the bride was giggling, the sailor looking imperturbable. Louis edged towards Marcella.

"I don't want those two Chinks to see me," he whispered nervously.

She stared at him.

"I wish they'd open the door," whispered Marcella.



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"So do I. My hat, I wish Violet could come past. She'd kill herself with laughing. She was married at St. George's, Hanover Square."

That conveyed nothing to Marcella. She was watching a German band composed of very fat, pink Germans who, on their way to their nightly street playing outside various theatres and restaurants, had noticed the group and scented a wedding. They began by playing the "Marseillaise" and made her laugh by the extreme earnestness of their expression; then they played the Lohengrin "Bridal March" and had only just reached the tenth bar when the chapel door opened with a tremendous squeaking and creaking. The conductor paused with his baton in mid beat and his mouth wide open as he saw his audience melting away inside the door. Marcella, laughing almost hysterically, whispered to Louis:

"Give them a shilling or something. They look so unhappy!"

"They're spying on me," he whispered, tossing them a coin which fell among them and received the conductor's blessing.

Marcella and Louis sat on a bench in a Sunday-school classroom, looking at "Rebecca at the Well" and a zoological picture of the millennium while the sailor got married. Both were subdued suddenly. She found herself thinking that, if ever she had children, she would never let them go to such a dreary place as Sunday-school.

"Isn't this awful?" she whispered at last. "People ought to be married on the tops of hills, or under trees. But it makes you feel solemn, and sort of good, doesn't it—even such a fearful place?"

He nodded. They heard the sailor and the bride chattering suddenly and loudly in the next little room and guessed that they were married. A bent little woman—the chapel cleaner—came along and asked them where their witnesses were. Her dark eyes looked piercingly among grey, unbrushed hair; her hands were encrusted with much immersion in dirty water.

"Witnesses?" said Louis anxiously.

"Two witnesses," she said inexorably. "Haven't you got 'ny?"

"We didn't know—" began Marcella. The old woman looked pleased.

"Well, I was wondering if yous 'ud have me an' my boss. We often make a couple of bob like that."

Louis nodded, and she shuffled off, appearing a few moments later with an old man who had evidently been waiting about for the chance of earning a few shillings.

“It isn’t a bit like Lochinvar,” whispered Marcella, “or Jock of Hazeldean.”

“Poor old lady,” he whispered, suddenly gentle.

The two old people sat down on the form beside Louis, who edged a little closer to Marcella.

“It’s forty years since we was married, my boss and me,” began the old woman. “Forty years—and brought up twelve—”

“Buried six,” mumbled the old man, shaking his head and wiping a watery eye on his coat sleeve.

“I say, I feel no end of an ass, don’t you?” whispered Louis. “Tell the old idiots to shut up.”

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"Poor old things—forty years ago they thought it was all going to be so shining," she whispered.

"It isn't as if he's had very good work," went on the old woman, "but you must take the rough with the smooth."

A small old man with a black suit and a long white beard came to the door and beckoned them. They suddenly realized that he was the priest and followed him meekly.

"I've often been the officiating surgeon," whispered Louis, giggling nervously, "but I never understood the point of view of the man on the operating table before."

"Oh hush, Louis. I feel so solemn," whispered Marcella. She wished very much that Wullie was there. She felt that he would have understood how she felt as she repeated mechanically the words the old man told her; she did not hear them really. She was making an end of all her doubts of Louis; she knew, quite definitely, that whatever misery or degradation might come to her in the future, whatever wild or conceited or cussed or tropical thoughts had brought her to this dull little chapel to-night, God was quite surely making her His pathway, walking over her life with shining feet, burning out all the less fine things that did not belong to Him. She woke up to feel Louis fumbling with her hand to put the ring on; she had been miles and years away, through fires and waters of consecration.

The old clergyman looked at her; he looked at Louis. The actual service according to the book was over. He gave a little sigh, turned to lead them to the vestry to sign their names, and then quite suddenly came back and asked them to kneel down. He talked to God very intimately about them. Marcella got the queer idea that he was talking to her all the time.

"He must have thought a lot of you," whispered the old woman. "It isn't like him to make up a extry bit like that. Well, I'm sure I wish yous luck, both of you. Mind not let him have too much of his own way, my dear."

Smiling she led away her toothless old man. Marcella handed Louis the marriage certificate, which he put in his pocket. Out in the street it was quite dark.

"Phew, wasn't it an awful experience? Lord, we're married! Married! Do you really believe it, darling? And I haven't given you a kiss yet. I couldn't with those old dodderers about. Oh, Marcella, isn't it great? And isn't it a lark? But if anyone had told me I'd have got married in a tin tabernacle, slobbered over by a lot of Non-bally-conformists I'd have had hysterics. We'll simply have to tell the Mater and Violet! It'll be the joke of the century to them."

She drew a deep breath.

“Louis, can’t we run right away into the Bush? I do wish we were at home on Ben Grief in the wind—the thought of that great, big hotel terrifies me. I feel sort of—like I used to feel when I went to church with mother on Easter Sundays, when everything was cool and white and smelt of lilies. Oh, Louis, I *do* so love you!”

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Suddenly he stood still and looked at her.

“Let’s find a cab and get down to that bally boat for the baggage. Oh, bother the baggage! My darling, I want you alone. You stood there so quiet and still, looking just like a little girl being very, very good. Oh, my dear, you’re a damned sight too good for me. Lord, I’ll feed myself to the sharks in the harbour if ever I hurt you! What luck to find you! What amazing, gorgeous luck! Me—the waster, the unwanted, the do-nothing. Marcella—Lord, what’s the use of words? I’m getting your trick of not being able to find words for what I mean. But you wait. Just you wait. There’s a new Louis born to-night, in a funny little Nonconformist chapel. Look at him, girlie—can’t you see he’s different?”

They found a cab and drove down to the quay again. Heedless of the people in the streets he kissed her again and again and did not stop talking for an instant.

“You know, the very fact of being married alone is going to do wonders for me. It’s going to give me a grip on things. I’ve been an outcast, dear—I’ve never known, when I’ve been this side of the world, where my next bed or my next meal is coming from. But to have a wife—and we’ll have a home and everything—why, you can’t think what it means.”

When they reached the quay he left Marcella in the cab, telling her he would only be two minutes. She watched him vanish in the shadow of the Customs shed. A moment later he was back.

“I hate to leave you, even for a minute. I must have one more kiss. Oh, my darling, if you could only guess what it means to me to know that you love me, that you are waiting here for me. You’ve never been a throwout, a waster, or you’d realize just what you mean to me.”

Then he was gone, and she lay back, her eyes closed, dreaming. She felt very safe, very secure.

It seemed a long time that he was gone, but she was accustomed to going thousands of miles in her dreams, only to find, wakening suddenly, that the clock had only measured five minutes. But at last she realized that it really was a long time. The horse began to paw and fidget; the driver, smoking a very reeking pipe, looked in at the window.

“D’you think your boss’ll be long?” he asked.

“How long has he been?” she asked.

“More’n half an hour. I’ve got some folks to take to the theatre, but I’m afraid I’ll have to give them a miss if he don’t hurry hisself.”

"I wonder if you'd go and see, please?" she asked doubtfully. "You see, we've only just been married to-day and I feel so silly—the people on board are sure to start making a big fuss if I go—"

"Right-o, ma. I'll go," he said, and made off across the quay. He, too, was gone a long while; the horse got more fidgety, but at last he appeared, carrying two of Louis's bags.

He grinned as he came up to the cab.

"He's a lad!" he said genially. "Would make me stop an' wet the wedding. But it do seem hard to me for the bride to be out of all the fun. Why don't you go an' wet it, too, ma?"

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"Where is—my husband?" she said, stumbling over the word and feeling sick with fright.

"Over there with his pals. They aren't half having a game. If I was you I'd go and rout him out! Not much use in a honeymoon when one's boozed and the other ain't. Now if you was to have a drop too—"

She did not hear what he said. She did not stop to think of dignity or anything else; the same panic that had almost made her jump overboard at Melbourne sent her running across the quay, over the gangway on to the ship. The voices of the men guided her towards them on the silent ship. Louis was sitting on the hatchway; two champagne bottles were overturned beside him; he was just pouring whisky from a bottle into a tumbler as he saw her.

His jaw dropped and he tried to stand up.

"Here's your missus," laughed Ole Fred, who was leaning against him.

Marcella looked from Louis to Fred.

"So you didn't go to New Zealand?" said Marcella quietly, looking at him with blazing eyes. He blinked at her and tried to smile affably.

"Of course I never thought you would, you horrible, wicked, idiotic old liar!" she said.

Ole Fred looked thoroughly startled. Louis gazed at Marcella and then at him.

"Now, ole man—I pu' it to you," said Ole Fred thickly. "Is tha' the sort of talk you le' your wife use to your bes' pals?"

Louis shook his head reprovingly at her.

"Marsh-shella! Naughty lil' girl! 'Pol'gize! Good Ole Fred! Bes' pal ev' man had, Marshella! Going t' Newze-eeelan'! All 'lone—way from 'smother—way from Ole Country! Give him kish, ole girl—no ill-feeling—"

Ole Fred got up unsteadily, grinning, and lurched towards her muttering, "No, no ill-feeling." She realized what he was going to do, and suddenly felt that she could not live any longer. But first—her father's temper came to her for a moment and she lost all responsibility. It was the first time the Lashcairn madness had seized her—and it was not the raging Berserk fury of her father. She stood quite still, very white. Ole Fred thought she was waiting passively for his kiss. But when he reached her on his unsteady feet she caught him by the shoulders, shook what little breath he had left out of him, and slid him deliberately along the deck. He was too surprised to resist effectively and the others had no idea what was in her mind. Reaching the rail of the ship, with the strength of madness she lifted him up—he was a thin little rat of a man—



and dropped him calmly overboard. There was a heavy *plonk* and a rush of feet as Knollys, who had watched fascinated, ran down the companion-way with another man. She looked at her hands distastefully.

“You’re very foolish if you rescue him, Knollys,” she said, with an air of giving impartial advice. “He’s not a bit of good. I knew quite well I’d put some of these idiotic men in the sea before I’d done with them.”



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She turned away towards Louis again. He cowered as she came near him. She smiled at him kindly and reassuringly.

"Poor little boy! You needn't be frightened of Marcella. She doesn't often put wicked ole men in the sea," she said gently, holding out her hand to help him to his feet. Before she had put Fred in the sea she had felt it would be much better to go herself than live with Louis any more. But the flood of madness ebbed; Louis's cowering as she came near him seemed to her so appalling, so appealing that she could not leave him, and her hatred of Fred made her set her teeth and determine not to let him have Louis.

No one spoke. The cab driver was looking at her with adoration in his eyes; looking round she guessed he was a friend.

"Have you all our luggage?" she asked him.

"Yes, ma—missus," he jerked, jumping and suddenly touching his hat—an epoch-making thing for an Australian to do.

"Will you help me get my husband to the cab then, please?"

"Aren't you going to wait and see if they fish him out, missus?" he asked hopefully, jerking his head over towards the companion-way, down which several sailors had vanished.

"It's no use," she said impatiently. "He isn't a bit of good. If he's dead all the better. He's a very, very wicked man, you know. He's not just weak and wobbly. He is so wicked and dreadful that he laughs at people when they try to be good, and fights the goodness. Naturally it's better to put him in the sea. If it was a few hundred years ago they'd burn him as a devil," she nodded reassuringly to the cabman.

"There are sharks in Sydney Harbour, too," she added reflectively.

"Oh cripes!" cried the cabman reverently. "Come on then, boss," he added, turning to Louis. "Heave hold of my shoulder. If old monkey face is drowned your missus'll hear sharp enough from the police."

Suddenly she ran back to the companion-way. She did not look to see where Ole Fred was. Keeping her eyes averted she called, "Good-bye, Knollys. Thank you for being so kind to me."

Then she took Louis's hand without a word. He stood immovable.

"Feel sh-shick, ole girl," he gasped.

She stood still, feeling sick, too.

“Go on, ma—I’ll tend him,” said the cabman. Marcella walked on with her head in the air, looking disgusted. After a few minutes she turned and saw the cabman struggling to drag him along. His legs lagged foolishly.

“Can’t walk, ole girl. Legs all cross-nibbed, ole girl,” he moaned.

“You’re not to talk, Louis,” she said calmly.

“Talk? Talk? Can’t talk. Parlez-vous Franshay, Marsh-sella? Voulez-vous coucher avec moi? Baisez-moi, ma petite—!”

She faced him suddenly.

“Look here, Louis. If you talk French one of us goes in the harbour. I’d rather it was me. Either that or I’ll take my hands and choke you. *You* know they’re strong hands—made in Scotland, Louis—bony, not a bit wobbly. Now what do you think?”

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He made a sudden effort, threw off the cabman's detaining hand, swayed a little and then steered a straight course for the cab, stumbling over the step and crawling in on his knees.

"Isn't he a lad!" said the cabman admiringly. "Pair of lads, that's what you are! By cripes, you are! Where are you making for, missus?" His eyes, full of curiosity, were on the ship as a babble of voices rose. "Listen, they've got ole monkey-face! That's him singing out now. We'd better put our best leg forward for fear he comes after you."

"If he does I shall put him back again," she said; "we were going to the Hotel Australia—but I don't think I'll take my husband there. I think they mightn't like him. Do you know anywhere else we could go—a house—where there are poor people who won't be rude to me about him?"

He thought for a moment. Then his face brightened.

"I know the very place, ma. It's quite near. The boss boozes, but Ma's a good sort. She'll have a room, sure. It's all among the Chows, if you don't mind that."

"Chows—what are Chows?"

"Chinese—Chinks—a good many white people won't live among them."

"If they don't object to us, I'm sure I shall not to them."

The next minute she was sitting beside Louis, but he was fast asleep.

"Louis," she whispered, shaking him gently. He stirred and muttered, but could not waken. She stared at him in the passing light of the street lamps. He looked so helpless, so much at her mercy. Quite unexpectedly she leaned over and kissed the tip of his ear. Next minute she was sobbing uncontrollably, leaning against his arm.

"Oh, why didn't I go in the water? I can't bear it—I can't! I'll never be able to go through with it! I'm making him no better—and no one can keep on being disappointed and disappointed and still keeping their faith. Even to-day, when I ought to have been so happy."

She sat up suddenly, and turned away from Louis, holding out longing arms for the softness of her mother, the autocratic strength of her father. But she had to dry her eyes quickly because the cabman had stopped and was speaking through the window.

"Here we are, ma," he said.

She wrestled with her voice.

“Do you mind—will you ask her, please? I’ve been crying, and I look such an idiot.”

“Right-o, ma. But don’t bother about that. Mrs. King has had her share o’ crying in her time. She won’t think nothing of that.”

She realized that it was necessary to waken Louis as she heard the door open and a conversation between two people. A little figure of a woman came out to the cab and spoke to her.

“It’s all right, my dear,” she said quietly. “I’ve got a top room. I’ll be glad to let you have it.”

“It’s very kind of you,” said Marcella. “My husband is—rather—asleep. How on earth am I going to get him upstairs?”

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"I'll get some of my young fellows to carry him up for you," said Mrs. King. "Don't you fret about it now, dear. Men often have a drop too much, and it's better to take no notice provided they don't get too noisy or too ready with their fists."

Marcella smiled faintly and stood stiff as a sentry while Mrs. King fetched out half a dozen of her lodgers who were playing cards in the kitchen. They carried Louis upstairs. He was so drugged that he did not waken.

### CHAPTER XV

It was a bare room, up three flights of stairs. Marcella watched while the men carried him in and laid him on the bed. Mrs. King seemed inclined to stay and gossip in whispers, but, after thanking her, and saying they would talk to-morrow, Marcella shut the door and locked it.

Then she looked round. There were three candles burning. With a little cry of superstitious fear she blew one out and pinched the wick. Through the two big windows she could see the ships in the harbour with rows of shining portholes: ferries were fussing to and fro like fiery water beetles. From the man-of-war she saw the winking Morse light signalling to the Heads. Trams clanged by in the distance; in a public-house near by men were singing and laughing. In the room Louis was snoring gustily. She turned from the open window and looked at him.

"There! I'm married to him now," she said, and looked from him round the room. The walls were whitewashed: there was a good deal of blue in the make-up of the whitewash, which gave the room a very cold impression. There was a text "God Bless Our Home," adorned with a painted garland of holly, over the door. Above the mantelpiece, which was bare save for the two candles, was a Pears' Annual picture—Landseer's "Lion and Lioness," fastened to the wall with tacks driven through little round buttons of scarlet flannel. There was a table covered with white oil-cloth on which stood a basin and jug and an old pink saucer. Two chairs leaned against the wall; one of them proved to have only three legs. A small mirror with mildew marks hung on the wall. Under one of the windows was a small table covered with a threadbare huckaback towel. The floor was bare except for a slice of brown carpet by the bed; Marcella liked the bare clean boards. They looked like the deck of a ship. She liked the room. Its clean bareness reminded her, a little, of rooms in the farm after the furniture had been sold.

Her baggage lay in a forlorn heap with Louis's, all jumbled together just as the Customs Officers had left it. Taking off her shoes she put on her bedroom slippers and began to move about quietly, unpacking things, hanging her frocks on a row of pegs in the alcove, for there was no cupboard of any description—putting some books on the

mantelpiece, her toilet things on the table. She was doing things in a dream, but it was a dream into which outside things penetrated,

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for when she had arranged the table beneath the window as a dressing-table it occurred to her that it would have to be used for meals and she packed her things away on the shelf above the row of pegs. Quite unthinkingly she had accepted this place as home; after the tiny cabin it did not seem very small; she was too mentally anxious to feel actual disadvantages. It was days before the cramping influence of four walls made her stifled and gasp for breath.

She had a vague idea that Louis ought not to be wakened, but, looking at him, she saw that his neck was twisted uncomfortably and his collar cutting it. Raising him gently she tried to take his coat and collar off; he half wakened and made a weak motion as though to strike her. She noticed that his hands were very dirty.

"Louis, you're so uncomfortable," she whispered. "Let me help you undress and get into bed."

"Le' me lone," muttered Louis, lying heavily on her arm. "Aft' my blasted papers. Blast' German—even if you did play Marsh—laise! Marsh—laise! Marsh—shella!"

His voice rose in an insistence of terror and she laid her face against his soothingly.

Then she drew back, sickened by the smell of the various mixtures he had been drinking.

"Ugh—he is horrible," she whispered, and bit her lip and frowned.

Then his frightened eyes sought hers and she whispered softly.

"Poor boy. Don't be so frightened. Marcella is here."

"Marsh—Marcella," he said, making a desperate effort to sit up and look round. He looked at her, bewildered, at the room, and then his eyes focussed on the lion over the mantelpiece.

"Bri'sh line, ole girl! Shtrength! I'm a line—fi' f'r you when we're married."

"We are married, dear," she said. "Can't you remember it?"

He stared at her again and dragged himself on to his elbow, looking into her face, his brain clearing rapidly. After a moment's desperate grasping for light he burst into tears.

"Married! And drunk! Oh, my God, why did you give me that money, little girl?"

She was crying, too, now, holding his damp, sticky hand.

“I thought—if I trusted you—to-day—”

“You mustn’t trust me. Oh, damn it all, I’m a chunk of jelly!”

“I thought—Oh Louis, if someone loved me and trusted me to make myself a musician, I’d do it somehow—and I’ve about as much music in me as a snail!” she cried passionately. “You know I trusted you! It seems to me that if you can’t remember for ten minutes, and try to be kind the very hour we’re married, the whole thing is hopeless —”

He was getting rapidly sobered by his sense of shame, and looked at her with swimming eyes. He struggled off the bed, lurched a little and nearly fell.

“Don’t you see I’m not like you? We’re intrinsically different. I might have been like you—once. It’s too late now. If I’d been trusted before this thing gripped me so tight—Marcella, the thing that makes other people do hard things is missing in me! I’ve killed it by drinking and lying! I’m without moral sense, Marcella! Can’t you see? I’m castrated in my mind! There’s lots of people like that.”



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"I don't understand you, Louis," she said weakly. "And—and I haven't got a dictionary to look up things." He was not listening to her. He went on raving.

"You mustn't trust me! Do you hear? If a doctor got hold of me, he'd lock me up! And that would do no real good! Nobody wants to help a drunkard, nobody tells him how to get a hold on himself. They're barbarous to us—like they were to the lepers and the loonies in the Bible."

"I'm not barbarous, Louis. Oh, my dear, my dear—you know I'd do anything."

"No, but you're a fool and don't understand! Why can't some wise person do something for me? Marcella, you're a fool, I tell you. You don't know. You don't understand when I'm lying to you. God, why aren't you sharp enough—or dirty enough yourself—to see that I'm brain and bone, a liar? You didn't know that I was drinking champagne at lunch to-day, did you? Violet would have known! You didn't know I'd two flasks of whisky in my pockets, and kept getting rid of you a minute to have a swig, did you? If only you were a liar yourself, you'd understand that I was!"

She sat back against the foot of the bed, feeling as though all her bones had melted away.

"Then what *am* I to do?" she said weakly, letting her hands drop. "I've no one to tell me but you."

"And I lie to you! God knows what we're going to do. I've lied again about the money. I never wrote and told the Pater be damned to his money! There'll be two weeks waiting for me at the G.P.O. now. Why did you believe me?"

"Louis—listen to me. I thought you were giving yourself a bad name and hanging yourself. I thought if you sponged out all thought of drink from your mind you'd be cured."

There was a gloomy silence. At last he burst out impatiently.

"Why aren't women taught elementary psychology before they get married? That is very good treatment for anyone who has a scrap of moral fibre in him. But I haven't. It won't work with me. You mustn't trust me. I'm a man with a castrated soul, Marcella. I've killed the active part of me by drinking and lying and slacking. You've got to treat me like a kid or a lunatic. I am one, really—there, don't look frightened, but it's true—Listen, old girl. Keep me locked up. I mean it, seriously. If I can be forcibly kept off the blasted stuff I'll get some sort of perspective. Now everything looks wobbly to me. Then, when I've got the drink out, you've to graft something on to me. Why in hell's name didn't I marry a girl who knew medicine? Don't you know that if a great chunk of skin is burnt off anyone, more is grafted on?"

She nodded, her eyes wide with terror.

“Well, I’m telling you this now honestly. Presently I’ll be lying again. Marcella, I’ve to have will-power grafted on to me, and until I have, I’m going to stay in bed. See?”

He was fumbling for his keys in his pockets. He gave them to her with trembling hands. There was a flask of whisky untouched in his pocket, and two empty ones. He threw them through the window regardless of passers-by.

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“Get out of here, Marcella, or look through the window a bit. I’m going to get undressed and lock up all my things. I’m a filthy object. You mustn’t look at me till I’ve cleaned myself up. Then you must see that I stay in bed till this hunger goes off. If I do that every time it comes on—Lord, you always make me feel I want to wash myself in something very big and clean, like the sea.”

She turned to the glimmering window, feeling very humble. She felt that she had let him down, somehow, in not being more wise. And yet she knew very certainly that she was going to grope and grope now, hurting herself and him until she did know.

“Why am I such a fool?” she asked, helplessly. The Morse lights winked at her from the flagship and she got back the memory of a night many years ago, when she had walked on Ben Grief with her mother just before she was too ill to walk out any more. They had seen a ship winking so that night, far out at sea, and it had passed silently. That night her mother had talked of God’s Fools and how they were the world’s wisest men.

“If you are not very wise, darling,” her mother had said, “God has a chance to use you better. It is so very hard for clever people to do things for God, humbly—which is the only way—because they are egotists wanting to show their own cleverness and not His all the time.”

That night she had told Marcella the story of Parsifal, the “pure fool” and how he, too big a fool to know his own name properly, had come to the court of the king who was too ill to do anything, God’s work or man’s.

“You see, this king had been given the sacred Spear. So long as he had it no enemy could hurt him or his kingdom. But when he forgot, and pleased himself just for a moment, the enemy got the Spear and wounded him with it. No one could cure him till poor Parsifal came along—a poor simpleton who had been brought up in the desert. And the only reason he could win back the Spear, and cure the king, and bring back the symbol of God’s Presence on earth again, was that he was so sorry for the king. He wanted so much to heal him that, whenever he got tired and sick, and whenever he got into temptations he was able to conquer them. It was his pity made him conquer where wiser people, more selfish and less loving, had failed.”

Marcella let the far-off, gentle voice sink into her mind, then. She saw herself very consciously as Parsifal; he, too, had been a fool. She felt she could take heart of grace from the fact that another fool had won through to healing and victory. When, presently, Louis’s voice came to her, she turned with a swift vision of him as King Amfortas with the unstaunchable wound.

He had washed and brushed his hair, and changed into pyjamas. He looked very pitiful, very ill. He was standing in the middle of the room with the two candles flicking in the light night breeze, making leaping shadows of him all over the walls.

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"My head's damn bad," he groaned. "It feels as if it's going to burst."

He swayed and almost fell. She helped him over to the bed. He sunk on it with a sigh of relief.

"I feel damn bad," he said again, and burst into tears.

"Don't cry, Louis. I'm going to make you better now," she said, sitting on the edge of the bed and stroking his damp hair gently.

"Light me a cig-rette—light me a cig-rette," he said, rapidly, shaking his hands impatiently. "In my coat—find my cigarette-holder. Be quick—be quick—There, I'm sorry, old girl. I felt so jumpy then. It seems as if there are faces watching me. Marcella—I'm sure there are Chinks about."

"You're quite safe with Marcella," she said, soothingly, as if she were speaking to a child. He puffed at the cigarette but his hands shook so much that she had to hold it for him. It soothed him considerably. She registered that fact for future reference. Presently he threw the cigarette across the room into the grate and turned over.

"Lord, I'm tired. Not had a decent night's sleep for centuries. Those damn bunks on the Oriana were so hard! Marcella—I want to go to sleep. If I don't get some sleep I shall go mad. Let me put my poor old head on your shoulder and go to sleep. I—dream—of your—white shoulders."

She sat quite still, trembling a little until his heavy breathing told her that he was asleep. His hair, which he had soaked in water to make it lie straight, felt wet and cold on her neck. After a long while she laid his head on the pillow and stood up, stretching herself because she was so stiff.

"Don't leave me," he murmured, without opening his eyes. She laid a cool hand on his head again. When she took it away he was fast asleep. She stood with her hands clasped behind her, watching him for a long time. Then she turned away with a sigh, to gaze through the window, trying to locate her position by the stars, only to be puzzled until she remembered that, for the last three weeks, the stars had been different from those that kept their courses above Lashnagar. She would not have felt so lonely had she been able to turn towards home as a Mahommedan turns towards Mecca. After awhile, chilled and hungry and aching in her throat, she turned back into the room.

"Being married is horrible," she whispered. "I thought it was such an adventure."

Going across to the bed she stood looking at him, her eyes filled with tears and, bending over him, she touched his forehead with her lips.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she whispered. "I wish you weren't drunk."

He stirred, and his hand made a little, ineffectual movement towards her, and dropped again.

Something in its weakness, its inadequacy, made her impatient; she felt it impossible to come near to anything so ineffectual as that futile hand and, taking the pillow from the other side of the bed, laid it on the floor. She started to undress and stopped sharp.

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"I can't get in my nightgown—in case he wakes up and sees me," she said. A moment later, rolled in her old plaid travelling rug she lay on the floor. It did not seem uncomfortable; it did not seem an extraordinary thing to her for a girl to go to sleep on the floor; she had her father to thank for immunity from small physical discomforts.

### CHAPTER XVI

Marcella was wakened several times during the night; she was cold and stiff, but only apprehended her discomfort vaguely as she listened to Louis muttering—mostly in French. Each time she spoke softly to him as she used to speak to her father when he was ill. To her he suddenly became an invalid; as the days went on she accepted the role of mother and nurse to him; only occasionally did a more normal love flame out, bewildering and enchanting as his kisses on the *Oriana* had enchanted and bewildered her. She felt, often, contemptuous of a man who had to stay in bed and have his clothes locked up to save him from getting drunk; at the same time she admired him for attempting so drastic a cure. It was a wholly delightful experience to her to have money and spend it on buying things for him; she would, at this time, have been unrecognizable to Dr. Angus and Wullie; they would never have seen their rather dreamy, very boy-like, almost unembodied Marcella of Lashnagar in the Marcella of Sydney, with her alternate brooding maternal tenderness that guarded him as a baby, or with the melting softness of suddenly released passion. All her life she had been "saved up," dammed back, save for her inarticulate adoration of her mother, her heart-rending love of her father and her comradeship with Wullie and the doctor. Louis had opened the lock gates of her love and got the full sweep of the flood. But he gave nothing in return save the appeal of weakness, the rather disillusioning charm of discovery and novelty.

For the first few weeks in Sydney she walked in an aura of passion strangely blended of the physical and the spiritual. She knew nothing about men; what she had seen on the ship made her class them as nuisances to be put in the sea out of hand. Her father was the only man she had known intimately before. Her father had been a weak man, and yet a tyrant and an autocrat. Logically, then, all men were tyrants and autocrats. The women in Sydney whom she saw in Mrs. King's kitchen, where she went to learn how to cook, talked much of their husbands, calling them "boss." Hence she meekly accepted Louis's autocratic orderings of her coming and going. Again, her father had been gripped, in the tentacles first of the whisky-cult, and later of the God-cult. Therefore, she reasoned, all men were so gripped by something. It was a pity that they were so gripped. It seemed to her that women must have been created to be soft cushions for men to fall upon, props to keep them up, nurses to minister to their weakness. She slowly came to realize

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that the age of heroes was dead—if it had ever been, outside the covers of story-books. It seemed that Siegfried no longer lived to slay dragons, that Andromeda would have to buckle on armour, slip her bonds and save her Perseus when he got into no end of entanglements on his way to rescue her. By degrees she came to think that men were children, to be humoured by being called “boss” or “hero” as the case may be. Reading the extraordinary assortment of books sent to her by the doctor, as time went on, it seemed to her that John the Baptist of to-day had gone aside from making straight the pathway of the Lord to lie in the tangles of Salome’s hair. In all the great names she read there seemed to be a kink; some of them were under a cloud of drugs or drink; de Quincey hurt her terribly; sitting one day on the side of Louis’s bed reading “John Barleycorn”—she had discovered Jack London in the “Cruise of the Snark” and loved his fine adventurousness—she felt that she could not bear to know a thing so fine, so joyous and so dashing as he should have so miserable a neurosis.

Dr. Angus, among other things, sent her Kraill’s Lendicott Trust Autumn lectures in the form of six little grey covered pamphlets. They were much coloured by recent inspiring German and American sex psychology. But she did not know that. She thought that they began, continued and ended in Kraill and, though she fell down in adoration before his uncanny wisdom, his cynicism made her miserable. They showed her humanity in chains; particularly did they show her man in chains; she read them all—six of them—in one afternoon and evening; students and trained scientists had taken them in doses of one a fortnight. Naturally she got mental indigestion that was not helped by the fact that, six to a dozen times on every page, she had to find the meaning of words in a dictionary she had bought to look up the meaning of Louis’s remark the first night they were married. He was amused and tolerant about the dictionary. He seemed to think girls need not trouble to understand what they read. He was particularly superior about “little girls trying to take strong meat when they were at the milk-for-babes stage of development.”

“But you know, Louis,” she said, looking up from her pamphlet with a perplexed frown, “He seems to think that if a man wants a cup of tea and a piece of bread and butter, it’s sex!”

“Well, so it is,” said Louis calmly, puffing at his cigarette and watching her through the smoke. “Every hunger on earth is sex, right at bottom—every desire is generated by the sex force; drinking, love of parents and children, love of God, the artist’s desire for beauty and to create beauty—just sex, old lady!”

He laughed at her horrified face.

“And you’re such a bally little Puritan you think that’s terrible, don’t you?”

She nodded, flushing.

“You aren’t a Puritan, really, Marcella,” he said, watching her face. “It’s your upbringing has made you a Puritan.”



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"Louis," she burst out, "I'd rather be a Puritan, I think—and be all dead and dried up like Aunt Janet, than—than—what you call bowled over. I'd loathe that anything should have me; put me in chains; make me do things! Louis—" her voice dropped to a meek whisper, "it isn't that—that—beastly sort of thing makes me love you, is it? Makes me love to buy flowers and books for you, and make food for you, and be near you? Louis—just because you're a man and I'm a girl?"

"Of course it is, you little silly," he said complacently.

"Then I won't!" she cried hotly. "I won't do a thing because something inside me, over which I have no control, says I've got to! I hate it! It's a chain—I'm—a thing with a will, not just a bundle of instincts."

He looked at her queerly, laughed a little and said nothing. She got the terrible idea that he knew more than she did, that something was weaving a net which all the while she thought was beautiful devotion when it was really something that was getting entangled in her arms and legs so that she could not move as she wished.

"I resent it!" she cried, suddenly, starting up as though she would push the wall through and escape into the street. "I can't bear chains, Louis."

"Then commit suicide," he said, stretching his hand out to her. "Even then some of these mad psychics say that that doesn't kill the thing you're escaping from. They say you die with an appetite and are so earthbound that you come to life again with it still about you. Lord, if I died now I'd come back and be the bung of a whisky barrel—and you—"

"Louis, don't," she cried, staring up wildly. "It's beastly. Oh it's better not to understand anything at all! Do you know, I believe lots of people who stop to think resent these tyrannies of the body, only they don't mention it because it's the sort of thing that makes people blush! In this last lecture Professor Kraill says the same thing you told me once."

"Considering I've already told you quite a million things—" he began in the tone one uses to a child. She broke in passionately, turning the pages of Number Six of the Lendicott Lectures swiftly.

"Listen. This is what he says."

*"We are loaded with sex and sex tradition, which the body and its burdens have imposed upon humanity. Poets have written and dreamed of the delights of wine, woman and song; priests and prophets have written and thundered and dreamed of the world, the flesh and the devil. It is only a difference of terminology. Poet, artist, priest and anchorite alike thought all the time of the tyranny of the body until it became a*



*million-horse-power steam hammer crushing out his microscopic pin-head of a soul. To man, woman is still the siren tradition made her; she likes to be. She likes to think hers is 'the face that launched a thousand ships and fired the topless towers of Ilium.' She insists that man*

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*shall set out on his high adventure in quest of her. But he is beginning to see through her. He has her fate in the test-tube of his scientific laboratories to-day. She has refused to join him as a comrade in armour; she has preferred to remain the vehicle of reproduction, the prize of his play-times, his allurements, his passenger. Then let her remain so. Man is going to keep her under. Think what has been done in plastic surgery, what is being done in what I call plastic psychology! Think what selection has been done in the breeding of lower forms of life. And then let woman tremble! If she is perpetually going to chain man in the meshes of her hair, the curves of her fingers, he is going to get rid of her—except as a thing for pleasure and for use. Most of the time he hugs his chains. One day he will get clear vision, realize that woman has got too much for him and—limit her! It is, to some extent, being done unconsciously already. Why is it a disgrace to be the mother of a girl-child in certain Oriental countries? Why do they drown girl-babies in the Ganges? It is simply that they realize the danger of this softness, this overlordship of women! Clearer thinking than we, they see the menace of femininity. We of the West will soon see that woman has been the passenger in the rather frail life-boat of the world. And in self defence we shall put her overboard before long—unless—unless—she takes an oar."*

"Lord, he *does* lap into them, doesn't he?" said Louis, gleefully.

She frowned and pondered.

"I think you are ungenerous, all of you," she said softly. "Men seem such unbalanced children to me. Wanting to put women overboard."

She looked at Louis, and they both broke into an uncontrollable fit of laughter as they recalled that that was exactly what she had literally done with an annoying man.

"Perhaps we're all ungenerous," she said presently. "I believe we are ungenerous towards the thing that chains us. It's only natural. But I don't think that you or the author of 'John Barleycorn' or poor de Quincey ought really to put drugs and drink and all that out of the world at all. You ought to live with them in the world, and not let them chain you. Don't you think so? And—poor Professor Kraill! Isn't he wistful about the stuffiness of women's hair? Oh Louis, do you know what it reminds me of?"

He lit a cigarette, watching her with amused tolerance.

"Knollys put a horrible sticky fly-paper in the stewards' pantry one day. I was looking at it, and wishing flies needn't be made at all. Then I wished I could let the poor things all loose, no matter how horrible they are. There was one big bluebottle that had got stuck there on his back with his wings in the sticky stuff. He struggled and struggled till—Oh, horrible!—his wings came off. Then he crawled and crawled, over other dead flies till he got to the edge of the paper. And he went all wobbly and horrible because nearly all his legs had got pulled off."

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"Lord, what a mind you've got!" he said.

"Can't you see that's how people are—most of them. Oh, poor things! If I'd stopped to think I'd have been sorry for Ole Fred instead of putting him in the sea for the sharks."

He looked at her amusedly again, and then at the kettle boiling on the little spirit-stove.

"I say, old lady, theories are all very nice—after tea," he suggested.

"Oh, is it tea time?" she said, with a little sigh. Then, brightening, she hummed a little tune all wrong as she cut bread and butter, laid a little spray of bush roses round his plate and went down to the kitchen to ask Mrs. King's advice about what treatment she could give to eggs to make them nicer than usual for him.

At the door she turned back.

"You know, Louis—they've such lovely, shining wings—all beautiful colours—"

"What?" he said. He had already dismissed the "silly little girl's" arguments from his mind.

"I'm thinking about people and bluebottles! Lovely iridescent wings all splashed down in sticky stuff. And swift legs—it seems such a pity to cripple them so that they can't fly or run."

"I *do* so want my tea," he said, pretending to groan.

She ran down the stairs with a laugh.

That day she discovered the possibilities of the roof.

At the end of the landing on which their big top room opened was a short iron ladder. She decided to explore and, climbing up the iron ladder, pushed up the trapdoor. A cry of delight escaped her as she thrust her head through the opening. It was a great, flat roof, separated from the next ones by low copings of stone work, flat topped and about two feet high. The town, as she climbed out and stood on the roof, lay beneath her like a plan. People looked like flies in the streets, the tramcars like accelerated caterpillars. The water of the harbour was still and smooth and as incredibly blue as the water she had seen Mrs. King using in her laundry work that morning. Wharves or trees ran right down into the blueness. The big ships lying at anchor made her heart beat fast with their clean beauty and romance; the bare, clean roofs running along for perhaps fifty houses gave her a breath of freedom that brought back Lashnagar and Ben Grief. She thought, with a pang of pity, about Louis, the product of suburban London, chained to streets and houses almost all his boyhood, knowing nothing of the scourge of the winds, the courage of wide, high places. She tumbled down the ladder, her eyes bright.



“Louis—Oh Louis, come up on the roof! It’s perfectly beautiful! I’ve been so worried about you shut up here like this, and I’ve felt so choked myself with this one room. But up there I’ll make you shut your eyes, and I’ll tell you all about Ben Grief, and you’ll think you’re there. I’ll make you hear the curlews and the gulls and see Jock and Tammias come in with the boats.”

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"But on the roof!" he protested. "Whatever next?"

"Oh, come and see. You'll love it," she urged and, though he said it was "a beastly fag," she got him at last into his dressing-gown and slippers and sitting beside her on the coping.

She was happier than she had been for months; she felt that there was enough breath up here for her, and not even his laughing at her for being "such a kid" could damp her enjoyment. Presently a new idea occurred to her.

"Let's sleep up here!" she cried, and once again over-ruled his objections, and dragged up the mattress and blankets.

The shadows of the chimneys were long across the roofs as she laid the mattress down by the coping. The day had been hot with the clear, bright heat of early summer. They sat on the mattress, smoking—an accomplishment Marcella had learnt from him and practised rather tentatively. She talked to him of Lashnagar, pouring into his ears legend after legend of her people, until she came to the tale of the spaewife and the coming of the ruin upon Lashnagar.

"Do you mean to have the cheek to say this is an ancestor of yours?" he asked as, with glowing eyes and quickened breaths, she told him of the twins born on Flodden Field and wrapt in their foemen's trappings. Had he been less self-centred he could not have tried to hurt her by making fun of her legends.

"Yes. She is my great, great, goodness knows how great grandmother. I'm rather proud of her, but she takes some living up to. I often feel I disappoint her. But if ever I feel flabby or lazy or tired of hard things I switch my mind on to her. Fancy her, sick and weak, tramping after her man to the battle, and then leaving him dead as she took his heirs and his shattered pennant back to the ruins of his home. I feel ashamed of myself for ever daring to think I'm ill-used when I think of my spaewife grandmother! We're not brave and hard like that now—But I'd rather like to get her here to settle you and people who talk about 'limiting' women. She wasn't much of a passenger."

"Oh, that witch story comes in lots of mythologies, and old family histories!" he said, teasingly. "I don't suppose she ever existed at all, really, or if she did it was because she'd been tarred and feathered and took refuge at that out of the world show because she was afraid of being burnt."

"Afraid!" she cried, and began to tingle all over just as she had tingled when Mactavish played the pipes at her father's funeral. Just for an instant she wanted to push Louis over the roof, hear him smash far below on the street for daring to say the spaewife was afraid. Then, just as swiftly, she remembered that he was weak and must not be annoyed because he could not stand it. It came to her in a flash how impossible it was

for him, with no pride but self-love, no courage but Dutch courage, to understand fearlessness and endurance. Her tingling smart of madness and anger passed, leaving her penitent and pitying. She put her arm round his neck and kissed him behind his ear. He, not knowing the swift processes of her thought, imagined that he had “knocked a bit of the silliness out of her” effectively.

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"Poor little boy," she whispered, and he liked it.

The waters of the harbour began to deepen to indigo: the sun went down behind the roofs of the city at their side. There was a faint faraway crackling in the air as of straw and twigs burning in a fierce fire; the sky was flooded with streamers of mauve and green, gold and rosy light that flickered over the bed of the sinking sun for an hour or more instead of leaving the sky suddenly grey as it usually was after the rapid twilight. The sundown bugle called down the flag on the masthead of the flagship, and the headlights twinkled out. Marcella and Louis grew very quiet as the streets quietened and only an occasional car clanged by in George Street, an occasional band of singing sailors went back rollicking down the street, a solitary ferry glided along in the water, with brilliant reflections and blaring German band. She crept a little closer to him; when he did not speak she forgot, for the while, the chasm between them. It is so easy not to criticize anything seen through veils of glamour. People socially, spiritually and mentally worlds apart can love violently for a while when there is physical attraction. And they are very happy, breathlessly, feverishly happy. Then they wake up with a memory of mutual giving-way that embitters and humiliates when the inevitable longing for something more stable than softness and breathlessness sets in.

Louis had not been drunk for three weeks; so many things had happened to her, new things, charming things, adorable things and sad things since they left the ship that she had almost sponged the memory of it from her mind. The faculty that had been forced upon her in self defence during her childhood, of forgetting hunger, hardness and repression the moment she left the house and got out on to the wild hillside in the sun and the wind came to her now with a kind of rapture. She had never, in her childhood, dared to resent anything that hurt herself. This spirit of non-resentment had become a habit of mind with her. She forgot—if she ever realized—that Louis had hurt her, in the soft beauty of the aurora, the silent fall of the night, the exhilaration of the roof with its loneliness, its romance.

After awhile she went down the ladder and brought up grapes and granadillas, and four candles. Louis looked disappointed: he would have preferred mutton for supper, but for once said nothing as she stuck two candles on the coping and two at the foot of the mattress, and lighted them. They burnt unnickering in the windless, blue air.

It was the setting of romance. Dreams, play-acting came back. Breaking off a bunch of grapes for Louis she said:

"This is a roof garden in Babylon. You're a king. Oh no, it's Jerusalem. I'm Bethsaibe, bathing on the roof and you're King David. You've got to fall in love with me."



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Louis was too self-centred, too introspective to make love to anyone; it was only alcohol that released unconscious longings in him: he had never, consciously, loved anything on earth: his desperate pleadings with Marcella on the ship had been pleadings for a mother, a caretaker rather than for a lover. His gross suggestions when he was drunk—the relics of his boyish first sex adventure—she did not understand. Nor did she understand why, when he had lain drunk and asleep that first night in the room below, she had looked at him feeling choked to tears; why she sat up at night watching him as he slept, vaguely dis comforted and distressed; why she looked at him with blinded eyes. Had Louis not roused first her mother love to guard his helplessness, he would never have got into close enough touch with her to rouse the physical passion which might have thus slept on for long years. All her frowning, bewildered self-analysis could not explain the whirlpool of sensations into which she had fallen, which alternately buffeted her with vague unhappiness and drew her along to ecstasies. She did not realize that all her dreams of a splendid Lover had become mixed up with the family legend about “taking the man she needed” and had crystallized round Louis, the first man to waken physical passion for her.

In a warm rapture up here on the house-top in the still night air her conscious mind went to sleep; she lived her dreams. And Louis did not understand; out of the reach of temptation for three weeks, he felt very strong; her tenderness, her passionate love flattered him: he became a very fine fellow indeed in his own eyes as he lay there, half asleep, under the silver and purple of the midnight sky. He must be a very fine fellow—so he argued—if she could love him. She had won his reluctant admiration long before she had wakened his love.

“She’s a queer stick,” he told himself drowsily, “and a perfect darling. Lord, the way she shook the life out of me that night at Naples! Just because I mentioned her bally old father. I believe—I really believe, in spite of her being in the steerage—that she’s pretty well born! And the way she stuck Ole Fred in the water without turning a hair. And got fifty quid out of her uncle as easy as falling off a log! Lord, I’ve never raised more than a fiver out of an uncle in my life—and that on a birthday.”

He felt for her hand and held it drowsily. It was a very cool, hard hand—not in the least like Violet’s pretty little product of creams and manicure.

“She’s *some* girl,” he thought. “And what a blazing wonder that she’ll look at me. Yet I can twist her round my little finger—on occasions like to-night.”

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By a very humanly understandable metempsychosis she became just a little less shining because more reachable; some of her shine transferred to him. His conception of the whole thing was physical; hers was not consciously physical at all. But as she lay, long after he was asleep, watching the candles fade one by one, leaving a fainter purple in the sky, she felt vaguely disappointed; all this business of love-making seemed to mean so much less to Louis than it did to her; he did not take it seriously, or rather he did not make it the high feast she found it. He could be flippant about it. For her it broke down every barrier, every reservation. Louis was able to come down immediately from ecstasy to everyday things. This, she argued, meant that he had not flown so very high after all. He was able to make a laughing, half-embarrassed remark to the effect that he hoped no one else was on the roofs round about. She would not have cared if everyone in Sydney was on the roofs. For her no one existed just then but Louis. That had jarred a little. Then there were no more cigarettes and he had, quite petulantly, complained of the trouble of going down into the room for a new tin. She had gone cheerfully, as she would have fetched things for her father. She did not realize that, by waiting on his whims, she was lowering herself in his esteem. He had taken the cigarettes without a word of thanks. It was only when she lay awake for hours afterwards, with a vague discomfort that was certainly not physical, that she remembered and was amazed that he could have remembered cigarettes just then. It did not square at all with her Lover dream. And the Southern Cross as she lay with unblinking eyes staring into the great, still dome above her, was disappointing. She had heard so much about it; she had thought it would be a group of flaming suns in the night sky. And its separate pointers were not even so big and bright as Venus. She felt, somehow, that she had been cheated a little; and immediately told herself that it was not so really—either she had expected too much, or else she was not clever enough to see what was really there all the time.

She did not go to sleep all the night. It was at four o'clock that she crept quietly from underneath the blankets and sat on the coping, perilously near the edge of the outer wall, with the dawn wind from the sea blowing deliciously cold through her thin nightgown. Daybreak came like the rolling up of a blind; thoughts and memories chased each other in her mind. She looked across at Louis, fast asleep. Her impulse told her to waken and ask him to kiss her good morning. And then she stopped dead. Her feet were carrying her, very uncomfortably, over the rusted corrugated iron of the roof towards him. Her brain signalled to them to stop, and they would not! She felt herself being carried by them quite against her will, and in another moment she knew that her lips would be on his eyes, kissing him to waken him. And at that moment her foot caught on a nail that the weathering of the iron had exposed. She gave a little, repressed cry of pain and saw her foot bleeding.

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She sat down exactly where she was; her foot went on bleeding, but she did not notice it. The slight pain had done its work in jerking her to an awareness of her body.

“Oh, my goodness,” she said out aloud, “I’m caught! I’m chained! Louis was right when he said I didn’t understand about these hungers. Oh, my goodness, it’s like Louis’s feet take him to a whisky bottle. My feet were simply coolly walking me off to waken him up.”

She sat motionless, scarcely breathing. Her heart began to thump unpleasantly and she felt a flush tingling down to her feet and to the tips of her fingers.

“If I hadn’t torn my foot then I’d have given way to that blaze—and each time you give way to a thing it chains you a bit more! I’d never have had a chance to sit cool and think it out, because I’d have forgotten, before I knew where I was, that it needed thinking out at all. I’d have wakened him by now.”

This jerked her, wakened her, widened her. Swiftly she was able to see that Louis, on his whisky chase, de Quincy on his opium chase, King David, Solomon, Nelson, Byron and Kraill on their woman chase were not perhaps so fortunate as to get a nail jabbed in their feet, pulling them up sharp and giving them time to think.

“There I’ve been blaming them a bit—pitying them a lot! Heavens, I was *superior!*” she said.

The sun came up out of the sea and looked at her.

“Because I didn’t know,” she told it. “I was superior! Because I’d never felt the pull of a chain.”

She thought the sun took on a horribly knowing, superior expression.

Another rather shaking thought came. Since her recollection of the blameless fool that first night in Sydney she had sought the bookshops for the text of “Parsifal” and had found it, a ragged copy for twopence, in a second-hand bookshop near the station. She had been puzzled when Parsifal, trying to free himself from the enchantment of the witch-woman’s embrace, had suddenly been confronted by her exultant:

“And so then, with my kiss,  
The world’s heart have I shewn thee?  
In my soft arms enfolded  
Like to a god thou’lt deem thee.”

“Yes, that’s it,” she cried. “Oh, you old sun, listen to the speciousness of it all! Listen—I mustn’t let Louis hear, because he’d be hurt. He isn’t my Lover, my Knight at all. He’s just the same thing to me as women used to be to the Knights—he’s something to

rescue, to deliver from bondage. And—just like those beautiful, soft women, he’s—he’s a sort of seduction to me. Oh—it’s horrible!”

She waited a minute tensely. Thought always came to her in flashes.

“And so are all men. They’re all in bondage.”

The sun seemed to have a big, fat, knowing face. One of his eyes winked at her.

“Here am I getting myself into a chain that’s going to drag at me every time I’m fighting for him. This—this softness, this love-making and all the thrill of it—it’s going to make holes in my armour and stuff them up with—*crepe de Chine!*”

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She had seen *crepe de Chine* yesterday for the first time; Mrs. King was making a blouse of it. Marcella had loved its fine sheen and delicacy. But it did not seem much use as armour.

“Here’s this thing happened to wake me up, give me insight. There is the plausibleness of it, the temptation of it. I *know* last night taught me things, millions of things. It promises to teach me more each time it’s repeated. And each time it’s repeated I get more and more *crepe de Chine* patches on my armour. I get bowled over like a ninepin. How am I to know I’ll not be permanently bowled over—till I get—like—like—” A long line of those people she had pitied for their weakness came to her. “I nearly was this morning. If it hadn’t been for that nice kind nail in the roof! Wagner knew all about this when he made the witch-woman realize that her kiss had unlocked all the world’s wisdom for the fool. And one can’t help wondering how it is that a thing so natural and beautiful can be bad for one—”

She began to bite her thumb-nail fiercely and stopped, disgusted with herself, as she realized how she had often condemned Louis for exactly the same habit when he got perplexed.

“You see!” she told the sun desperately, “even a little thing like that! I do think we’re censorious and cruel to each other.”

She began to walk about the roof. Her foot was bleeding neglected; at every step she left a little, red print unnoticed.

“Of course it’s natural and beautiful—and abominably instructive! Where the wrong comes in is that it gets you down, beats you, takes hold of you. Eating bread would be wrong if you made an orgy of it. So would religion, or anything. All this time I’ve been posing as something so splendid, wanting to save Louis from Drink; I’ve been deceiving myself. I’ve been in love with him. And it’s the sort of love that would soon degenerate into an orgy—if I let it!”

She felt that she was so full of ideas that she was getting muddled, but one thing was very clear.

“I wonder if that queer remark in Genesis, ‘Adam knew Eve, his wife,’ means this strange understanding that has happened to me to-night? I’ve often been puzzled by what it could mean. Did it mean that he became aware, in a flash as I did, of what this sex business might mean in his life—how it might be a chain to him as it has been to so many people? It’s queer—it’s like waking up from a dream that’s been over you all your life, and suddenly seeing things very clear. I see them clear now.” She looked out across the shining sea. “Either it can be a chain, or it can be a Spear of Deliverance as it was to Parsifal.”



She looked from the sea to Louis, unconscious, untroubled by problems now that she had taken his burdens upon herself. She realized that she had even more battles to fight now. She had her own; there was an enemy within her own camp. Even as she stood there watching him her nails gripped the stone coping fiercely because half of her was wanting last night's tornado back again.

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"No, I won't put up with chains. I'll carry a Spear," she said, and tumbled down the ladder to dress ... tumbled because her feet were unsteady.

### CHAPTER XVII

As she was dressing she became aware of sounds of violent scrubbing going on in the next room—she had often heard such sounds almost before dawn. She had noticed, too, the almost painful cleanliness of the rather bare, big house. She knew that no servants were kept; she never saw Mrs. King scrubbing; most of her time was spent in cooking and washing clothes. Mr. King had never, yet, put in an appearance.

Presently the scrubbing stopped and shambling steps came along the landing as someone slopped along, dragging his slippers into which he had merely thrust his toes. There was a scratching sort of tap at the door. Marcella opened it quickly.

A man stood in the doorway, a man with bent shoulders, grey hair and bent back. His face was yellow and unhealthy-looking; his eyes were filmed and colourless. He seemed half asleep as he looked round over his shoulder suspiciously.

"Missus—have you got a tray bit?" he whispered.

"What's that?" she asked.

"A tray bit, missus—just thruppence—a mouldy thruppence to get a livener."

"Oh, you want some money?" she said hurriedly, and realizing the impossibility of offering a grown up man threepence gave him half a crown. He shambled off without a word and she saw no more of him. Later, when Louis came down from the roof, he slid along the landing on the soap the scrubber had left there. When Marcella went down to the kitchen where Mrs. King was already busy ironing, the mystery was explained.

"My boss has gone off for the day," she complained. "I went up into Dutch Frank's room just now, and found the pail of water left there! He'd hardly begun his scrubbing. I don't know where he got his money from."

"Was *that* your husband?" cried Marcella, stopping short in her toast-making.

"Oh, he's bin at you, has he?" said Mrs. King resignedly.

"I gave him—a little money. I didn't know he was your husband," said Marcella apologetically.

"I ought to have warned you, but there, you can't think of every blooming thing at once. Don't you worry, kid. I'm not blaming you. He would have been at you sooner or later.

It's all the same in the long run, but it means I've got to scrub the floors. And my back's that bad—I do suffer with my back something cruel."

"Where has he gone, then?"

"Oh, beer-bumming. He goes off every day, and comes in every night after closing time, shikkered up."

"I've never seen him before," ventured Marcella.

"He's a lad, Bob is. We had a bonser hotel once, kid—a tied house, you know. He was manager, on'y he drunk us out of it. So then I took on this place on my own—got the furniture hire system, else he'd raise money on it, and sell it up under me. He's no damn good to me, you know, kid—only I do manage to get a bit of scrubbing out of him, of a morning."



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"Does he scrub floors?" asked Marcella in awestruck tones.

"It's all he's good for. He never earns a penny. He goes and tacks on to any fellow he sees looking a bit flushed with money and boozes with him all day. He often meets a fellow that knew us when we had the hotel, and he gets a beer or two out of him."

"Oh, I am sorry, Mrs. King," began Marcella, but Mrs. King laughed a little harshly.

"I don't mind so much now, kid—got past it. So long as my back don't trouble me too much. The boys are very good to me—they put him to bed if he's dead drunk. If he isn't dead drunk I won't sleep with him, because he's always forward and vulgar when he's only half there. Then he haves to sleep on the sofa in the dining-room. Next day he gets up and cleans the grates and scrubs for me. If he didn't he wouldn't get any money out of me—and well he knows it."

"But do you give him money for drink?"

"Yes. But not till he's done his scrubbing. You see, being in the hotel business all his life, he can't get started of a morning till he's had a dog's hair. So he'll scrub all three storeys down for thruppence. When he's had one drink, and is safe inside a hotel, he's got sauce enough to raise drinks out of anyone. But you know, whenever there's a new chum about that he can get thruppence out of, it's poor Ma for the scrubbing. And my back's just as bad as bad can be!"

The fire was not very bright. Marcella wished Louis's chops would cook more quickly. She wanted to get upstairs.

"It's dreadful being married to a man like that," said Marcella.

"It is," said Mrs. King, planting her iron viciously on Mr. King's shirt that she was ironing. "I used to try to stop him once. Only you get disheartened in time, don't you, kid? The times I've started a new home and had it sold up under me! Six homes I've had and this is the seventh. And the times I've trusted him, only to get laughed at for being a soft. Now all I do is to feel damn glad to get him off my hands for the day. We've made that a hard and fast rule. I'll do for him, and give him a meal of a Sunday when the hotels are closed and see to his washing, and let him sleep in my bed when he's drunk enough not to get vulgar. In return he does the scrubbing and the grates, and I find him in liveners—"

"Oh, my goodness—do you love him?" asked Marcella, staring at her.

It was Mrs. King's turn to stare.

Then she laughed loudly, a little hysterically, until tears came into her eyes as she stood with her iron poised.



“Love him? By cripes, no! I’d as soon think of loving one of them bugs the Dagoes leave in your bed when they have a room for the night.”

“Why did you marry him, then?”

Mrs. King put down her iron and stared out through the door into the sun-baked courtyard where washing flapped and bleached and hens scratched in the dust. It seemed as though she had never thought about it before.

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"I suppose I married him for the same reason as you married your chap, kid. I suppose I was took with him, once."

Marcella gathered her plates and teapot on the tray and stood at the door for an instant, visioning last night's glamour ending in loathing, or in dull acceptance of misery and disappointment.

"I do feel sorry, Mrs. King," she said, her eyes damp.

"I'm sorrier for you, kid," said Mrs. King, attacking the shirt again. "How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"And I'm nearly forty-nine. I've got through thirty years of my misery, and you've all yours to come. I've learnt not to care. I go and have a bit of a splash at the Races when I'm pretty flush with money, and I have a glass or two of port with the boys sometimes, and get a laugh out of it. You've got to learn these things yet, poor little devil. But don't you make the mistake I made and be too soft with him."

Marcella shook her head.

"And—I say, kid. I go down on my bended knees every day and thank God I've got no kids of his—"

"I think it's a pity. You must be so cold and lonely," she said, seeing a resemblance between Mrs. King and Aunt Janet.

She had made the bed before she went down to cook the breakfast. Louis was reading the paper and smoking, looking very well. She hated to see him in bed now.

He ate his breakfast in silence, with the paper propped in front of him. She pushed the window wide and, perched on the window-sill with a cup of tea outside and a piece of toast in her hand, she decided on what she was going to say to him.

"Louis," she said at last, "I am a wretchedly dissatisfied sort of person, dear."

He looked at her enquiringly and smiled.

"Louis, can you get up to-day and come out with me?"

He hesitated for a moment. Then he sighed.

"My dear—I don't think it's safe," he said in a low voice.

"Really?"

“Yes, really.”

“Well, then, it isn’t. But I hate to see you lying here like this. I want us to go and explore. In that big garden by the waterside it’s gorgeous. And—there’s your work.”

He flushed a little, struggling with himself. At last he said:

“After all, it’s our honeymoon. We can afford to slack a little.”

She laughed outright at that. He could not see anything to laugh at.

“It isn’t enough for me—slacking. I hate it. I want to do things just all the time. I want to dig up fields and move hills about, and things like that. Louis, don’t you think we might go up country and be squatters like uncle?”

“I wouldn’t mind being a squatter like your uncle,” he said, comfortably “with fifty quid notes to splash all over the shanty! But you’re not getting tired of me, are you, darling —after last night?” he added gently. She flushed, and fidgeted perilously on the window-sill.

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"No, Louis. But—after last night—I don't like to see you lying here like this," she began.

"I know it's boring for you, my pet. Marcella, come and sit on the edge of the bed. We can talk better if you're near me."

"No, I'll stay here," she said decidedly. "And it's not boring for me. It's—" She was going to say "degrading" but stopped in time.

"You know, I think I'd be all right," he went on, "if I got up and went out now. But I can't be sure. I don't want to hurt you again, darling."

"I know, my dear. But I can't help thinking this is a negative thing. If you had something to do—something that would interest you so much you couldn't even think about whisky."

"I've got that something in you, when you're as sweet as you were last night," he said softly. She felt sickened for a minute. The Spear in her hand wavered; it seemed to be turning to a chain again. A chain for her, a Spear for him—she said quietly:

"I like taking care of you, Louis. I'm not thinking of myself at all. Only I can't help wishing you'd got pneumonia, or a broken leg or something, so that you could stay in bed sort of—honourably."

"It's worth while, if I get better, isn't it, my pet?" he said, slowly.

"*Anything's* worth while—if you get better," she said.

And so the days wore on until they had been married six weeks. In all that time Louis never saw whisky. This, he confessed to her, was a miracle; except for when he was with the Maories in the Prohibition Country, and when he had been in hospital for various long stretches, he had never known three days to go by without his being drunk. So she felt that they had advanced steadily. Moods of depression came and went, charmed away by her. They spent a good deal of time on the roof. They had not many books to pass the slow hours, though Dr. Angus sent two every week. Louis began to lecture her on medicine; he really knew extraordinarily well what he had learnt: he was an excellent teacher of facts, but he had not one iota of deductive thought in his teaching and, like Andrew Lashcairn, was remarkably impatient if she did not understand or, understanding, ventured to express an opinion of her own about anything. They had many glamorous nights on the roof, nights that recalled the enchantment of those hours under the Aurora, nights of severe mental reservation on Marcella's part, all unsuspected by Louis. He confessed to her that his ideas were getting modified; a great confession for so crusted a conservative as he.

One night they were kept awake by a tropical downpour which lashed against the windows and poured through the ceiling. Three times they had to get up and move the

bed round to escape the stream of water. Marcella seemed to be spending all the night mopping up water.

“If Mrs. King sees all this mess I expect she’ll say we mustn’t go up on the roof again,” said Louis. “I suppose we cracked the rusty old iron by walking about on it.”

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"I love the roof," said Marcella, patiently mopping. It was three o'clock: the shrill hum of mosquitoes made them afraid to put out the light, since they had no mosquito nets. After a while they stood by the window watching the water running along the street as high as the kerb stones.

"I love the roof, too. A few months ago I'd have fainted at the thought of doing anything so unconventional as sleeping on a roof. You are changing me, Marcella. I'm getting your ideas of not caring what people think, of being my own censor. And—do you know something else, Marcella?" he added, looking at her with adoration. Her eyes asked questions.

"I believe I've got it beat at last."

"The whisky?"

"Yes. I don't want the bally stuff now. I want you instead. I hate you away from me for an instant. If you went away now, dearie, I'd be raving with d.t. next day!"

"Oh Louis!"

"I would! I worship you, Marcella. You're life itself to me. I can't get on two minutes without you."

"But just supposing I did die—seriously, Louis! People get knocked down in streets and all that. Why shouldn't it be me?"

"I shouldn't attempt to live. I know exactly what I'd do. I've got it all worked out! I shall just get blind, roaring drunk and then throw myself in the harbour. My life is useless without you."

To his amazement she wrung her hands hopelessly, and looked at him with tragic eyes.

"Can't you see, you utter idiot, that that's just all wrong? It's no use doing things for someone else! You've got to do them for yourself! What's the good of it? Do you think I want to make you a flabby thing hanging on to my apron strings all the time? You've got drunk on whisky in the past. Louis, I'm simply not going to have you getting drunk on me! What on earth's the use of conquering drink hunger and getting woman-hunger? It's only another—what you call neurosis, and what I call kink! If that's all the use my love and the whole wicked struggle is going to be, I might as well give up at once?"

He caught her wet face between his hands. In the light of the candle he looked at her earnestly.

“If, at the end of all this, I’ve to go on being a prop to you, we need not go on trying any more. Props are rotten and cowardly, whether they are props of love or not. I want to see you grow so that, if I go out of life, you’ll stand up straight with your head in the sun and the wind. Not propped, my dear! Father was all wrong, I think now. When he’d killed the whisky he leaned on a great big man God outside him, a shield and defence. Can’t you see that we’ve to stand up alone without God or anything except ourselves? Can’t you see that unless our strength is in ourselves we’ll never stand? That’s what I’m trying to do—and I know how hard it is.”

“You? You’re not a drunkard, Marcella,” he said.

She smiled a little as she looked at him.



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"You know, Louis, you're an awful duffer!" she said, and turned away. But he lifted her over the wet floor into bed and, as he blew out the candle, told the mosquitoes to go to hell, and kissed her face and her hands, he thought he had effectually stilled her queer ethical doubtings. And she felt very much alone and unguided, and not at all able to stand up straight without a prop as she had preached to him.

For the next few days Louis was depressed and restless. She did not understand him. She was not yet aware that his hunger came on in periodic attacks and thought that she must have hurt him in some way to make him so wretched. She tried to be especially gentle to him, but he was rather difficult to please. He developed a habit of womanish, almost shrewish, nagging that astounded her; he grumbled at his food, he grumbled at the discomforts of living in one room; he made her feel cheap when she kissed him by turning away and saying, "There, that's enough, now!"; he found fault with her clothes and, one morning as she was dressing, said he was tired of seeing her cleaning the room; she seemed to think that that was all he needed—a nurse and a servant, since she never troubled to make herself attractive to him. Several times, coming from doing her cooking in the basement, she found Mr. King slinking along the top landing, but did not associate him with Louis. Several times she thought she smelt whisky, but told herself angrily that she was dreaming. Then, one day, coming in from the Post Office, she found Louis gone. One thing she noticed as she came along the landing was an empty bottle in the dark corner behind the door. As soon as she opened the door she saw three whisky bottles, empty, on the mantelpiece. On a piece of paper he had written:

"Get all the satisfaction you can out of these, old girl. I'm off."

She felt cold with horror, but there was nothing she could do. Mrs. King said that she had seen him go out at two o'clock. And that was all she could learn. For the rest of the afternoon and evening she was almost frantic with fear. But the money was not touched. She could not imagine what had happened until Mrs. King told her that Mr. King had confessed to getting letters containing money from the Post Office for Louis, and buying him whisky. Marcella ran out of the house, almost crazed with fright, to look for him. When she had only gone a few hundred yards she ran back, afraid he might come in and need her. It was not until after midnight that a violent knocking on the front door roused Mrs. King and sent Marcella down the stairs in a panic.

It was Louis. His eyes were wild, his clothes muddy. He lurched past Mrs. King and, making a great effort, managed to get upstairs.

In the room, instinct made Marcella shut and lock the door. He had thrown himself on the bed, his muddy boots on the coverlet. He lay there breathing heavily for awhile until he was violently sick.

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"Oh, Louis—my poor little boy!" she cried, forgetting that he was drunk in her fear that he was ill.

"You think I'm drunk, ole girl—not drunk 'tall, ole girl."

"Well, get undressed and get into bed," she said, trying to help. He struck her hand away from his collar fiercely and, holding her arms twisted them until she had to beg him to let her go.

"Aft' my papers," he cried fiercely. Then he seemed to recognize her and began to rave about his duty to England, and how England's enemies had given him poison.

"I'm poisoned, ole girl. I knew what it would be. But when they sent for me I had to go."

"Who sent for you?"

"They sent a note by King. It came in by the English mail. Th-th-they have t-t-to b-be s-so c-c-careful," he said, and that was all he would tell her. Soon he was fast asleep, breathing heavily, and she was wrestling with a sick disgust at his presence, a fright that he really had been in danger from enemies and the conviction that he was drunk and not poisoned. She lay on the floor again this time because she could not bring herself to touch him or go near him. His hands and face were dirty and he had definitely refused to wash them or let her wash them. But in the middle of the night he woke up and began to shout for her.

"I wan' my wife. Where's my wife?" he raved and groping till he found the candlestick knocked on the floor with it. She sprung up hastily.

"Louis—hush, dear. You're waking up all the poor boys who have to go to work at six o'clock," she whispered.

"I wan' my wife," he cried, groping for her with his muddy hands. She stood trembling by the bed.

"Louis, I can't—it isn't a bit of use asking me. I can't be in bed beside you like this."

"Glad 'nough to las' night!" he said, laughing into her face. She felt the hot blood pumping to her skin until it seemed to her that even her hair must be blushing. Then she went very cold as she walked blindly towards the door, only conscious that she must get anywhere away from him.

"I wan' my wife. She is my wife, isn't she? Dammit! Wha's a man's wife for? Marsh—Marshlaise! Damn Germ's playing Marshlaise! They're aft' me—I knew they'd be aft' me! Marsh-shella? Where's my Marsh-ella?"

He pounded on the floor again, and she turned back, wrung by the terror in his voice. She lighted two candles and he saw that she was by his side.

"I thought you'd left me," he said, beginning to cry and streaking the tears about his face with his dirty hands. She was shivering as she bent over him, her tears mingling with his.

"I'm here with you, dear," she told him.

"Are you my wife? Wan' wom'n—beau-ful whi' shoulders! N'est ce pas? Parlez-vous Franshay, mam-selle? Ah oui, oui."

"Louis, you mustn't, *mustn't* talk that beastly French, please," she sobbed. He thumped on the floor, staring round wildly with glazed eyes. There was a tap at the door. Marcella, glad of any diversion, went and opened it.

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"I say, kid, keep your boss quiet if you can," whispered Mrs. King. "My young chaps down below can't get their proper sleep for that row, and they've got a hard day's work before them if he hasn't."

"Mrs. King, whatever am I to do with him?" she cried frantically. "I don't believe he knows it's me. And he's so horribly dirty."

"Oh, go an' sit on his knee a bit, kid, and make up to him. That's the best way to make them go quiet. He's at the vulgar stage to-night, your boss is. But do keep him quiet. Not that I'm not sorry for you, kid," she added, as she turned away. "They're beasts, men are. Mine's asleep as it happens."

He was still raving, saying disgusting things that, unfortunately, were in English this time. Looking at him in the candlelight she felt terrified of him and utterly unable to treat him as a sick man and not a wicked one. As she stood there stiff, unable through sheer disgust to get any nearer to him, he clutched at her nightgown and drew her nearer. She felt frantic; her nails cut into her hands as she gripped them together as if for the comforting feel of a hand in hers.

"Why should I have this disgust happen to me? It's too dirty to ask women to get men to sleep like this."

Then, amidst all the searing things he was saying, came the memories of those cries in the night at the farm and she wondered breathlessly if this sort of thing could have happened to her mother. And, at that moment she knew that it had not. Her father might, quite possibly, have almost killed her mother by his violent rages. But he could never have been merely disgusting. She looked at him again and felt murderous; a passion to put him out of life, to stamp upon him and finish him flooded up and burst and died all in an instant. She realized in that quiet instant that this passionate disgust was utterly selfish; if he had been loathsome with any other disease than this she would have nursed and soothed him tenderly; if he had been clean and charming, as on the night of the aurora.

"Oh, what a hypocrite you are, Marcella Lashcairn!" she said. "With all your high-falutin' ideas of balance and coolness! You've been luxuriating in the thought of martyrdom all the time you've been fighting the enchantment of this wretched love-making! You've not been fighting it a bit, really! It's only now, when it's disgusting and beastly and—not a bit enchanting, that you're fighting it! What a liar you've been!"

"I wan' my wife," he muttered, quietened a little by Mrs. King's voice. "'Sall very well, ole girl."

"Be quiet, Louis, or I'll shake your head off!" she said, quietly. He stared at her, and cowered down in the bed. She watched him for a moment. Then she spoke softly.

“Now you’re going to sleep—you’re going to put your head down on Marcella’s shoulder and go to sleep. You’re quite safe with Marcella.”

He shivered a little, and then lay still. She pinched out the candle with fingers that did not feel the flame.

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For a whole fortnight he drank steadily, using remarkable cleverness in getting money. He joined forces with Mr. King: for the first week they obtained money from some unknown source and only came home at night when they were put out of the hotels at closing time, and even then they brought whisky or gin—which was much cheaper—home with them. Marcella had not known there were distinctions in alcohol; she found during that fortnight that whisky made him mad and then terrified, gin made him horribly disgusting and beer made him simply silly and very sick. The second week Louis tricked and lied to Marcella, using any excuse to get her out of the room. At the end of three days he had sold everything he possessed except his least reputable suit, which he had to keep to wear. The last day of the fortnight he came home without the waistcoat: whether he had sold that, or given it away in maudlin generosity, or lost it in some fantastic fashion she could never gather. He had not taken any of her money. On Mrs. King's advice she had gone up on the roof one day, crept along three other roofs and hidden it in a gully.

"You've got to be up to all the dodges," said Mrs. King.

"I loathe dodges," said Marcella.

She got down to the depths in this fortnight. Louis scarcely slept at all, nor did she. Soothing him at night sickened her beyond endurance; she read the New Testament much during the day while he was away, and the story of the Grail. One day St. Paul said something to her that brought her up sharp.

"Though I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profiteth me nothing; love suffereth long, and is kind: love—beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

"I don't believe I love him. I don't believe I ever loved him. That madness wasn't love, or it would have endured all things," she said. Then Parsifal told her that without love pity might still endure all things. By the time she had been married two months her pity for him was an overwhelming ache. He pretended penitence to win it: he had no need to pretend....

At last he had no money. Everything portable he had sold, including some of her clothes. His drink hunger was tearing him. She was going about the room with big, mournful eyes and white face, making a meal for him. He had scarcely eaten for the whole fortnight; she did not understand that he was too poisoned to eat; she tried to persuade him to take food until he was irritated beyond endurance and threw it on the floor. As she passed him, quiet footed, he noticed her purse in the pocket of the big cooking apron Mrs. King had lent her.

"Dearie," he said presently, "leave that silly mess and come here to me."

She came immediately, and sat on the edge of the bed, her shoulders drooping.

“Your little Louis’s so sorry,” he whispered.

“Are you really sorry, Louis? Not like you were last time?” she asked, suddenly hoping all things again on the slightest provocation.

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"My darling, I'm heartbroken to think of the way I've treated you," he said. "I think I'd better throw myself in the harbour."

He took her hand in his and held it shakily. Her loose sleeve slipped up; on the white arm he saw blue marks of fingers; this jerked him a little. He had not known he had got to that yet. Suddenly he kissed them and began to cry.

"When did I do that?"

"What?" she said guilelessly.

"Your arm—"

"Oh, that!" she said, flushing. "That's nothing. I don't know how I did it. Mrs. King's mangle, I think it was. It's ugly. I don't like you to see ugly things." She drew the sleeve down tight.

"My poor little brave darling," he whispered, drawing her closer, trying to make her hide her face on his shoulder as he measured the distance between his hand that was round her waist and the apron pocket. He saw that it was hopeless.

"Marcella—when your father was ill, did he pray?"

"Yes. All the time."

"I wish I could," he murmured.

"Why not, if you want to? Wanting to pray is a prayer, really."

"I don't feel fit to, Marcella. Do you think you could pray for me, girlie?" he said, looking past her at the wall.

"I—I don't think I could—out loud. I'd feel as if I were eavesdropping. But I can in my mind, if you like."

"Let's kneel down, then, like we did in the funny little tin tabernacle when we were married," he said, and with an unsteady spring he was out of bed and kneeling by her side. For five minutes they were very quiet, she with her face buried in the counterpane as she prayed vaguely to herself and God and her father to help him. So intent was she that she did not feel his hand in her pocket. She thought his look of relief when they stood up and he kissed her meant that once more he had beaten his enemy.

"Girlie—go down and fill the bath for me! Right full to the brim with cold water. Like ducking in Jordan! I feel good now. I'm going to be clothed and in my right mind, now," he said earnestly. When she came back, her shoulders squared again, he had



vanished. She did not miss her purse until she went to the door to buy milk. Luckily there was not very much in it. Not till she heard the tale from Louis's lips did she believe he had stolen it, and when she missed a few not very valuable but very precious articles of jewellery that had belonged to her mother she thought that his tale of enemies—Germans and Chinese—who were dogging him, searching for valuable Government papers, must be true, and that they had taken her few trinkets.

That night brought the climax; he had reached the limit of endurance and was brought home by two sailors who had found him on the Man-of-War Steps. A wild southerly buster was blowing, bringing rain with it in floods. He was drenched and so were the sailors.

"He isn't half shikkered," said one of the boys admiringly. "Trying to jump in the harbour, saying the Germans was after him! If we'd not been going back to the *Astarte* just then he'd have been in, sure enough."

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"I'll get him upstairs for you, miss," said one of the sailors. "He's going to have the rats. We'd really ought to have give him to the police."

"I'm glad you didn't. If you can help me get him to his room—"

"Right-o, miss. Is he married?"

"Yes. I'm his wife," she said quietly. The sailors seemed to discuss the matter together. Then one of them volunteered to stay the night, as he guessed Louis would be dangerous.

"I'll get pulled for it to-morrow," said the boy, "but it don't seem right to leave a girl with him."

"You *are* nice, both of you," she said gratefully, "but don't worry. I'm quite used to him. He'll go to sleep."

Her instinct was to get rid of spectators, to have him to herself locked away from unsympathetic eyes. So the sailors went at last. When she got back from seeing them out Louis was flattened against the wall, staring with horrified eyes at the door, shaking violently. He had lost control of all his muscles; his face was grinning dreadfully. She gave a little cry of fright at his dreadful face. He mistook the cause of it and it communicated itself to him adding to his already overwhelming horror.

"They're after me," he mumbled; she could scarcely tell what he said because his mouth could only form the words loosely. "On the roof! Germs—Chinks! Listen!" Suddenly he spoke with extraordinary clearness, telling her that he had had word that day that the Germans and Chinese had formed an alliance and were already over-running Europe.

"Big air fleet over Melb-Melba! Alb't Hall in ruins!" he chattered. "Chinese torture. They know I'm biggest en'my in 'Stralia, ole girl. They got me—to-day they caught me. I always knew it—I knew they'd have me! But I beat them, just as I beat the Pater! They know I'm the man they're after! They know I'm the son of the Duke of ——" He mumbled a name Marcella could not catch. "Tha's why Pater—s'posed father—pers'cuted me all 'long! He was in their pay. Can't you see it? But I got away. Only they'll have me, they'll have me. They're on the roof now! Marsh-Marshe-lla, can you guard chimney if they come down? Ole girl, guard it with your body! Coming down chimney—Christmas Eve—"

He began to cry and laugh hysterically.

"When I was li'l kid'—Chris-mas stockings; I nev' thought Chinks'd come down chim' with hot irons—scalpels—" And then he described in abominable detail the tortures of the Inquisition all mixed up with Chinese tortures and atrocities: his reading seemed to have taken a morbid turn for years; the unspeakable horrors he described made

Marcella the same quaking jelly of fear as he was, for the moment. The wild howling of the southerly buster in the chimney spoke to her Keltic imagination of enemy voices; the creakings of the rain-swollen roof, the pattering of the hail above on the iron was like quiet-footed torturers advancing to their work. Her reason had gone for a moment, overwhelmed by horrors. She did not stop to ask herself logical questions. Louis's voice went on, all on one note, piling horror on horror, disgust on disgust.

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"They've killed poor ole King. Dutch Frank's in their pay—sleeping in the nex' room to us all these weeks. They hold your feet to the fire till they swell and burst. They'll do that to you, old thing, 'cause you're with me. Ole girl—I say, ole girl! You won't yell out, will you? Ole girl—show them how an Eng—Eng—can die!"

She watched him, fascinated, her back against the door. With a look of infinite cunning he began to search his pockets and produced a bundle of papers, ordinary note-paper, pale grey with an embossed address and telephone number at the top. He handed them to her solemnly.

"If they get me, ta' these! Lea' me! Le' me die f'r ole flag! Braved a thous' years batt' and the breeze! Ta' these to the Gov'-Genral! He mus' sen' these to King George! May save Buck'm Pal's! If all else falls, mus' save Buck'm Pal's, Marshella! King George unstans code—all in code—"

She took them dazedly in her hands. She saw that on the whitewashed wall against which he had almost stuck himself was a great patch of wet from his drowned clothes. He was standing with a pool of water dripping from him; his blazing eyes were darting this way and that in terror, his mouth was working loosely. Occasionally he lost power of speech entirely and regained it with didactic distinctness for a few moments. He made ineffectual grabs at Marcella, but his shaking hands failed to reach her. His inflamed brain searched back to every horrible physical thing he had read, or seen, every operation he had watched; his morbid condition made them things of obscenity, atrocity. He repeated them all to her with such circumstantial and guileless exactitude that her brain reeled, and still she stood by the door, keeping out she knew not what. Watching her face growing whiter, more pinched, he remembered things done to women by madmen—and said them aloud.

She glanced at the bundle of papers in her hand, wondering where she could hide them from his enemies. Opening them out so that she could fold them better she read the top page. It was written in thin, Italian handwriting, the typical caligraphy of the upper-class woman of middle age.

"My own Darling Boy," she read.

"I enclose the usual pound from the Pater. Also five shillings each from Mary and myself to get you some cigarettes and chocolates. I hope you can get that nice milk chocolate you like so much in Australia. My dear, I hope and pray every day that you will remember that promise you gave me at Tilbury. When I see other mothers with big sons I feel I can't bear your being right at the other side of the world. Mrs. Cornell came in with Rupert to-day, and for the first time in my life I felt I hated them both. The doctor and Mr. Blackie have been in playing billiards with the Pater. I strongly suspect the Pater let the old chap win. Anyway, he was very excited about it when he went home."

She turned over to the last page, and read, “given Toby his biscuit and told him Master will soon be home. He will, won’t he, dear boy?”

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“Your loving old MUM.”

She frowned. Louis had slid down to the floor and was curled up against the wall, making himself as small as possible, muttering, and occasionally grasping out at something that eluded him.

The next letter was very much the same as the first—little loving messages, circumstantial accounts of trivial family interests. Cook had been ill again and the soup was burnt one night because the temporary cook sent by Miss Watkin’s Agency was certainly not up to her job. Mary had been to see “The Chocolate Soldier” again, and was very bored. One of the Wayre girls—the fair one—had dyed her hair for a church concert and couldn’t wash it off again.

And he said these letters were a code!

Marcella had a quick struggle with two sides of her nature. The Kelt in her hugged the thought that these were secret service papers to be guarded with her life for his sake, his country’s sake. There was nothing extraordinary to her in the thought that, in the reign of George V, torturing enemies were abroad with knife and bastinado and poison cup. She saw herself standing over his prostrate body, with countless slain enemies before her, and a dripping spear in her hand. She got a glimpse of King George, with ringlets, velvet suit and Vandyke lace collar gravely smiling as he received the papers from her hands. She was still in the romantic stage of kingship! And then the stolidly common-sense Puritan ancestress in her made her laugh. It was hard for her to disbelieve a romantic and perilous tale. But these letters! They were simply the pathetic love-letters of a mother to her boy, bringing an atmosphere of a commonplace, peaceful English home into all this madness. With that the truth dawned on her. There were eight of them, each mentioning money! Louis had admitted not writing to his father to put a stop to his remittance. She had forgotten to insist that it was done. Here was the explanation of his present orgy!

He was kneeling on the floor now, trying to grip his bitten, bleeding fingers into the wall and crawl upwards. He thought he was in a well, drowning. As she bent over him the well vanished, and she became his enemy. He made a desperate lunge at her and tried to grab his papers from her. But his body was unco-ordinated; murder was in his brain, but it could not be transferred to his shaking hands with which he menaced her.

She was very much stronger than he, and all the stronger now that her acquired fear of unknown enemies had been laughed away. The thing she realized most was that he must go to bed, that his wet clothes must come off for fear they gave him pneumonia; that, even if they were not wet, they must still come off and be locked up to keep him once again a prisoner. Only, it seemed, in imprisonment, lay peace. And peace was certainly not salvation!

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As she realized that, all the strength was taken from her, but only for a moment. She felt that there was something in living from day to day and trusting that somehow good would come to him; she thought for a mad moment of being drastic, and breaking his leg to make him an honourable prisoner, but realized with self-contempt that she was too soft to do that to him. Instead, she fought him to get his clothes off, and by shaking him till all his breath went, perhaps saved his reason by crystallizing his intangible fears of enemies into physical fear of her, whom he could see and guard against. But he dared not sleep. As soon as he had ceased to be afraid of her rather hard, very strong hands he became afraid again of the Germans and Chinks; and, seeing him there, so weak now, so sick, so shaky she could not shake fear into him any more.

As the night wore on his delusions changed. He was still being persecuted, but now she was the persecutor. Once he cried out that he had been drinking sulphuric acid, and his throat and mouth were completely burnt away, leaving a gaping wound. She made tea for him, guessing that this was merely a picturesque way of telling her he was thirsty. But he thought she was poisoning him, and dared not drink the tea. She had only married him for his money and his position, for his enemies had told her he was a duke's son. She was a second Mrs. Maybrick—but this conveyed nothing to newspaperless Marcella. She had been unfaithful to him many times, he told her: Mr. King, Dutch Frank, Ole Fred and the Chinese greengrocer from whom she bought granadillas every day, were the objects of her transferred affections.

Unused to the ravings of delirium she was first wildly indignant and then coldly despairing; at first she thought he was cruel; then she realized, with a softening to pity, that he was only mad. He won back the pity by telling her that his mouth and throat were now in an advanced state of decomposition, having been dead many months; maggots were crawling over them, choking him. The overwhelming beastliness of this suggestion was almost more than she could bear until she realized that it must be even more overwhelming for him. By chance she hit upon the sort of treatment a doctor would most likely have given a man suffering from alcoholic poisoning. She spoke to him quietly, as if asking his advice, though she could scarcely control her voice.

"The best thing is to poison the maggots, don't you think, Louis?"

He looked at her craftily, his mind switching on to a less horrifying thought.

"Ha! I knew you had poison. Where is it?"

"I gave you all the poison in that tea, dear. What is there we can use to poison maggots? Surely they taught you that at the hospital?"

"Oh yes, yes—mix up salt and water and watch them wriggle! A quart of water and two tons of salt. Be quick! I'll poison the devils," he cried, and she watched in astonishment

as he drank the salt water greedily. Of course he was sick, and very much better because much less poisoned.



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His delusions became less terrifying; the maggots changed to a bee buzzing inside his ear, deafening him. She killed the bee by blowing cigarette smoke inside his ear and telling him it was dead. When he grew much quieter and more reasonable he asked her the time in so ordinary a voice that she thought he must be quite well. The next minute he begged her earnestly not to come near him again because her infidelities had made him loathe the sight of her.

Right back of her mind was the shaking conviction that she could not stand alone; she was longing, demanding almost, all that night, that God should come down from on high with chariots and thunderbolts to save her; she wanted Dr. Angus to tell her what to do, to persuade her that Louis was a sick man and not a bad man; next minute she wanted her father to come and thrash him to death for his wickedness. But all the time, illogically, she pitied him while she pitied herself. By accident he killed the self pity by transmuting it to a softer, more beautiful thing.

"Did I tell you the Chinks had got that little Jimmy who was on the *Oriana*?" he asked casually at tea-time next day.

"Who? What do you mean?" she said, starting.

"I saw him and Peters sleeping out in the Domain that wet night. I was going to sleep there too, because I was afraid to come home to you. They told me they were starving. The kiddie had got his pyjamas in a bundle. All their other baggage had gone somewhere—probably seized for rent somewhere. Serves the old fool right, spending all his tin on that little widow!"

"But where's Jimmy?" she cried, starting up to fetch him.

"I don't know. I gave him a shilling to get a feed, and the old chap came and had a few drinks with me. I forget what happened then. I expect the Salvation Army 'll get the kid—if they can get him from the Chinks."

That night she was tortured by Jimmy. Then she was tortured by all the children in all the worlds, especially those children who had no mother, and more especially those children whose fathers were chained as Mr. Peters was. She could not leave Louis while she went to search for Jimmy, whom she would have kidnapped without a second thought if she could. Next day Louis, though sane, was very ill with gastritis, and though several of Mrs. King's lodgers went from Domain to hotel, from hotel to the police, and from the police to the Salvation Army, they could not trace Jimmy. She never saw him again; he lived in her mind, a constant torment, the epitome of victimization, gallantly loyal and valiant even in homelessness and starvation.

## CHAPTER XVIII

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While Louis was so weak and ill Marcella came to several conclusions. The first was that they must leave Sydney at once; the second was that Louis must be made to work if he would not be persuaded to work willingly. In work, it seemed to her now, lay his salvation much more than in imprisonment, even though she should have him imprisoned in a nursing home, under treatment. And in getting away from Sydney lay her own salvation. It was high summer; the heat to her, after the cool exhilaration of the Highlands, was terrific; very often the thermometer she borrowed from Dutch Frank's bedroom registered a hundred and twenty degrees in their room, and the close intimacy of life in one room was becoming appalling to her. While he was in bed she was happy in a purely negative way; very soon happiness came to mean to her the state of quiescence when he was not drunk. They had cleared up many things, and though she was glad to have got to the bedrock of truth about him at last she was sick with disillusionment, and a self-disgust at having been so credulous, so easily deceived. In the state of chronic depression reactive to his orgy he let out all the truth about himself in a passion of self-indulgent penitence. His tales of secret service were, he told her, not technically lies. They were the delusions of his deranged mind. He had read a spy book in England just before meeting her, when he was recovering from a similar orgy; it had made a dint on his brain similar to the impression left by the French girl earlier. In the same way he explained his morbid tales of Chinese tortures—once, in a fit of melancholy, he had attempted suicide, and after his recovery had gone to the seaside with his mother to recuperate; in the boarding-house had been a collection of books on atrocities. It seemed that everything he read or saw when in a state of physical relaxation affected him psychologically. Marcella did not realize this, however, until long afterwards.

The tales he had told her about his parentage he was inclined to treat with amusement.

“Don't you know, darling, that that's the first thing a man says when he's crazed with any sort of delirium? Either his mother's honour or some other woman's goes by the board. I just had a variant on that theme—that's all.”

She was silent for a while, crushed.

“And then the things you said to me, Louis. About me and—that awful Mr. King and old Hop Lee who brings the fruit. They are simply unforgivable. Louis, I'll do all I can to help you, my dear, but I'm finished with you. You sneered at me because you knew I liked to kiss you. Nothing on earth can ever make me do it again.”

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"Marcella," he said solemnly, "the other night I had d.t.—just a mild attack. Ask any doctor and he'll tell you about it. Those things I said to you / didn't say, really. They were just lunacy. There was an Indian student at the hospital who used to assure us solemnly that delirious or drugged or drunk people were possessed by the spirits of dead folks; drunkards by drunkards' spirits who wanted drink so badly they got into living bodies to satisfy their craving that even death couldn't kill. I used to laugh at him as a mad psychic. But I'm hanged if it doesn't look as if there's something in it. You know / couldn't talk to you like that, little girl, don't you? You forget that this is illness, dearie."

"I'm afraid I do, Louis. Anyway, whether it's you or—or—an obsessing spirit, or anything else, I can't help it. I can't have you talk like that any more."

"No—I quite see that," he said thoughtfully. "I can explain it, you know."

"I'm tired of explaining," she said wearily, sitting on the table with her legs swinging. Her hair was plaited back and tied with a big bow, as she usually wore it in the house; his heart contracted with pity as he saw what a girl she looked.

"I don't think people ever realize how deeply this question of physical fidelity has sunk into us—as a race, I mean. If you knew it, Marcella, it's absolutely the first thing of which people accuse those they love when they get deranged in any way. A dear old man I knew—he was quite eighty—a professor of psychology—when he was dying had the most terrible grief because he seriously thought he'd got unlimited numbers of girls into trouble. I suppose"—he went on slowly, wrestling with his thoughts as he put them into words—"I suppose it's because we resent infidelity so bitterly or else—why is it it touches us on the raw so much? Why is it you were so sick with me for saying that insane thing about King and Hop Lee?"

"I don't know, Louis," she said hopelessly. "It simply made me feel sick."

"But—it *did* touch you on the raw, you know, or you wouldn't have felt sick. It wouldn't make you feel sick if I accused you of murder or burglary—I believe it's simply because we might, all of us, very conceivably break the seventh commandment; in fact, I don't believe anybody goes through life, however sheltered and inhibited they may be, without wanting to break it at least once! And that's why we're so mad when anyone says we have."

She thought this out for a while.

"Well, I think that's perfectly disgusting, and that's all I can say about it," she said finally.

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Later he explained in a very clear, concise way, the reason for his outburst. Partly it was periodic; partly it was the result of outside circumstances. He had lied to her to “keep his end up,” he said; he had clung to his father’s money because he could not bear that she should be penniless; then a letter from his mother, brought at his request by King, had upset him. It told how Violet had returned his engagement ring; she had forgotten to do it until her husband, noticing it in her jewel-case, had asked its history and insisted on its return. His mother had said she would keep it safe for him until he came back; his father had said it must be sold to pay some of the debts Louis had left. There had apparently been a family quarrel: the mother, wanting sympathy, had written to Louis about it. And he had felt angry with Violet, angry with Violet’s husband, angry with his father. “That explains why, when I went off my head, I said I wasn’t the Pater’s son, and why I crystallized my annoyance with Violet into hatred of you.”

There was a long silence. Marcella was learning things rapidly.

“Then, when everything outside goes well, we shall be happy, but if the tiniest thing upsets or annoys you I shall have to suffer?” she said calmly.

“Oh, my pet—” he began brokenly, and burst into tears.

She felt that his crying was pitiful, but very futile. Later, very shakily, he wrote a letter to his father at her dictation, and she posted it, thus cutting them off from England. He got better slowly, able, as his brain cleared, to treat himself as a doctor might have done. As soon as he seemed able to talk about the future she raised the subject.

“Louis,” she said one evening, “I’ve learnt a lot of things lately. I’ve learnt that I must never believe a word you say, for one thing. And I’m going to act on that. But what’s worrying me most is that we have practically no money left.”

“Oh, my God!” he cried tragically.

“You see,” she went on calmly, “I believed in your work, so I was not particularly careful with the money. That’s one thing. Another is that we’re both going to work or you’ll be worse and I’ll murder you soon. Number three is that we’re going to get out of this city where you won’t be in constant temptation. Perhaps when you’ve got some nerve back again we’ll live among people again. You can’t stay in bed for the rest of your life. You’d be bored to drink in no time—”

“I couldn’t be bored where you are, girly,” he whispered tenderly. “How could I be?”

“I don’t know, but you are. And so am I,” she said grimly. He stared at her and was silent.

“What are we going to do till we get away, then?” he asked. “We’ve still got the Pater’s money—”

“Yes, that will come for weeks yet. I’ve thought all about that. If I were heroic I suppose I’d not touch it. But I don’t see how we can avoid it.”

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"But it isn't enough to get out of Sydney with," he said petulantly.

"Yes it is. I'm going to find work for us," she informed him.

"What sort of work?"

"Anything—farm work is all I know. But probably I could cook. Mrs. King has told me a good many things to make."

"But, Marcella—" began Louis, almost tearfully.

She turned to him quickly.

"Louis, you're to leave this to me. On the *Oriana* you said you would. I'm your doctor and I'm prescribing treatment. I may be wrong, but give me a trial, anyway. I don't want to boss you. I want you to be free. But you can't till you've learnt how to walk yourself."

And she would say no more, but going to several agencies in Pitt Street put down their names. She told them she came from a farm in Scotland, and they seemed very pleased to see her. But when she added that she was married to an Englishman who had a public-school education they became sceptical.

"What can he do?" they asked. She hesitated.

"Rouseabout?" asked the clerk. When they explained that this meant being Jack-of-all-trades on an up-country station, Marcella, in a spirit of sheer mischief, said that would suit Louis well. She liked the busy sound of the word, too. But though she called at the agencies day after day, no one seemed to want her. At last a clerk, an elderly, pleasant woman explained.

"They're afraid to engage newly married couples on up-country stations where there are not too many hands for fear they go having children—you see, that puts a woman out of action for a while and throws all the work out of gear. If you were forty-five or thereabouts, now."

This seemed an astonishing state of things to Marcella.

The days passed. Louis got up at Christmas time in the blazing heat of midsummer, looking a shadow of himself. He began to take a greedy interest in doing things; he made a cupboard for the crockery lent them by Mrs. King; he made it very well, very carefully, hampered by lack of tools. He read hungrily all the books Dr. Angus sent to Marcella, especially lectures and scientific books. He seemed to disagree on principle with whatever she said, and they had many pleasantly heated arguments. His mother sent him papers—the "Referee," "Punch," the "Mirror." He cut out many of the "Punch" pictures and tacked them up beside the Landseer print, side by side with Will Dyson's

cartoons from the "Bulletin" that Marcella liked. When there was nothing to read or do he told Marcella yarns of his past, until she grew to know his people very well. Whenever he felt tempted to lie to her he pulled himself up pathetically, and she saw that he was really trying to keep his tongue under control. When everything else palled they played Noughts and Crosses, or Parson's Cat, or Consequences. Mrs. King had asked them repeatedly to play cards with her "young chaps" in the kitchen, but Louis was too frightened to face them. He was too shy to go downstairs to carry up water or coal for Marcella, and she had to do it herself; in the undermined state of his nerves it was torture to him to face people, and he became petulant if asked to do what he called "menial tasks." Marcella understood him: Mrs. King had no hesitation in saying he was abominably lazy.

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Money became more and more scarce, but this worried her not at all. She was coming to associate the possession of money with Louis's restlessness, for always on English mail days he was restless and bad tempered until she had paid away practically all their money, when he became calm again. She began to think that if she could devise a way of living by barter, without money at all, they might conceivably eliminate these fits of restlessness and petulance. And all the time, as there seemed no chance of getting work, she was racking her brains for some way of getting out of the city before his next intermittent outburst came along.

English mail day usually happened on Monday; on the Saturday before the last remittance would arrive Marcella discovered that she had no money at all. She told Louis with a little, perplexed laugh.

"Lord, and I've no cigarettes," he cried in dismay.

"Well, it's only one day," she began. He got nearly frantic.

"You know perfectly well I can't do without cigarettes," he cried. "If I do I'll get all raked up. You know what it means if I get all raked up—"

"Oh, don't always be threatening me with that," she cried hotly. "You know I'm doing my best, Louis. But I tell you I wouldn't be a slave to anything like cigarettes. I do believe St. Paul when he says, 'If thy right hand offend thee cut it off.' I would—if my right hand dared to boss me."

"Probably you would," he sneered. "We all know how damned superior you always are, and as for an emasculated old ass like St. Paul—blasted, white-livered passive resister —"

She stared at him and laughed. Her laugh maddened him.

"I wonder why it is," she said quietly, "that if anyone conquers his particular vice, people sneer at him and call him names? You seem to think that curing a cancer in one's mind is rather an effeminate thing to do, Louis—rather a priggish thing. I suppose if you get cured of drinking you'll say you never did it for fear of being called a prig?"

"Oh, for God's sake stop theorizing and face facts!" he cried. "Just like a woman, to run away from things. Where am I to get cigarettes from for to-morrow? Marcella, I can't be without them! What on earth you do with the money I can't imagine! Girlie—do get them for me," and he burst into tears. She stared at him in astonishment. The next moment her arms were round his neck, his head on her shoulder.

"You poor little boy," she whispered. "Don't worry. I'll get them for you."





"I'm sorry I'm such a kid, dearie. But you know my nerves are in rags yet. And I can't be without cigarettes. I tell you I can't be without cigarettes! Borrow some money from Mrs. King—"

"Don't you worry. I'll manage it," she said soothingly. "We've got bread and jam and tea. We'll pretend it's a picnic and we've forgotten the rest of the things."

"Naturally, you'd take good care to get in a good stock of the things you like," he began. "Jam! Oh Lord, I do wish I hadn't a tongue. I say unkind things and wish I hadn't the next minute."

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"It rather gives away what you think, though," she said quietly, as she went out of the room.

She passed three times through the kitchen before she could summon sufficient courage to borrow sixpence from Mrs. King to buy cigarettes. But after a while she came back with twenty cigarettes and gave them to Louis.

He stared at them.

"Only twenty!" he said gloomily. "These will never see me through all the week end."

"They're better than nothing, anyway," she said, not noticing that he had not thanked her.

"I've only ten more—that's thirty—till Monday at noon. I'll never see it through, girl—never in life. How much did you get from Mrs. King?" he asked wildly.

"I only wanted sixpence for those," she said.

"You've the brains of a gnat," he cried.

They spent a miserable evening. The cigarette question was preying on his mind, and she made it no better by talking about people on desert islands, and people at the South Pole who were forced to do without things. She was worried about him; she felt that if he had something big in his life these little, mean obsessions would be sublimated by it.

And the something big came, silently and unexpected.

## CHAPTER XIX

She wanted to go and spend the day under the great trees on Lady Macquarie's Chair. The cool lapping of the blue water was inviting and the shade of the trees promised drowsy restfulness. It seemed to her that, if they were not near a table or chairs, he would not notice the lack of a meal—anyone can sit under trees by the sea wall and eat bread and jam sandwiches, and forget they are doing it because they have to. Louis objected. To him food eaten out of doors was reminiscent of people from the slums having tea on Bank Holiday on Hampstead Heath or Greenwich Park. To Marcella it recalled days on Ben Grief with Wullie. But they stayed indoors with blinds drawn to keep out the stifling airs of the street, and sheets dipped in carbolic solution hung over doors and windows to keep away the half dozen unidentified insect pests that worried them.

She wrote long letters home during the morning. Louis smoked and fidgetted and read the Sunday papers. She found it hard to write letters when he was walking about,



sometimes watching the point of her pen, lifting a cup and putting it down again, reading a few paragraphs of the paper and dropping it listlessly, opening the cupboard door motivelessly and closing it again, lifting down books, peering behind them and letting them slip from his hands to the floor with a bang.

She glanced up once or twice impatiently. Once, looking at her apologetically he said:

“I keep worrying about those bally cigarettes, old thing.” She saw that his finger-nails, which three weeks’ sanity had mended, were bitten and gnawed to bleeding again. “I c-can’t h-help it, girlye.”

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She felt raked up and nervous, too. Since they had been married she had found such delight in preparing Louis's meals that she was miserable in not doing it to-day. She felt that she was to blame, that she had been remiss somewhere, though she could not see where. But she answered him crossly and impatiently, and he began to fidget about the room again.

"I've been reading 'Parsifal' again and again, doctor," she wrote. "Do read it, and tell me what you think of my theory. I see humanity as Amfortas, the wounded king, who, if he hadn't let himself so wantonly get wounded, would still have been the keeper of God's Presence on earth. I see the Spear as humanity's weakness, which, by being turned to strength, becomes a spear of Deliverance. Ingenious, isn't it? You'll say 'More dreams, Marcella?' But they're not dreams, doctor, any more. I'm a man of action now, and I like it."

"I say, old girl," broke in Louis's voice. "It's nearly one o'clock and I've only three left. I've smoked them faster than usual simply because I've been worrying so. What the devil am I to do when these are through?"

"Play ring o' roses on the roof and forget it," she said, with a laugh. "Ration those—one each hour when the church clock strikes. Then we'll go to bed and go to sleep and make to-morrow come quicker."

"You know I never sleep if I haven't a smoke," he said impatiently "I wish it wasn't Sunday. I'd go out and get drunk."

She made tea, which he swallowed in huge gulps. He refused food, but she ate large, thick slices of bread and jam with relish. The heat of the day came down like an impalpable curtain, making her tired and gasping. Twice she stood under the cold douche in the bathroom, but the exertion of dressing made her blaze again. In the afternoon they both tried to read, but he was too restless to be held by a book and she found "L'Assommoir" which Dr. Angus had sent out among a collection in answer to her request for "every book about drink," depressing. It told her nothing; all these books seemed to her to hold a policy of despair that indicated lunacy or suicide as Louis's only possible end. E.F. Benson's "House of Defence" was the most hopeful book she read. In the tormented morphia-maniac she saw Louis vividly. But she knew that he was too innately untrustful, unloving, to be saved by an act of faith. She had put that book down an hour ago, and turned again to the real pessimism of Zola, longing for the cool of the evening to come.

"Marcella," said Louis at last. "There's only one now."

She put the book down impatiently and, going across to him, sat on the cool, draughty floor, taking one of his limp, damp hands in hers.



“You know, little boy, if you really were a little boy, I could smack you and put you to bed for being such a worry. Didn’t your mother ever stop you worrying for things when you were a kiddy? If I ever wanted things father made me go without them on principle.”

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"Yet he killed himself with drink."

"Yes. I guess he didn't mean me to kill myself with any desire at all! Fancy being tyrannized over by a bit of paper and tobacco! Can't you get a picture of it? A nice, big man like you and a cigarette standing there with a grin on its face, like a savage god, making you bow down and worship it! Horrible! Didn't the Lord know all about you when he made that commandment about graven images!"

"Oh, you're inhuman—and you're a prig! You're a block of marble. You think because you've never wanted anything in your life no one else has."

"I like marble," she said with a laugh. "Something solid and substantial about it. You can always be sure about it."

She went back to her book, but she was not reading. Presently she saw him raking about among a sheaf of waratahs with which she had hidden the ugly old grate. He looked up exultantly.

"Six cigarette ends! That's enough to make three if I roll them thin. Lord be thanked I've some cigarette papers."

There was something so pathetic about this that she forgot to feel contemptuous about it. Before another hour had gone he had smoked the three resurrected cigarettes as well as the last remaining new one. She made more tea. It was five o'clock, the hour when all the sun's heat in Australia seems to gather itself together and pour downwards, drawing up the earth heat to meet it. Louis looked fagged and worn. She re-dipped sheets in cold water and hung them up to cool the room a little; her hair was damp, the atmosphere of the room quite motionless.

"Do you think I could smoke tea?" said he, plaintively. "I believe people do sometimes."

He took the tea from the caddy, rubbed a little in his palm and made a cigarette with it. It drew with difficulty; after the first bitter whiff he threw it away impatiently and sat on the edge of the bed, his face buried in his hands.

She dashed out of the room and went down to the dining-room. Four of the "young chaps" were playing their interminable game of cards at the table. A three months' old niece of Mrs. King, whose mother was sitting with her sister in the bedroom talking, lay in a dressbasket on the table being guarded by the men.

She blinked knowingly at Marcella, who bent over her. Two men lay asleep on chairs, one on the couch. They were all in various stages of undress, and had towels round their necks with which they mopped their damp foreheads. They looked up and greeted her as she came in.

“Have a game, ma?” asked Dutch Frank.

“No, thank you. I’ve come to beg, borrow or steal. Can someone lend or give me a few cigarettes? My poor man has run short. It’s too hot to go out. At least, I’m going to stay in.”

They all had any amount of cigarettes; the piles of ends in the hearth made her think contemptuously of Louis scrabbling in the dust for them. Next minute she was sorry for her unkindness. The boys each pressed a packet of ten upon her; when she tried to choose between them they insisted that they would be jealous unless she took them all. Louis’s face, when he saw forty cigarettes in her hand, disgusted her. It was like the pigs in the sty at feeding time—squealing—jostling.

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In his relief, he became quite charming. He began to joke, and “be good” just like a child who had worried all day for a treat and been granted it by a weak mother who had reached the limit of endurance. He joked and told her stories and was more pleasant than she had ever seen him.

“You are a darling, you know, and you do spoil me, girlie,” he said, kissing her hand. “You forgive me for being a baby, don’t you?”

She could not say she didn’t, as she smoothed the damp hair from his forehead.

In her mood caused by his brightening spirits she felt she could not go on reading “L’Assommoir.” She glanced at the Sunday papers and put them down. Louis looked at her and laughed.

“Now you’ve got the fidgets,” he said. “Let’s do something.”

“I’ve nothing to read but that Zola thing, and a book on Symbolism that Dr. Angus sent. And I don’t want to read a bit. Louis, we’ll have to do something, you and I. We’re rusting. We’ll have to get away.”

“In this heat?”

“In anything. I’m like old Ulysses. I cannot rest from travel. What is it—’How dull it is to pause, to make an end, the rust unburnished—’ I’ve forgotten most of it. But there’s one bit that appeals to me a great deal—’Life piled on life were all too little—’ I want to do millions of things in my life, don’t you?”

He lifted his eyebrows at her, and smiled placidly over a cloud of smoke.

“Let’s go along to those agencies to-morrow and say we’ll be rouseabouts without any wages, just for food. I’d love to be a rouseabout. It sounds so beautifully active. ‘Rouseabout’! I think John the Baptist was a rouseabout, don’t you? The rouseabout of the Lord! Oh Louis, let’s be that, shall we?”

“You’d never stand it.”

“Well, anyway, after this week we’ve got to do something.”

He immediately became petulant and worried again, so she told him blithely that she would arrange things. She grew to do this more and more as she knew him better. The cigarette famine that had made such a misery of the day was only typical of many things; anything that caused him the least anxiety lost him both nerve and temper, and he was only in the way. So in self-defence she began to protect him from everything, simply making plans and trying to get him to fall in with them with the least possible friction. And this was not very easy: he disagreed with her arrangements on principle,



though he always fell in with them later. This, he considered, was his way of showing his man's authority.

As it grew cooler they went up on the roof. The iron was hot, the stone coping still warm, but there was a faint breeze blowing in from the sea, and the blue air was less heavy.

"What can we do?" he said, helplessly, looking down on the few weary people crawling through the streets.

"Nothing," she said, leaning back against the chimney-stack.

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"I'll tell you what. Let's go on with those lectures I was giving you before—before I went rocky! Or rather, look here, I'll tell you what! The old Dean said I was one of the best men in England in midder."

"What's that?" she said, resignedly. She did not want to listen just then. She wanted to be quiet and think out the very obtrusive financial and moral problem of getting away. She felt like Lot when he knew of the destruction to come upon the cities of the Plain. But she felt one couldn't walk out of things as Lot had walked. Only—she had to do her worrying with placid face, giving lip-service to his entertainment; it would never do for him to know the convolutions that had led her to any conclusion; he was an innate pessimist, she an optimist. So she thought with half her mind and listened with the other half.

"Midwifery! We call it midder, you know," he said. "I was always awfully interested in women—as cases."

He took out an envelope to make notes, and a pencil. She felt a little compunction as she saw his look of keen interest and realized that the study of medicine was probably the only thing on earth that could take him out of himself.

"We've to begin at the beginning," he said intently. "It's amazing how few lay people know even the elements of embryology."

She heard his voice, and all the time she was wondering if she could write and tell her uncle the truth, asking him to let her and Louis come and work for him without any pay till they had paid back the fifty pounds she had borrowed. He had said it was far from civilization. That was what she needed!

"See?" came Louis's voice, keen and interested, and the words "cells" and "mulberry-form" floated into her consciousness.

"Yes, I think I will—it's the only way," she said, answering aloud the silent question.

"I don't believe you've heard a word, you young sinner! You confounded second-sighted Kelts—one never knows where you are! But next week I'll give you a written examination. It's not a bit of use swotting a thing half heartedly."

She dragged herself to attention, reproaching herself for damping his interest. Things he was saying dropped into her consciousness like heavy drops of rain falling from the eaves in a light summer shower. Suddenly she gripped his wrist tensely and he looked up in surprise. Her face was flushed, her eyes shining and sending out little flashes. He had never seen her like this before. His pencil and paper dropped. The paper fluttered over the wall, the pencil dropped after it.

“There, that’s my only pencil,” he said. “You have got the jerks, old lady. What’s wrong?”

“Why, Louis, we must be going to have a baby! I’ve been wondering—” She broke off suddenly, flushing, and would say no more.

His mouth came open as he stared at her, and looked so funny that she laughed.

“Aren’t you pleased? Oh Louis, isn’t it splendid—isn’t it a *shining* sort of thing to have happen to you!”

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She felt it impossible to sit still; something bubbled up within her like fire; it was a touch of the old exhilaration she had felt on cold mornings in the sea at Lashnagar. She wanted to take his hands and go flying away with him, jumping from star to star in the thrilling blue sky. As it was she stood on one foot, as if poised for flight with a sort of spring in her movements that his softer muscles had never experienced. He caught at her hand, and felt it taut, and queerly, individually alive.

"Oh, do say something nice!" she cried. "Louis, I've a good mind to push you off the roof—like the queen bee."

They had been reading about the queen bee's amiable dealings with her lovers a few days ago.

"Well, I'm damned!" he cried. He got an impression of her as a captive balloon that had dragged loose its grapnel, and was being tugged at by currents far above the earth, where the air was heavy and motionless. He gripped her hand still tighter.

"Look here, young person, you sit down here and tell me all you mean," he said. She stared at him. He suddenly looked much more responsible. It was the doctor in him suddenly awakened to new life. He had not felt the birth struggles of the lover or the father yet.

"But you're not ill and tired like women are. I can't believe it," he objected, frowning with a sort of diagnostic eye upon her.

"Why should I be?" she said, laughing and rumpling his hair which was very straight and neat and made him look too elderly for her wakened mood of ecstasy. "It's too splendid! It's a funny thing, I've never thought of having babies before. I've always been a Knight, you know. And knights don't have babies. Oh Louis, wouldn't they look funny, riding out to battle with babies on a pillion behind them? Fancy Parsifal with a baby! Or St. George! Yet why shouldn't they have them? And why shouldn't they go to battle? It would be good training for them, wouldn't it? They're so soft."

It was impossible for him to stop her. For the first time in her life her tongue was loosened; she talked floods of nonsense, happy, enchanted nonsense. But Louis would not lose his diagnostic eye.

"But didn't you know before?" he persisted.

"No. Do you think I'd have been such a selfish hog as to keep it to myself?"

"But you've read biology—you ought to have known how things happen."

"Oh, bother biology! Who ever thought of biology meaning themselves? I didn't, anyway. I never think things in books refer to me. Fancy a skeleton meaning oneself!"

Mustn't a skeleton feel immodest? Louis, when I'm dead, do find some way of disintegrating me, will you? I couldn't bear to look as immodest as a skeleton does."

After awhile she became quiet, but still bubbling over with irrepressible happiness. Louis was unusually gentle as they sat talking in whispers as though afraid the stars would hear their secret as they came out one by one and looked at them.



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"I can't believe it, yet," he said at last.

"Don't worry, then. You will soon enough. Louis—how long is it?" she said, puckering her forehead. He made calculations.

"More than six months," he said.

"Oh, what a long time! I don't believe I'll ever be able to wait so long as that. It's like being told the king is coming—and having to wait six months. It *is* a long time to wait till he's ready, isn't it?"

Suddenly he caught at her hand and kissed it. Presently he went downstairs, leaving her there. To her amazement he appeared later with the mattress and pillows. He had always left her to carry them before. She gathered that it was her role to be waited on, and resented it.

"We'll sleep up here to-night, girlie," he said. "I know you like it."

"It almost seems a waste of time to sleep, doesn't it?" she said, her eyes filled with dreams. "And yet all the while, whether we're awake or asleep, talking or working, he's getting nearer and nearer—without our doing anything towards it!" Her eyes, as she spoke, were out seeking the far invisible bar of the Pacific.

"It doesn't fit in with you, Marcella," he said, and her eyes focussed on the glowing end of his cigarette. "I can't imagine you ill and weak—or—or—motherly. Well, yes, perhaps motherly, because that's how you are to me sometimes. But you seem too young, somehow."

"Whom the gods love die young," she quoted softly. "Because they keep young. I'll be ever so young when I'm a nice old lady with white hair. I shall have it cut short then, like a choir boy's in saint pictures. And as for being ill and weak, I never shall. I simply won't have it."

"My dear, oh my dear, you'll have to. And I'll have to take care of you. All women need taking care of."

She gave a little short, quiet laugh.

"You'll not make me take off my armour, Louis," she said. He looked puzzled, but said nothing. She lay back on the pillow, looking up at the Southern Cross. The wind lifted her hair gently. Ghosts came over the sea, very kindly ghosts that smiled at her and passed on.

His hand reached out to hers in the darkness.



"I say," he whispered, into her hair, "I was an ass over those damn smokes. I'll—I'll buck up over that sort of thing in future, Marcella—can't have two babies in the family."

Her eyes filled with tears.

"My *dear*," she whispered, and held tight to his hand.

## CHAPTER XX

He went to sleep that night with the muscles of his mind tightened. He was going to fight for his wife and child! She, judged by all he had known of women in his select suburb among his family's friends, and in his externing in the Borough was now a poor weak thing, to be cossetted and cared for, worked for and protected. He felt he could move mountains to-night—for the first time in his life he had someone weak to care for. No more charity from his father! No more slacking, no more giving way! He had an aim in life now. And, moreover, he had the thrilling excitement of a "case." That he could not forget, though it was certainly subsidiary to the feelings of pride in himself that her imaginary weakness had brought into being.

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And the “poor weak woman” lay at his side, staring at the stars with eyes that held bigger worlds than they. After the heat of the day to lie here in the coolness, with the night breeze fanning her hair, tickling her bare feet and arms, was very delightful. Several times she pressed her hands tight down on the mattress and once she pinched herself. She seemed, in her exhilaration, to be losing weight; she would not have been surprised, if she had found herself floating away to have a real, close-hand look at the Southern Cross. She had no idea what was going on in Louis’s mind. No kindly angel whispered to her that she should go in, now, for “swounds and vapours,” and thus bolster up the protectiveness that had come to birth within him that night. She knew nothing of “swounds and vapours.” The rather hard women on Lashnagar were never ill and weak until they were ready to drop into death. Aunt Janet had never been weak save in the matter of the acid drops. She certainly felt thrilled rather than weak. She had something of contempt for the weakness of women. She was very fond of Mrs. King, but her constant complaints about Mr. King’s badness and her aching back did not seem to Marcella to be quite playing the game. Mrs. King had solemnly advised her, several times, to make Louis think she was not well. When she had seen her carrying pails of coal quite easily up the stairs she had said, with a shudder:

“Oh, kid—you make my back ache to see you! Why don’t you let him do those jobs? You ought to lay down on the bed and tell him you feel queer. Then he’ll be all over you, trying to do all he can for you.”

“I don’t want him to, thanks,” said Marcella concisely. “Why should he do it any more than me?”

Mrs. King thought she was mad.

But now she felt that they must get away from Mrs. King, from everyone. She began to shape her letter to her uncle in her mind, and as she did so, realized that she and Louis would be alone together no longer. They would join the communal life at Wooratonga. If he failed again—and she felt that, perhaps, he might fail—there would be critics. It came to her that it was quite impossible to go and live with her uncle and the three daughters who were “rather hard.” She was not ashamed of Louis now; for that she was thankful, but she dreaded that less kindly eyes than hers should see him when he was weak.

She touched him on the cheek with her lips. He wakened at once.

“What is it, my pet?” he asked anxiously, striking a match and holding it close to her face.

“Louis, I can’t let our baby come to live in Sydney,” she said.

“Well, he isn’t coming to Sydney to-night,” he laughed.





“No. But I want it settled. Louis, I was thinking it would be a good plan to ask uncle to let us go and work for him. But now I feel I can’t go among his people—”

“You’re afraid of what I’ll get up to?”

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"Not a bit, now. Only they'd never understand you as I do. And—we're fearfully happy when we don't have whisky worrying us. Don't you think we could go and live together in the Bush?"

He sat up, lit a cigarette and passed it to her. Then he lit one for himself.

"Can't you face the fact that you're going to be ill, Marcella?" he said, irritably. "You'll have to lie down for hours and all sorts of things. You're a lick to me—abso-bally-lutely! You ought not to be well like this! Lord, the things I've been told about women having babies! They simply get down to it—all except the unrefined working women."

"Then I'm an unrefined working woman, that's all," she said complacently. "Anyway, Louis, to please you or anyone else I can't pretend to be ill. Now just forget it till it gets obtrusive. I shall."

Over the roof-tops, through the moon haze streaming about the chimneys came a vision of the spaewife riding to Flodden after her man, riding from Flodden with the twin children wrapt in the Southrons' pennants. Marcella smiled a little. Louis frowned and fell in with her way of thinking. He suddenly felt flabby again. She felt taut as a steel spring.

The next day she wrote to her uncle for money, telling him the truth. It was not pleasant, but it had to be done. As soon as he saw that she was quite decided on going, and showed no signs whatever of falling in dead faints about the house, Louis entered into the spirit of the adventure. The lure of wild places got into his feet. As he wrote down a careful list of the things they were to take in their swags he looked up and actually suggested that she should wire to her uncle for the money so that they need not waste a day more. As for the prospect of work, that worried him not at all.

"You're always sure of a meal, anyway, if you're a sun-downer," he said. "And usually there's a job of sorts that'll keep you in grub. I say, old girl, we'll have to live on damper and billy-tea. It's the finest stuff going!"

He argued long with himself about how many blankets to take, how much tea and flour; he talked about the kind of boots best fitted for walking on unmade roads: one day when they went out together he discovered a patent "swaggie's friend"—a knife at one end of a composition handle and a fork at the other.

"It's a good thing to take a fork," he said reflectively, "you needn't eat with your fingers if you do. Fried sheep eaten with the fingers is rather messy at times."

They arranged for Mrs. King to collect and forward their letters from home as soon as they gave her an address; Marcella did not mention the chief reason for getting away

from Sydney now. She had an instinctive feeling that Mrs. King would think she was raving mad to run away into the Bush with an unborn child.

“I hope you’ll be happy, kid,” she said, as they talked over plans. “But I doubt it, with him. You want more than I do—”

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"I want everything," said Marcella, decidedly.

"I don't care so long's my back isn't too bad, and he scrubs down for me, and I can pay my way. I've got this house paying proper now, and the young chaps treat me as if I was their mother."

Marcella felt it was well that she was getting away from this atmosphere of dull acceptance of misery, of the worst in life. Anyway, she told herself, she would make a quick end to things with fire or knife before she got like that. Expediently keeping a drunken man quiet; expediently kissing him and fondling him for fear he would get drunk again to-morrow in spite or pique: content with a man who would scrub floors for a "livener"! It was better, far, to be homeless wanderers in the Bush where there was no need to be expedient for the sake of others, where they would have to stand up on their own intrinsic strength or fall; where they need not be respectable and where she could, if he were weak, alternately shake him up and soothe him without spectators. She would never, never, never allow herself to get into this cringing habit of being thankful for the small mercies of life when the big justices of life were there, so very big and shining.

"Of course," went on Mrs. King in a flat voice, "I've always one mercy I thank God for on my bended knees every night. That is, not having any drunkard's children to bring up and be a curse to me when their father's left off breaking my heart."

"Oh—no, no!" cried Marcella, staring at her with horror.

"Yes, kid, just you keep that in mind! You ta' care, my dear. It's on'y natural, if you have kids, they'll take after their father. And I'd sooner see them laying dead before me than bring up drunkards to be a curse to some other poor devil. They'll not escape it. It's in their blood."

Marcella burst in passionately:

"Why, Mrs. King, that's the rottenest, wickedest heresy that was ever invented to tell anyone! If you believe a cruel thing like that, it means that the whole scheme of things is wrong. Why should children take after a bad parent more than a good one? Why should they be weak rather than strong? If you're logical, what you say means that the world is getting worse and worse. And everyone knows it's getting better every minute —"

"I'd like to see it," said Mrs. King.

"Besides," went on Marcella, "besides, if I had a baby I'd build him so strong, I'd make him so good his father would simply get strong and good because he couldn't fight the strength and goodness all round him! I'd build a wall of strength round the child—I'd

pull down the pillars of the heavens to make him strong—I'd clothe him in fires—There, I do talk rubbish, don't I?" she added, quietly as she turned away. But Mrs. King's words stuck: she pushed them forcibly away from her mind: they would not go, and sank deep down; they came back in dreams, tormenting. She dreamed often of a little child starving and cold out in the Domain, while the southerly winds lashed rain at him—dreams of a little boy with Louis's brown eyes—a little boy who gnawed his nails—and stammered—and grew old—and wavered—and shook in drink delirium.

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She refused the dreams house-room in her conscious thoughts. She looked at the shining billy and big enamelled mugs they had bought that day, at the bright brown leather straps that smelt so pleasantly new, fastened round two grey and two brown blankets. Louis came in and made her strap the two blankets on her back to see if they tired her. In spite of the heat of the day she scarcely felt them.

"This is what they call Matilda," he told her, weighing the swag in his hand.

"I can carry you both if you get tired," said she, looking from Matilda to him.

She had asked her uncle for ten pounds. He characteristically made no comments about her omission to mention a husband when she saw him at Melbourne, and remarked that they would be very pleased to see her and her husband any time at Wooratonga. When he proved his unquestioning kindness she wished she had not had to ask him for money.

That night they packed. There was a new lodger downstairs who proved very helpful. He had come from the Never-Never Land to knock down a cheque in Sydney; in the ordinary course of things he would have been blind to the world till the cheques were all spent. The night of his arrival, when he was only softened by a few drinks after six months' abstinence, the Salvation Army had got him. He had saved his soul, his liver and his money at the same time. And he was bursting with information.

"You take the train to Cook's Wall, chum," he said, spitting on his hands and trying the strength of the good leather straps. He had tapped the billy and the mugs with a wise finger, giving them advice about soaking their boots in linseed oil for a few days.

"Yous ought to buy your tea and baccy and flour in Sydney. It's dear and poor the further yous get," he told them. And—

"Cook's Wall is the rail-head, chum," he said. "It's in the Lower Warrilow. There's a bit o' manganese down there, and they're clearing land. Plenty of work waiting. Lot of new squatters—small squatters without two fardens to rub together and make a chink. Them assisted lot. They're always glad of help, clearing scrub. They get a loand off of the Gov'ment for tools and seeds and stock, but they've got to clear the land—within three years, I think it is. Hard work, chum."

Marcella and Louis looked at each other with shining eyes.

"That's the place for us, old lady!" he said. "I've done clearing in New Zealand, and gorse grubbing. Makes you as black as your hat, and you sleep like a million tops and eat half a sheep at a sitting—"

"You'll get a job there, ma," he went on, turning the spigot of his information before her now. "They're always glad of cooks for the huts where the men live. And they don't pay

so bad, either. You get your rations, of course. It's rotten hard for lads that have been working fourteen hours in the open air to come in and start cooking."

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Marcella felt thrilled with the excitement of it all, but doubted her powers of cooking.

“You needn’t worry, old lady,” said Louis. “It’s fried sheep for breakfast, dinner and tea unless a cow breaks its leg and has to be slaughtered. And then it’s fried cow. And damper and flapjacks. I can do that much cooking in a southerly buster with three sticks for firing, standing on my head.”

But she decided to be on the safe side and scoured Sydney for a cookery book. She found a very fat and flushed and comfortable Mrs. Beeton. It apparently weighed about two pounds. A week later Marcella decided that its weight was at least two stone, but the pretty picture of cooked foods, and the kindly advice it gave about answering doors, folding table napkins and serving truffles were all very reassuring.

They had a tremendous argument about books. Louis flatly refused to take any. Marcella refused to go without some. Finally she packed the New Testament, “Parsifal” and the cookery book inside her swag. Later, opening all her books to write her name in them before leaving them on the shelf downstairs for the use of Mrs. King’s “boys,” she noticed the gipsy woman’s prophecy in the title page of “Questing Cells” and took that along too.

For the last time, they slept on the roof; as soon as Louis was asleep and Marcella lying quiet beside him, she had a visitation of her dreams about drunkards’ children. Creeping from under the blankets silently, she walked right along the roof in the moonlight to have the matter out with herself once and for all. She did not want to take bad dreams away to a new life with her.

“I won’t believe it. What’s more, I *don’t* believe it,” she said decidedly. “Louis may be a drunkard. Father was. So were all the Lashcairns for ages. But I’m not. And my child is not going to be. After all—*is* he our child—? I mean—Jesus was not Joseph’s child—only—”

She stopped, waiting. This was an immense, breathtaking thought.

“Just his body is made by Louis and me—and all the rest of him comes—new—quite new. The spirit—the quickening spirit—”

She felt, once more, as if her feet were taking wings with the hopefulness of this thought.

“Why that’s what the Catholics mean by Immaculate Conception! Of course it is! Why—it’s all Immaculate Conception! How on earth could it, logically, be anything else?”

She went back, then, and lay down very still. Louis lay white and quiet in the moonlight.





“You may hurt him, Louis, if I happen to die. Not that I intend to, for one small instant! You may let him be hungry and cold. But you won’t hurt him inside. I’ll see to it that there’s strength in him—the quickening spirit.”

Her last sleep in Sydney was dreamless.

## CHAPTER XXI

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Even the two days' journey in the most uncomfortable train on earth could not damp their ardour. Most of the time Louis was gay and unusually chivalrous; at night, tiredness and heat cracked his nerves a little, making him cross and cynical until, sitting bolt upright on the wooden seat, she drew his head on her knee and stroked his eyes with softened fingers till he fell asleep. At the stations where they alighted to stretch cramped limbs she stayed beside him all the time. Once, by a specious excuse, he tried to get rid of her, but she saw through it and stayed beside him. He resented it bitterly.

"Damned schoolmistress," he growled. "Always round me, like a limpet." In his eyes she read a flash of hate.

"My dear, do you think I want to be a limpet?" she said, "if I don't you know we'll never catch the train when it starts again."

"Never have a free hand," he muttered.

She was puzzled. It seemed impossible to keep a constant watch on a man of Louis's temperament. He resented her vigilance though he demanded it. If she seemed to be leading him, he bolted. If she let him have his head, he still bolted.

When they were in the train again, drawing away through miles of scrub further and further from the cities, she felt very glad that the strain was going to end soon: she would get a rest and so would he where probably he would have to go fifty miles to get a drink. But she tormented herself with the fear that inaccessibility was not going to strengthen him; rather it would weaken, she was afraid.

At five o'clock the second day the train, which had dwindled down to one coach and five trucks, rattled and groaned into Cook's Wall. The station consisted of a rough wooden platform raised on wooden supports with a weather-board hut which the stationmaster called porter's room, booking-office, luggage-office and station hotel. Someone had ambitiously painted the name on the station. "COOK'S WAL" and "STATION HOT" appeared in green letters on the face of the structure. "L" and "EL" appeared round the corner in red.

The surroundings of the station looked quite hopeless; a few sun-baked sheep-pens and races stretched behind the Station Hotel, shimmering and wavering in the heat haze; half a mile away was a collection of home-made huts consisting of boxes and kerosene tins piled on top of each other. A primitive winding-gear and a heap of slag marked the position of a small manganese mine which had been the cause for prolonging the single line railway so far into the Bush. To the west and south and north stretched scrub and bush, right away to forest and purple hills on the far horizon. Eastward the glittering rails shone back to the city, sending out blinding little flashes of light as the sun caught them.



The guard and driver got leisurely out of the train and stood on the platform; the stationmaster-cum-porter-cum-hotel-keeper, in a pair of dungaree trousers and a dusty vest of flesh-coloured cellular material which gave him the effect of nakedness, stared at them as though passengers were the last phenomenon he had expected to see.

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"Cripes! What yous want?" he said.

"Are we far from anywhere?" asked Marcella, smiling at him. He spat assiduously through a knothole in the boarding and looked from her to Louis.

"Depends on what you call far," he said reflectively. "There's Gaynor's about fifteen miles along, an' Loose End nigh on thirty. Where yous makin' for, then?"

"I should say Loose End would suit us, by the sound of it," said Louis with a laugh. "But it isn't much use starting out to-night."

The stationmaster looked proprietorially towards the station and the hotel site. There seemed room for tickets, and for the man who sold them—if he were not a very large man. There was not much hope for visitors.

"I'm running up a bosker hotel soon's I can get a bit of weather-boarding and a few nails along," he said hopefully.

"That doesn't solve th-th-the immediate problem," said Louis.

"Let's sleep with half of us in the hotel and half on the platform," said Marcella, delighted with the authentic lack of civilization.

"Be et up with h'ants," the driver informed them. "Look here, chum, if I was you I'd sleep in the train. She don't set off till between seven and eight to-morrow."

They jumped at the idea, and the stationmaster, suddenly helpful, offered them the loan of his hut, his spirit lamp, his kerosene tins and his creek which was half a mile away among a few trees, low-growing, stunted blue gums.

"Have to have a wash," the stationmaster told himself unhappily, and suggested the same course to the driver and guard as there was a lady to dinner. Then he piloted Marcella and Louis to his hut.

It struck a homely note in several ways. The name of Rockefeller came to them in the flattened out kerosene tins which, nailed to supports, formed the roof; boxes stencilled with the names of well-known proprietary English goods formed the walls. Inside was a bed in shape of a frayed hammock; upturned boxes formed the chairs and there was an incongruous leather-topped, mahogany-legged writing-table. A kerosene tin was the toilet apparatus: another, cut in two, was used for boiling water. Given a supply of kerosene tins in the Bush, one can make a villa and furnish it, down to cooking utensils and baby's bath.

"Next time's yous happen along, I'll have a bonser hotel," he said, and leading Marcella outside showed her, under the shade of a tree, a *cache* of dozens of eggs laid by the

hens that ran wild, and buried in the earth; half a sheep wrapped in canvas, surrounded by great clouds of flies gave evidence that it had been long dead.

“Help yourself, missus. We’ll all kip together. You’ll find a bag o’ flour in the hammock,” said the stationmaster, and wandered off to get on with his hotel and his station.

Marcella looked at Louis and laughed.

“What luck! Here’s a chance to experiment! If we get to the station where they want a cook, to-morrow, I’ll be able to say I gave every satisfaction in my last place.”

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“Always supposing we’re aren’t all dead before then,” said Louis.

The first job was to boil water and wash the plates on which she amused herself by tracing the remains of quite half a dozen different meals. She felt sickened by the sight of the dead sheep; Louis seemed unmoved as he ran an anatomical eye over it and hacked off slices with a blunt knife. He became very wise on the subject of flapjacks and felt that Marcella was not quite playing up to him when she preferred to make omelets. The meal was quite a success in spite of the fact that, when it was ready Louis had difficulty in beating up the host and the other guests, and there was nowhere to keep warm the mutton which congealed and stuck hard on the plates. But no one troubled about such a detail. They ate with enjoyment and drank vast quantities of tea with much sugar and no milk.

They had an unbearably stuffy night in the breathless railway carriage; once Marcella went out on the platform and sat down for awhile listening to the echo-like barking of dingoes out on the ranges. In less than five minutes she was back again, her feet and hands prickling and sore with the bites of ants and sandflies. She was not at all sorry when dawn came at half-past three. She was disappointed in the creek; it had sounded luxuriously moist from the note of pride in the stationmaster’s voice when he mentioned it. It turned out to be a suncracked water-course with a little muddy water lying in hollows, and one or two deeper holes from which the manganese miners got their water. She had been hoping for a swim: she had to be content with dipping a handkerchief in one of the hollows and wiping her face with it, since all the rest was needed for drinking.

“Next time yous come along we’ll have had a drop o’ rain, an’ then you can drown yourselves if you want to,” said the stationmaster.

They started out at four o’clock with the information that Gaynor’s Station was a collection of weather-board huts, a homestead put together by five lads from England who were trying to make a fortune each. They had not yet made a living between them. Loose End was owned by an elderly squatter with many children. Five big gums, which could be seen for miles, stood sentinel over the homestead on a rising knoll of ground.

“But if yous ain’t lucky, don’t hit up Loose End. Old Twist has lots o’ luck, but it’s mostly bad luck. A kid every year, an’ eether a bush fire or a flood or something to make up for it. His eldest is going on for ten, I think—an’ how’s he to pay for labour to clear his land?”

Neither of them knew, but they decided to make for Loose End and see what was going on under the five gums.

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That day was the strangest experience to them both. Louis had tramped before in the cooler New Zealand summer; Marcella had walked miles on Lashnagar. But this walking through the dry, sun-scorched scrub, on which their feet slipped and slid was an experience quite unique. The heat rose from the ground to meet that blazing down from the sky of Prussian blue. At eight o'clock they were both tired, but Marcella, who plodded on, calm and unworried, was not nearly so tired as Louis who made himself hot and dissipated much energy in wondering when they would get there—wherever “there” might be. He had started the day whistling and gay; by ten o'clock he was in the depths of despair and took Marcella's attempts to chaff him as insults and injuries. As soon as they reached a patch of stunted bushes she decreed a halt and a rest. They filled the billy from their water-bottles and, making a fire with the scorched scrub, had it boiling in a few moments. Louis, though he was revived to interest by the pannikin of tea and a cigarette and biscuits, sank back into deep depression after a few minutes, saying that their coming into the Bush had been the act of lunatics, that they would die of starvation and thirst—until she made him take out his map and find out where they were.

Together they pored over it. After much wrangling they located Loose End beside a small lake and decided that they would reach there to-morrow with considerable effort.

“Anyway, we'll have to, because of our water,” said Louis. “Otherwise we'll die.” But Marcella found that, by going a few miles west, they would catch up the creek that drained into the little lake.

“It'll only be a dried water-course,” said Louis miserably.

“No it won't. It's sure to be a foaming torrent if I say it shall. Didn't you know I was a witch?” she told him, and she was certainly more right than he, for that night they camped under great eucalyptus trees beside a water-course which ran deep and still at their feet. The first thing they did was to gather wood and make a great fire. After the day's anxiety about water it was intoxicating to know that unlimited quantities were to be dipped up and made into tea. While the water boiled they splashed about in the water, shaking sand out of the folds of their underclothes and their hair.

They had brought eggs and flour and salt. Louis, looking pleased with himself, produced a tin of Eno's Fruit Salt.

“Always take this stuff into the Bush,” he explained. “If you can only get muddy water, this makes it more possible. And it's dashed good stuff for making damper less damping.”

He put in too much and the damper was so light that it crumbled and got mixed up in the wood ashes. But they were both too hungry to notice whether they were eating damper or wood ash, and much too blissful to care.

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They spread the blankets against the roots of a great tree, over a bed of heathery scrub, very soft and springy; they had no axe or any means of chopping wood, but there was a thick carpet of dead stuff under the trees. Noticing dead branches hanging by thin strips of bark Marcella made a lasso with the swag straps and pulled them down. As far as warmth went, there was no need for fire at all as soon as the meal was cooked: but out there in the vast purple-blackness of the night with pin-points of starlight in the illimitable loneliness the rose and gold of the spurting flames was comforting and comradely. They piled the dead wood upon it before they lay down; as one resinous branch after another caught fire the trees danced round in giant shadows, as though they were doing a death-dance for their limbs on the funeral pyre. The silence was a complete blank except when a flapping of wings beat the air where some bird changed its night perch, or a parrot squawked hoarsely for a moment, causing a fluttering of smaller wings that soon settled to silence again.

Louis rolled over; like Marcella he had been lying on his back, staring through the trees at the stars. His hand sought hers and held it, quivering a little.

"You know, it's going to be a hell of a fight, Marcella," he said.

"Oh my dear, do you think so?" she asked, surprised that he was confirming her opinion.

"Yes. In the city, you see, I only have to fight myself. I know, there, that I can always get the stuff—even if I've no money I can beg or pinch it—All I've to fight there is the accessibility of it. Here I've to fight the inaccessibility...."

"I don't quite understand that, Louis."

"I don't suppose you do. You see, dearie, out here it's quite on the cards that I shall go completely off my rocker." He spoke quietly, rather wistfully and sadly.

"Louis!" she cried, sitting up and looking down at him.

"I know I can't get whisky, you see. It's probably a hundred miles away. And I've no money. You must keep it all. This craving comes on and simply eats me up, dear. It's like a cancer, gnawing through bone and flesh and muscle. In the city when the gnawing gets too awful there's always an anesthetic in the nearest pub. In a way, to conquer it in the city is more noble. I said 'noble' in inverted commas, dear. I don't think it is particularly noble. But it's going to be the devil of a fight."

She did not know what to say or think. It seemed, at any rate, better that he should be removed from whisky, however hard it was going to be for him.

"I've thought a lot about it," he went on, speaking more impersonally than she had thought he could. "It's going to be so awful for you. I'll be a fiend to you, I expect, when the hunger comes on. I suppose this is one of the advantages of an inebriates' home."



They'd shove me in a straight jacket or give me drugs when I got like that. Out here, you see, there's only you. I can't control myself. I may hurt you."

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"You won't. If you do, I'll fight you, so you needn't worry on my account. I think it's all a silly convention that says a man in a temper mustn't thump a woman! If you want to thump me, do! But you'll probably get a much worse thumping than you give."

He tried to be cheered by her, but could not. After awhile, she said:

"Besides, if you do get well here—and you're going to. I don't doubt that for a moment—think how splendid it will be to know you've done it without the sort of restrictions, and treatments you'd get in a Home. Doing it just by your own strength is great, Louis."

He saw that, and was happier, but he could not break out of his morbid introspection. Even after they had said good night and she was in the hinterland of sleep, he wakened her by sitting up and lighting a cigarette.

"Can't you sleep?" she murmured drowsily.

"I'm thinking about you," he said gloomily. "Marcella, I was a cad to bring you out here into the backblocks, just because I wanted to escape temptation. You need civilization just now—you need all the comforts of civilization—care and—Oh the million things a woman needs."

"Oh, Louis, do be quiet!" she said, "all I need at this moment is a good sleep."

He lay down again for ten minutes. Once more he started up, dragging the blanket right away from her.

"How can you expect me to sleep? Marcella, what right had I to make you have a child? We've no money."

"They don't cost anything," she said wide-awake now.

He made a gesture of impatience.

"We've no home—you've no attention."

She sighed.

"Listen to me, Louis, and then, my dear, for ever hold your peace. If the Lord, or whoever it is that's responsible for babies, had meant them to make women invalids, they'd never have been invented at all. Because there's no real room in the world for invalids. They'd have been grown on bushes, or produced by budding, wouldn't they? So just you forget it! The baby is my affair. It's nothing to do with you, and I positively refuse to be fussed over. I call it indecent to talk about ill-health. It's the one thing in life I'd put covers on and hide up. You must just think you've been to a factory and ordered

a baby, and they said, 'Yes, sir—ready in six months from now, sir.' And then you walk away and call again in six months!"

"Oh Lord!" he groaned, "why *did* I marry a kid?"

"You can talk about him as much as you like," she went on calmly, "the finished article. But I simply won't have you fussing about the details of his manufacture, and all his trimmings. And that's final."

"But he's my child," protested Louis.

"Not yet! In six months' time, perhaps. But you've enough worries, real worries, without making them up. There, dear heart, I don't mean to be cross with you. But you're such an idiot, and I'm so sleepy."

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They said good night once more, and she was falling asleep when he pulled her hair gently. He was frowning, with deep lines on his forehead.

“But look here, old lady. If we’re going right away from everywhere without any home, where’s the child going to be born?”

“On the battlefield,” she murmured sleepily.

He groaned, and once more his impatient twistings snatched the blanket away.

“Oh damn the Keltic imagination! Why can’t you get a grip on things and be practical?”

Once more she was wide-awake, laughing with intense enjoyment.

“I can’t see what there is to laugh at,” he protested. “Marcella, has it occurred to you what sort of heritage this kiddy of ours has?”

Purposely misunderstanding him she flung out both arms wide, to embrace the whole of Australia, bush and forest, mountain, river and desert from sea to sea.

“You know what I mean,” he said desperately. “Me, his father, a drunkard, with drink in his family, and you the descendant of dozens of drunkards. And what’s more, though you are not a drunkard, you’re as mad as a hatter. What the devil is the poor little beggar going to do?”

She was suddenly awake and very serious.

“Listen, Louis,” she said, holding his hands very tight. “I got that jerk-back most dreadfully in Sydney. Mrs. King was saying that the crowning mercy of her life was the fact that she hadn’t any children. But it’s a mad, bad, heretical sort of fear, the sort of heresy against nature that people ought to be burnt at the stake for believing! This child is no more your child and mine than Jesus was the child of Joseph the carpenter, or—or Romulus and Remus were the children of the wolf-mother. We’ve given him his flesh. We’re his foster-parents, if you like. But God and Humanity are his father and mother. I found all this out one night on the roof in Sydney. He’s a little bit of the spirit of God incarnate for awhile.”

“Keltic imagination,” he said tentatively.

“Very well, then. If you don’t like it my way, I’ll put it in the scientific way. You twitted me once for forgetting that biology applied to us two. Doesn’t it apply here? Biology shows that nature’s pushing out, paring down weaknesses and things that get in the way. If a drunkard—who is a weakness, a scar on the face of nature—was going to have drunkard babies, nature would make something happen to drunkards so that they can’t have children at all....”



"She does—in the last stages," murmured Louis.

"That's a good thing, perhaps. But I don't believe in inheriting things like drinking. I don't believe my people inherited it at all. They inherited a sort of temperament, perhaps—and it was the sort of temperament that was accessible to drink-hunger. People talk about drinking, or other weaknesses being in their families. Drinking seems to be in most families nowadays, simply because

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people are slack and lazy and drinking is the easiest and least expensive weakness to pander to. But I certainly believe most hereditary weakness comes from legend or from imitation. It's idiotic nonsense. When you're a kiddie you hear all sorts of family talk about family characteristics; it becomes a sort of legend and you live up to it unconsciously. You see your parents doing things, and because you're with your parents a great deal just at the time when you're soft, like a jelly just poured into a mould, you get like your parents. And then it's too late—too late to alter, I mean, unless you take a fork and beat the jelly up again, or warm it on the fire and make it melt. I've read a lot about this, and I believe it's at the bottom of half the morbid stuff people write and talk about hereditary drunkards and criminals...."

"But statistics," began Louis.

"The worst of statistics is that people only quote the statistics that will prove their argument. They don't quote those for the other side. If drunkards' children become drunkards it's probably because their lives are so desperately miserable that they take the most obvious way of drowning the misery. Anyway, Louis—"

"Lord, you are getting dictatorial, Marcella," he said.

"Yes. I know. I mean to be, on this subject. I'll tell you this much, my dear. If you tell this child of ours that you're a drunkard, I'll shake the life out of you and then run away with him where he'll never see you again. And if he sees you drunk—! But he won't. Anyway, you won't be any more. And now, seriously, after all that speech, let's go to sleep."

It was his turn to lie awake for hours this time, thinking and listening to her quiet breathing.

## CHAPTER XXII

They started awake at dawn to the discordant laughter of a jackass in the gum tree above their heads. After a moment's struggle to locate herself Marcella sprang up and, running over the little plot of grass that fringed the creek, had another joyous swim. The morning was very still—uncannily still, and already hot. When they started out along the bank of the creek about six o'clock they felt the oppression almost unendurable, but in the motionless air the five trees that marked Loose End were very distinct, though rather like toy trees in a child's model garden.

The depression of the night had gone; neither of them mentioned it; they talked of trivialities until they halted for lunch and drank a billy full of lukewarm tea.

Louis had built a tent by spreading two of the blankets over bushes to keep off the sun-glare. But there was not much rest in the gasping heat and at last Marcella stood up, stretching her arms which the pack on her back was making stiff.

"I wonder if it would matter if I took all my things off?" she began reflectively. Then she gasped out: "Why Louis, where are the five trees?"

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He sprang to his feet, staring about in bewilderment. The sun was above their heads, red and leaden; all round stretched the scorched scrub; the creek lay to their right but the five trees had vanished, swallowed up in a thick, dun-coloured fog.

“Lord, we’re in for a dust-storm, old lady!”

“Will it hurt us?”

He dilated on the horrors of dust-storms, and how they buried people and choked the water-holes. It grew dark, not a breath of wind stirred the scrub, not a bird moved or twittered in the few trees fringing the creek.

“It may pass us by,” said Louis. “They’re often very localized. But if it gets us, be sure not to speak, or your mouth will be full of dust, and keep your eyes shut tight.”

They plodded on. Once Marcella started violently as a parakeet flew by with a brilliant flash of pink and green wings and a screaming cry. They found it difficult to breathe. It seemed as though all the air had been sucked up behind the advancing wall of dust and sand. One moment they were walking in clear, though breathless air; the next the storm was upon them, stinging and blinding and burning as the particles of dust were hurled with enormous velocity by the wind.

Marcella gave a little cry of fear, and in the process got her mouth filled with dust as Louis had prophesied. Groping out blindly she found his hand, and they clung together. She would have given anything to be able to speak, for the horror of the ancient doom of Lashnagar rose up all round her and gripped her. But for more than an hour they battled in silence, unable to go either backwards or forwards. When finally the storm passed over, leaving them with parched throats and red-rimmed, aching eyes and blistered skin, it was dusk—the swift dusk of the sub-tropics.

Marcella wanted to stay and wash the dust away in the creek; Louis, remembering the food shortage, insisted on pushing on. But when darkness fell they were going blindly in the direction they guessed to be right for they could see nothing of the five trees. Louis got depressed. Marcella felt tired enough to be depressed too, but had to keep his spirits up. She was just going to suggest that they should give up and rest supperless for the night when they heard a faint “coo-ee,” and even more faintly the plodding sound of a horse’s steps. Louis excitedly gave an answering shout, and in a few minutes they saw a horse looming through the darkness.

“What a good job I’ve found you,” came a boy’s voice, and they saw a small figure standing beside them, reaching about to the horse’s shoulder.

“Were you looking for us?” said Marcella. “And are we found? We don’t seem to be anywhere.”





"I was looking for the sheep. I came across twenty back there, suffocated with the dust. I don't know what he'll say when he knows! But it's a good thing I found you, else you'd have gone on all night."

He turned then, and they followed him. He said nothing more until after about two miles of silent tramping they turned the corner of a high fence threaded with wonga-vine, and saw the lights of a homestead. Marcella felt she understood fire-and sun-worshippers. She could cheerfully have worshipped the twinkling light.

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A dog began to bark excitedly; half a dozen children, with one unsexed garment shaped like a bathing-dress each, turned out to stare at them. A man of fifty or thereabouts, with a thin, rather tragic face came along the low verandah built all along the front of the Homestead, and looked at them enquiringly.

"Were you in that storm, chum?" he asked. Louis nodded.

"Come right in! What, got a girl with you, too? Enough to finish you off! Mother!" he added, raising his voice, "Here's a young woman come to see us."

A little meek woman in a faded blue frock came out on to the verandah.

"Wherever have you come from?" she asked. They explained, and she seemed to do ten things at once, while they were speaking. Louis was irresistibly reminded of a music-hall *prestidigitateur*. She was giving directions for more chops to be put into the frying-pan, clean water to be fetched from the creek and put in a kerosene tin in "Jerry's room," a cloth laid over the bare boards of the already prepared table, and a tin of jam found from the store. Marcella felt at home at once. It was the simple, transparent welcome of Lashnagar again.

The architecture of Loose End was entirely the invention of John Twist. It consisted of a chain of eight rooms. As the family grew, another room was leaned against the last one. One of the boys at Gaynor's had been heard to express the opinion that Loose End would, some day, reach right across the Continent.... The middle and largest room had two doors at opposite sides. It was the living-room. The others, which were either stores, bedrooms, or fowl-pens, had a window in one wall—glassless, formed of trellis—and a door in the other. A boarded platform ran right round the house to a depth of nine feet and the roof of the rooms, projecting over the platform, kept out rain and heat. There was much corrugated zinc and rough wood, many kerosene tins and boxes in the make-up of Loose End, but all the rooms were miraculously watertight. The room into which Marcella was shown was a sleeping-room and nothing more. There were three hammocks slung from wall to wall and one camp-bed still folded up. But while she was apparently talking to Marcella, Mrs. Twist whisked open a tin trunk, put a white linen cloth on the little table in the corner and, running out of the room, came back with a small, cracked mirror she had borrowed from her own room.

When she came into the living-room, after strenuous work in removing the dust of travel, Marcella found that Louis had been taken possession of by some of the children, and been to the creek for a bathe. One of them—apparently a girl, since she was called Betty—had filled a jam tin with water and put in a bunch of bush roses; the big kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling shone upon seven cropped heads, seven brown faces and fourteen bare, brown legs swinging from the bench on which the children sat. Fourteen bright eyes shining in faces polished with soap divided passionate interest between Marcella and the epoch-making pot of jam on the table. Mr. Twist told the

guests to sit down; he made the tea while Mrs. Twist dished up an enormous tin full of chops and fried eggs, placing a china washing-basin full of potatoes beside them.

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"We need such a lot," she said with a laugh. "I did have an enamelled soup tureen I used for the potatoes, but the enamel chipped off a bit and I thought it might hurt the children if they swallowed it. So now we put the potatoes in the washing-basin and wash up in the tureen."

While the meal was in progress they all talked at once. The children after their first shyness had worn off were entranced when they learnt that their guests had, only a few months ago, been in a real ship on the real sea. Marcella, in turn, was fascinated in watching the manoeuvre with which Jerry concealed the fact that there were not enough knives and forks to go round. He, being ten, was old and tactful; he cut up his meat and ate a few swift mouthfuls frowning into quietness the nudging and protesting brother at his side who wanted his innings with the knife.

"We seem to be a bit short of usables," said Mrs. Twist, complacently drinking tea out of a jampot. "It's all along of that bush-fire last year, when we lost everything."

"We ought to have got out our pannikins," said Marcella, "but we were so tired and hungry I couldn't think of anything but how nice it was to get here."

"You can't think how glad I am to see you," said Mrs. Twist. "I haven't seen a woman since little Millie was born two years ago."

There seemed a million things to talk about. When the last scrap of jam was satisfactorily disposed of, the seven children scattered in seven directions. Mrs. Twist and Marcella washed the dishes; Mr. Twist and Louis smoked on the verandah. A great collie walked sedately into the room and looked at the cleared table reproachfully. Betty appeared with an air of magic and found him a plateful of food. The children seemed to be attached to their mother by invisible wires. At one minute their voices could be heard, shrieking and calling to each other. The next, when she went along the verandah with Mrs. Twist, most of them were in their hammocks, falling asleep.

"I wish they were a bit older," sighed the mother, at the door of their room. Two merry voices giggled in the darkness.

"That makes you older, too," said Marcella softly.

"They're so many to feed, and there's only Jerry can do much to help father yet. We've thirty acres of gorse to clear—and it seems impossible to get at it. It ought to have been done two years ago, but the Government have given us grace when we explained about the bush-fire. We lost a thousand sheep then, you know. And the Homestead was mostly burnt down."

They went along towards the men.

"It's a hard life," said Mrs. Twist uncomplainingly. "But the children are well and happy."

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That night they talked, sitting out on the verandah, the black wall of the darkness in front of them, the fire-glow behind. A hot, steaming rain had begun to fall, following on the wind of the dust-storm. It dripped softly and gently, bringing no coolness with it. Mr. Twist talked of the slices of bad luck that had bowed his shoulders, lined his face, and all but broken his spirit. The two women talked softly. Jerry, who, being almost a man, had been allowed to stay up, brought out his old gramophone. Many notes were merely croaks; but "Oh, Dry those Tears" and "Rock of Ages" were quite recognizable. He was very proud of the "Merry Widow" waltz that had been sent to him from his uncle in England, and kept repeating it until he was ordered off to bed. Presently, in the darkness, Marcella found herself telling Mrs. Twist about the coming child.

"Where are you making for, kid?" asked Mrs. Twist, who seemed sorry for her.

"Anywhere. We were told there was a lot of clearing going on up here, so I thought we might both get a job. I didn't want my baby born in the city."

They talked no more that night, for Mr. Twist said it was bedtime. They slept dreamlessly in their hammocks until five o'clock, when they were wakened by Scot the collie who, planting his forepaws on each window-sill barked furiously until he was answered by a shout from within.

The sky was grey and sullen, the hot rain was still falling; grass seemed to have sprung up from the sun-baked soil in the night and the slant-set leaves of the five gums smiled as they slid big drops on to their roots. The leaves of the wonga-vine that sheltered the rather scanty beds of the food-garden looked riotously alive and green; nasturtiums and sunflowers sent out by the uncle in England glowed like little gold lamps seen through a fog.

Breakfast was a repetition of fried mutton and flapjacks and tea. As soon as the children had cleared it away the smallest ones settled down to write on slates long lines of pothooks and hangers. Two of the boys spelt words laboriously from ancient "readers," and Jerry set out to look for the lost sheep again. Marcella was packing her swag a little sadly. She wished they could stay at Loose End. Obviously it looked as though Loose End could not support its own family without the burden of another. But Mr. Twist thought differently.

"What do you say to stopping here, ma?" he said, looking at Marcella through the trellis. "I've been talking to your boss and he's willing if you say the word."

Marcella straightened herself up and looked at him.

"I'd like nothing better," she told him simply.



“Right-o, then. That’s settled,” he said, and they discussed details. Rather shamefacedly he offered them five pounds a month and rations. He said they were worth more, but he could not afford it. If they liked to throw in their lot with his and try to make Loose End’s run of bad luck change, he would share the good when it came. They accepted his offer without discussion. Then he asked if they would live at the Homestead or in a shepherd’s hut about half a mile away, near the lake.

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"It's not a bad little place. I had two shepherds before the sheep got drowned. Then it was no use them staying. I don't think there's much in the way of furniture—"

They looked at each other. In each other's eyes they saw a plea to be alone together in their new world, and said, in a breath, that they would live in the hut.

"Oh kid, I'm so glad," said Mrs. Twist when the men went off to see what damage the dust-storm had done. Marcella was extraordinarily happy as she was taught what to do in the Homestead.

### CHAPTER XXIII

The hut was on the edge of a great patch of gorse that Mr. Twist said stretched for twenty acres or more, right to the limit of his holding. It was giant gorse, quite unlike the mild edition of it found in England. In many places it towered above the hut and the stems were almost as thick as tree-trunks, while the spines played havoc with clothes and skin. It was burnt dry now, by the sun. In the cooler weather, Mr. Twist said, the whole place was a golden blaze of bloom.

The cottage consisted of three rooms, built on the same plan as the Homestead. The middle room was a sort of kitchen. There was a big table and a bench of planed wood.

"There isn't a grate," said Mr. Twist, "they got their rations up at the house, you see." The absence of a fire-place did not trouble Marcella. She had often cooked on Wullie's open fire at Lashnagar, and Louis quickly explained that he would make a bush oven outside. Neither of the rooms leaning against the kitchen had any furniture, but Mrs. Twist seemed to have laid in a whole ship's stores of navy hammocks, which she said they could have until Louis had carpentered bed for them. There were hundreds of very fat, furry spiders who crawled about solemnly and fell with heavy bodies down swift silken threads as Marcella opened the door of the bedroom.

For the next few days they certainly did not earn their wages. They were like two children with a new doll's house, and at the end of the week the hut was unrecognizable. Louis, unskilfully busy with saw, hammer and nails put up a shelf for the box of books they were going to get from Mrs. King's as soon as someone went into Cook's Well to take a letter. Marcella wished a little that she had some money to buy things for her house, but it was the sort of wish she found it easy to conquer and when, in a spirit of mischief she took the tar brush with which Louis had been caulking the sides of the hut, and tarred CASTLE LASHCAIRN on the corrugated roof, she saw Castle Lashcairn rising there.

"After all, imaginary castles are the best," she told Louis after two days spent in clearing away dust and spiders, and limewashing the interior. "It only needs imaginary cleaning."

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He was surveying his new white shelf on which the matronly Mrs. Beeton seemed to incline towards the sober black New Testament and give a cold shoulder to the lean-looking "Questing Cells" and the slim "Parsifal." He had made and patented a very wonderful reflector for their little lamp by cutting and bending a kerosene tin in such a way that it mirrored six times the light inside. Sitting out on the verandah he thought out the details of an arm-chair to be made out of a barrel Mr. Twist had given him. They sat on the edge of the verandah, their legs swinging. He was smoking—very distastefully—a pipe because there was plenty of strong shag at the Homestead but no cigarettes. Marcella had been watching him; it had amazed her to see how much more calmly he had taken the cigarette famine than she had guessed possible.

"If I can go on like this, dearie," he said at last, "there'll be no more bogeys. I've been busy—and very happy this last week. If I'm kept busy—"

"You'll be kept busy," she said, smiling. "When we've cleared the twenty acres of gorse it's all to be ploughed and planted. And when that's done and there isn't a single other thing to do, we'll start to tunnel a hole through the middle of the earth to Lashnagar, like they did in Jules Verne's book."

"I'm keeping my body occupied," he went on slowly. "The point is, will that satisfy my brain, and all of me?"

She looked down the little slope on the top of which Castle Lashcairn stood. The five gum trees stretched up to the cloudless night sky; a few hundred yards away the lake glimmered, star-reflecting and still. To the left the lamp of the Homestead glowed, and "Oh Dry Those Tears" started to groan out. Marcella waited for the line that almost sounded like a collection of bass "brrrrrs" and then she spoke.

"If you can forget yourself, my dear—get swallowed up," she said gently, and a silence fell between them.

The days drew into weeks. Castle Lashcairn grew more and more beautiful; the books arrived from Sydney and kept sentry on the white shelf. Several of her unnecessary frocks Marcella made into cushions stuffed with dried lucerne which made a most interesting crackling noise when one leaned against them. Louis spent most of his Sundays in making a cot for his son but his fatal lack of thoroughness was a drawback, for it seemed to come to pieces as quickly as he got it together. Marcella looked after the fowls and the cows; she did most of the cooking at the Homestead; she got the children beyond the hanger and pothook stage of writing and filled their minds, hitherto worried by family cares, with legend and fairy-tale. She wrote often to Dr. Angus, and he sent her books and garden seeds. All the time she and Louis never found a moment in which to be idle; about eleven o'clock every day she took his lunch across the clearing to him; she collaborated a good deal with Mrs. Beeton in making various ambitious dishes for him, but as



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they were almost entirely made of mutton, “standard” flour and eggs, there was not much variety. When the fried sheep had lived too long before being killed, or been kept too long after death, they spent considerable time looking at the pretty pictures in the cookery book: Marcella told of Wullie’s feasts in the beach-hut. Louis remembered restaurant celebrations. But they were always too hungry to care much what they ate; the most leathery damper, the most difficult mutton was pleasant eaten out of doors in the faint smoke of the gorse fires.

During the afternoons she helped with the gorse grubbing. Before the great bushes could be approached they had to be fired, and she loved to watch the golden blaze flare swiftly to the sky, leaving a pall of grey smoke through which the carbonized gorse branches shone gold for a moment in a fairy tracery before crumbling to white ash on the ground. Then they had to take pickaxes and mattocks, chisels and spades to chop down the parent stem and uproot the smallest leader from the roots. Gorse is very tenacious of life. A root of only a few inches will spring up to a great tree in an incredibly short time, especially on virgin soil fertilized by many burnings.

They had faces perpetually blackened by smoke. Marcella worked with an oilskin bathing-cap sent by Mrs. King, over her hair; she wore an old blue overall on which the spines of the gorse had worked havoc. And still she would not be ill to fall in with Louis’s preconceived notions; living an absolutely normal, rather tough life, hardened by her father’s Spartanism, she found that a natural process made very little difference to her. To Louis’s real distress she swam in the lake every morning; what he could not understand was that she had scarcely, even yet, awakened to consciousness of her body. Once or twice in her queer ecstasies, once or twice in Sydney the sleep within her had stirred and stretched and opened her eyes; from the force of the stirring and stretching she had gathered an impression of something immensely strong. But it had not yet risen and walked about her life yet.

One day she went across the clearing to Louis, through the smoke wreaths that were being gently swayed to and fro by a soft wind. In a blue shirt open at the neck, shewing a triangle of brown chest, he looked very different from the effeminate Louis of the *Oriana*. Just as she reached him, looking at him instead of the rough ground, all rutted with upturned roots, she slipped and almost fell. In an instant his arm, taut and strong, was round her. She laughed and drew away from him.

“I was looking at you coming along here, Marcella,” he said. “Do you know what you remind me of?”

“Dinner?” she said, sitting down to unpack the basket of food.

“No—a Maori woman.”

“Louis! A savage?”

“They aren’t savages. But after all, savage doesn’t mean anything but wild, untamed. You’re that, you know, old lady. Untamed even by motherhood. And I’d have thought that would have tamed even Petruchio’s handful. But this Maori woman I was thinking about was in the King Country in New Zealand—You know, I’d read ‘The Blue Lagoon’ and thought it a bit overdrawn.”

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"What is it?" she interrupted, pointing to the food imperiously.

"It's about a girl and a boy living on a desert island, and she has a baby without turning a hair. Remembering my nerve-racking experience of maternity in the Borough I thought Stacpoole was rather talking without his book. But when I saw this Maori I felt like sending him my humble apologies by wireless. The tribe was trekking. I was with them for months, you know, in the Prohibition Country. My diagnostic eye had foreseen a birthday and, as a matter of fact, I was getting rather funky and wishing I had Hermann's 'Midwifery' to swot up. I saw myself the hero of the occasion, don't you know, dashing in to save her life, miles from civilization. One morning we were camping by a hot spring for the women to do some cooking and washing. My patient disappeared with an old thing we called Aunt Maggie. Presently we trekked again, and I was feeling horribly uneasy about her, when I nearly dropped. There she was, sailing along in the midst of the other women, with the kid in her arms, looking as cool as a cucumber! Lord, I did feel small!"

He laughed reminiscently, and lighted his pipe.

"It seems right to me," she said, looking away through the drifting smoke. "Why should the coming of life mean pain for someone?"

"Don't know, old lady. But it does. I say, how do you think I'm getting on?"

They looked across the clearing and felt rather proud.

"I love it," he said simply, "taking nature in hand a bit—she's a wicked old harridan, isn't she? A naughty old lady gone wrong! Look at that gorse! We'll have spuds here in no time, and then, in a few years, wheat. I feel I'm making a dint on the face of the earth at last. In a hundred year's time, when I'm forgotten, the effect of these few months' work will be felt. I say, am I talking hot air?"

"Not a bit. But let's do a bit more—Jerry calls it scene-shifting."

She tossed the last piece of cake to an inquisitive kookaburra who had been watching the meal optimistically, with bright eyes and nodding head. It was a triumph, this cake—in several ways. The stationmaster at Cook's Wall had built his "bosker hotel" at last, and had made it a store at which one could buy fruit, jam, sugar and various luxuries. Louis had been in twice to the store lately, and had actually remembered the seed-cake on the *Oriana* when he saw caraway seeds in the store. He volunteered the information that there was whisky for sale at the store, but did not mention whether he had wanted to buy it or not.

He got up, taking the mattock. Marcella began to fight a great stem running along the ground.

“Devilish stuff,” he said, turning back to look at her. “See that little patch over there?”

She nodded, following his eyes. A brisk little gorse bush was bursting from the ground. A few feet away another was keeping it company.

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"Devilish stuff!" he repeated. "Just like a cancer—in pathology. You chop the damned thing out, root and branch, and there it pops out again, miles away from where it started. Look at that piece there."

He attacked the little plant with rather unnecessary severity and dug up a thin, tough, cord-like root which he threw on the fire savagely.

"Louis, do you remember that schoolmaster on the *Oriana*?" she asked suddenly, staring thoughtfully at the long, thin leaders.

"Oh, that ass who sat in my chair? Yes. Why?"

"He told me a fearful thing about cancer."

"He would—blighted idiot. What was it?"

She hesitated a minute.

"He said he'd read in some book—he was always reading queer books—that cancer was an elemental that had taken possession of one's body. A horribly preying, parasitic life—feeding on one's body—Ugh, it made me feel sick! And it's so cruel, really, to say things like that. He seemed to suggest that elementals were something unclean that could not come except to unclean people. And—mother died of cancer. And mother was very beautiful."

"Well, you can tell the footling ass from me that he's a thumping liar. Elemental grandmother! Let me tell you this much—cancers come from one thing only, and that's irritation—injury, often. Corsets, sometimes—or a blow—If I were to thump you—"

He laughed, and turned away.

"Yes, I know," she said quietly. She was thinking of that stormy scene between her father and the two doctors when the faint smell of chloroform crept round her at the farm while she waited outside on the landing.

## CHAPTER XXIV

For nearly five months peace stole round Castle Lashcairn. Marcella was almost incredibly happy and so was Louis. Mrs. Twist and Marcella held long consultations about the baby, but Marcella, afraid of worrying Louis, tried to make him forget all about it. Even when, as time went on, she really began to feel tired and unable to work with him, she fought her tiredness indignantly; she was terrified lest he should get "raked up" and go along to the hotel for solace. So she hid everything from him, arranging all details with Mrs. Twist who promised to "see her through it." There was no nurse within

a hundred miles; there was a dreadful old woman who had brought several bottles of squareface with her when she attended Mrs. Twist at Millie's birth. They decided to dispense with her services.

Marcella sent money to Mrs. King to buy things for her in Sydney. They spent a whole Sunday evening making out the list. Many of the things he had learnt, from textbooks, to associate with babies, Mrs. Twist thought unnecessary, but Marcella, with no basic opinion of her own, let him have his way, and one day in May he took Gryphon, the Twist pony, to fetch the packages from the station.

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He was to be away one night—starting at four in the morning he would rest at the hotel for the night and start back next morning. That night Marcella lay long awake, thinking about him. She was vaguely anxious; when she fell asleep she dreamed that he came home to Castle Lashcairn drunk. He was talking French—his eyes were wild, his mouth loose and slobbering, his tongue bitter.

She started up in fright and rolled out of the hammock.

“No—no. It couldn’t happen again. It couldn’t. We could never live now, if we were to get miserable like that after we’ve been so happy. He’s so—so clean, now. He can’t get dirty again.”

She could not sleep after that, and walked down to the lake in the moonlight. She was really feeling ill. Louis’s lectures and diagrams and descriptions of “midder” cases at the hospital sickened and frightened her. Mrs. Twist, with the average woman’s unscientific and morbid interest in such illness, sickened her still more.

The moonlight was very bright; the weather was warm, for May. Louis had begged her not to swim now. She had given in to him rather than worry him, but a sudden impulse to do what she thought pleasant without troubling him came to her, and she slipped out of her nightgown quickly. The lake lay at her feet, a shimmering pool of silver, almost without ripples. It lapped very gently against her feet, bringing back the softly lapping waters of Lashnagar on spring mornings. It was adorably, tinglingly cold; she forgot the dream in the exhilaration and gave a little cry of rapture as she waded further out. Then, without warning, a ghost was in the water beside her. She stared, and knew that it was her own reflection. With a little cry she hurried back to land, her heart thumping wildly as she pulled on her nightgown over her wet body with trembling hands.

“How horrible I look!” she whispered. “He mustn’t know I look as awful as that!”

The next day she waited for him, anxious to unpack the thrilling parcel from Sydney, but he did not come, and all the night she sat waiting, afraid that he had met with some accident. If someone had come, then, and told her he was drunk she would not have believed it. It seemed to her just as unreal a thing as last night’s dream.

But at four o’clock in the morning as she sat on the verandah, half nodding with red-rimmed, heavy eyes, she saw him come stumbling along, holding on to the pony’s neck.

She went out to meet him, knowing just exactly what she was going to meet. And she felt frozen with horror. The average man coming home drunk is not a tragedy. He is merely amiably ridiculous. To Louis, after all his fights and all his hopes, tragedy had certainly come, but he was too drunk to know it yet. He began to bluff and lie just as usual.



“Ought be ‘shamed, sending a chap thirty—thirty—thirty miles f’r lot fem’—fem’—fripp—fripp—fripperies! Sick an’ tired, stuck in with a wom’ day an’ night f’r months. ‘Nough make any man k-k-kick.”



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She did not speak, and he went on in the same old way, French words peppering the halting English; she could have shut her eyes and fancied she was back in the city again, or on the ship.

He muttered and shouted alternately all the way to the cottage; there was a meal waiting but he could not eat; sitting on the edge of the verandah, he ordered her to light him a cigarette. She knew there were none in the house and felt in his coat pocket, guessing he had bought some. She was not really unhappy. She was too sick, too frozen to feel yet at all.

"Come out my pock'," he growled, hitting her arm away fiercely, his teeth clenched. "Aft' my money, eh? Think you're winning, don't you? In league with the Pater against me. Think you'll always have me under your thumb, nev' giv' free hand. There's not a man on God's earth would stand it, damned if there is—tied to wom' apron strings all the time!"

"Very well, get your own cigarette. I'm going to bed."

"Y-you w-w-would," he said, and laughed shrilly. "Think you've got me in blasted bush, work like blast' galley slave while you skulk in bed."

"Oh don't be such an idiot, Louis. You'd better go to bed. I'm tired of you," she said, going past him into the bedroom.

"Ta' my boots off," he grunted, trying to reach his feet and overbalancing. "If you can't make yourself 'tractive to a man, you can be useful. Nice damned freak you are f'r any man t' come home to! Nev' trouble to dress please me—like Vi'let."

Marcella began to laugh hysterically. It was uncanny how his opinion of her appearance coincided with her own.

"Wom' your condish' no damn goo' t' any man!" he mumbled. She went past him, into the room and left him. It was the first time she had made no attempt to soothe and sober him and bring him back. She felt impatient with him, and horribly lonely and frightened of being with him, horribly longing to run to someone and be comforted. But she was just as anxious to hide the trouble from the Twists and knew that she must bear it alone.

She cried for hours, completely disheartened, longing passionately to go to him and ask him to assure her it was only a dream, and he really was cured as she had imagined. But at last she fell asleep, too proud to go and ask him to come to bed again, guessing that he would sleep in the living-room.

She wakened early and started up with full recollection of what had happened. In the light of morning, after a sleep, she was sick with herself for having forgotten her theory

that he was an ill man; she had let personal annoyance stop her from trying to help him. Brimming over with love and pity and self-disgust she ran out to find him, for she guessed he would be penitent now, and in black despair.

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He was not there. On the verandah was a “squareface” bottle, empty. Wakening from a drugged sleep in the grey morning, his mouth ablaze, his brain muddled and full of resentment against her, he had remembered the gin he had brought home with him; there was not much left in the bottle. He drank it, full of resentment against it for making him so unhappy. He knew that ten pounds—two months’ pay—was in the cigarette-box on the shelf. It was Mr. Twist’s birthday next Sunday and they had decided to give it back to him to buy tools. Louis remembered it; fighting every inch of the way across the floor with the strength that the last few months had put into him, he took it out of the box. Then, a thousand devils at his heels, he dashed off into the Bush on his thirty-mile mad tramp.

It was a week before she saw him again, and all the time she was aching to follow him. But she knew she could not walk so far and, with a stern cussedness typical of her father, she went on with Louis’s work, not mentioning to the Twists that he was away, though they all wondered what had happened to him. She burned the gorse as though it were whisky, almost savagely. She tore at the roots in the ground as though they were the fierce desires of life to be ruthlessly uprooted, smashed out, burnt to ashes. She was scarcely conscious of emotion; the smoke got into her eyes and blinded her; stooping to dig made her feel faint and ill, but in her desperate misery she attacked the work as even Louis in his best days had never done. It was not until she had been at it nearly a week that Mrs. Twist found her out, and came across the clearing to her, looking indignant.

“Want to kill yourself, and have the child killed too kid?” she cried before she reached her. “What the nation do you think you’re doing?”

“I won’t be paid for work that isn’t done,” said Marcella ungraciously. She was so sore, so aching that she knew to her disgust, that she would be crying weakly on Mrs. Twist’s shoulder if she let herself be even commonly polite.

“Come on, kid, and have a cup of tea with me,” said Mrs. Twist gently. “I know what it is to feel as if you could chew anyone’s head off. It always takes me like that the last few weeks. Where’s your boss?”

“He—Oh, I don’t know. I’ve got to do his work. I daren’t let him think he can shirk like this! He’ll never get back again if I make him think it doesn’t matter. Mrs. Twist, I’m tired of it!” she cried with sudden fierce intensity. “Never, never, never for a minute dare I be tired and weak; why I daren’t even *think* tired for a minute. Always I’ve to be strong for him! Oh—” she suddenly choked and, flinging her spade aside, sat down clumsily on the ground, her face buried in her hands. “If only Father could come alive for a few hours—and thump him!”

Mrs. Twist made no enquiries about Louis; she had guessed a good deal and, by excessive tact, got Marcella to go across to the Homestead with her and rest for the

remainder of the afternoon. But she was back at her work again next morning grimly determined to show Louis that if he shirked his job she would do it for him.

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That night he came home—pale and haggard, unshaven and unwashed. He had spent the ten pounds until he had just enough left to buy two bottles of whisky. With these he had wandered off on the home road, to sink to sleep when he could go no further and waken to another solitary orgy.

She had been working till after dark, in spite of Mrs. Twist's remonstrances, to which she answered rudely and impatiently. At last the elder woman thought it less wearing to the girl to leave her alone; she guessed that she would faint with physical weariness before she had got over her mental misery. Louis could see the red glow in the sky for the last two miles of his dazed tramp; it led him homewards, muttering to himself about a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud. He looked into the house and saw that she was not there. He had not known, till he saw the empty rooms, with her frock hanging over the hammock, her nightgown neatly folded on the shelf, her books and a pannikin half full of cold tea in the kitchen, how much he had counted on seeing her, how he had hungered for her, deep down, during all the nightmare week. He felt too ashamed to go to the Homestead to look for her; then it occurred to him that she would be across the clearing.

And he met her, half-way. She was coming along in the dull glow of the dying fire, the pickaxe over her shoulder. She looked different to him; perhaps his eyes were distorted, perhaps the fire-glow making leaping shadows caused the difference; but she walked heavily, wearily, without the thrilling, young spring of swift movements that made her such an exhilaration to him. He wanted to run across the clearing, lift her in his arms and charm away the tiredness; swiftly on top of that emotion came the realization that she was walking wearily partly because she had been doing his work, partly because her spirit was heavy and sick. He felt sick with himself for having hurt her; he resented the misery his conscience was causing him: swiftly he found himself resenting the ungainliness of her figure which, in his morbid mood, seemed his fault too. He hated the unconscious reproach she gave him as she came along, stumbling a little, carrying the pickaxe.

He had finished his last spot of whisky at noon and had not slept since; he was worn and tired and frayed, even more than she was. He was acutely uncomfortable for want of soap and water and food.

He dashed across the space between them, his eyes blazing madly, and she looked up, hearing his steps, seeing the blaze of his eyes, the tenseness of his clenched hands.

"Damn you—damn you!" he cried, "playing the blasted Christian martyr. Walking like that, to make people think I've made you tired!"

She stared at him, and her eyes filled with tears. She had got to the stage of longing to see him so much that she did not care whether he were drunk or sober. Then the ridiculousness of playing a role in the Bush at ten o'clock at night, struck her, and she

laughed—a rather cracked laugh. He came close to her, all flaming with hate. He noticed the blue shadows under her eyes, smelt the fire on her clothes. She recoiled from the whisky on his breath, which, from association with her childhood's horrors, always reduced her to a state of unreasoning terror.

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“Oh blast you—too fine to come near me, are you? You were damned glad to pick me up, anyway—and so you ought to be, with your drunken old scab of a father!”

She, in her turn, blazed and tingled; murder was in the ends of her fingers that quivered towards him. Luckily she had dropped the pickaxe. But her movements were slow, and his quick, and he got behind her in an instant. Next moment, without realizing what he was doing, he pushed her violently. She stumbled a few steps and fell heavily against the blunt end of the pickaxe. For an instant he stood looking at her; the next moment with a hoarse cry he was kneeling beside her.

“Oh my darling,” he cried. “I told you I’d kill you in the end! I told you the damn stuff was making a madman of me.”

The whisky vanished from him like the flashing of lightning. Lifting her in his arms he carried her homewards and laid her down on the verandah. Frantic with fear he was going to fetch Mrs. Twist when she sat up rather shakily and looked at him.

“I suppose that’s what you’ve been expecting me to do—faint all over the place—swounds and vapours,” she said, laughing faintly. “Louis, it was a horrible feeling.”

“Marcella,” he sobbed, kissing her hands, kneeling beside her desperate in his self-abasement. “I thought I’d killed you.”

“You’re not much of a doctor if you don’t know I’d take much more killing than that,” she said. “And I wanted to kill you for a minute, so we’re equal.”

In a torrent all his explanations came pouring out. He had thought the whisky hunger was killed; he had tried to test his certainty and had failed.

“I got cocky, old girl. I swanked to myself! I thought I’d got it beat and I’d just go and have one whisky at the Station Hotel to satisfy my own conviction. But when I’d had one I couldn’t help it. I seemed to be outside myself, watching myself for the first two or three. I was interested. I kept thinking ‘I’ll tell Marcella she need not be frightened any more. I can drink two or three whiskies and not be a bally Blue Ribboner any more. We need not be banished to the Bush for the rest of our lives to keep me out of danger.’ Then I got muddled and quite lost grip. It had a sort of chemical effect, you know. I hated you for keeping me from whisky that was making me feel so fine and jolly again. I felt I’d been a bit of a prig lately. I loved the stationmaster and a few manganese miners who came in. In fact, I just wallowed again. I came home hating you. I didn’t come to see you. I came for money. And that’s all. The whole thing’s hopeless.”

“It was my fault this time, Louis. I went to bed and left you. If I’d not been so proud and so huffy I’d have kept you.”

“Yes, but only for a time, dear. I saw it all in a flash to-night when you lay there and I thought you were dead. Marcella, no savage would have done that—hurting you just now.”



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"What rubbish! If you hadn't done it to me I would have done it to you," she said easily.

"Don't you see how hopeless it is? The very first time I go near whisky, I want it. And this happens. I was a madman to-night. It means that we've got to stick here for the rest of our lives. I daren't even go to the store to fetch things for you when you're ill. I have to hide in a hole like a fox when the dogs are after it."

"After all, is it so very horrible here, Louis?" she whispered. "I think it's been heaven. Our Castle, and the clearing—and next month my seeds that Dr. Angus sent will be coming up. And the baby, Louis! Just think of the millions of things we've got!"

But he knew better than she did the torment of his weakness and refused to be comforted. He was near suicide that night; he too had been happy, happier than ever in his tormented, unfriended life before. He had the terrible torture of knowing that it was he who had brought the cloud into their sky; he had the terror before him, with him, of knowing that he would keep on bringing clouds, all the more black because they both so loved the sunshine.

And she, when she undressed, sick and faint but comforted with the thought that once more a fight was over, blew the light out quickly so that he should not see the ugly purple mark of the pickaxe.

She usually slept with her nightgown unfastened so that the cool winds should blow over her through the trellis of the window. To-night she muffled herself up tightly, and when he came in from a strenuous ten minutes in the lake, feeling once more as though she had sent him to dip in Jordan, she pretended to be asleep. Seeing her so unusually wrapped up, he thought she was cold, and fetched a blanket to cover her. She dared not yield to her impulse to hold out her arms to him and draw his aching head on to her breast for fear the bruise should grieve him.

## CHAPTER XXV

Once more came peace, so sunlit and tender that it seemed as though they had wandered into a valley of Avilion where even the echoes of storms could not come, and doves brooded softly. They talked sometimes now of the coming of their son; Louis, once he had got over his conventional horror of such a proceeding, said that she would be as safe in Mrs. Twist's care, with him hovering in the background, as though she had gone to the nursing home in Sydney, as he had suggested at first.

"I shall funk awfully to know you're going through it, old lady," he told her. "You know nothing about it yet. I've seen this thing happen dozens of times, and it's much worse than you imagine."

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She decided, privately, to spare him the misery of it all by sending him off into the Bush on an errand for Mr. Twist as soon as she was taken ill. But her scheme fell through. All one day of blue and silver in June, a winter's day with keen exhilaration in the air, she stayed with him in the clearing, burning the branches as he hewed them down. She felt scarcely alive. Her body was a queer, heavy, racked and apprehensive thing down on the ground. She watched it slowly walking about, dragging faggots of gorse fastened together by the swag-straps which she loosened as she cast the branches cracking and creaking into the flames. Her mind was restless, a little fey. Louis, seeing something of her uncertainty, stopped work early, and they walked home slowly over the cleared land that was now being ploughed.

"I feel proud of it, don't you?" she said, looking back. He nodded, watching her anxiously.

As she was making the tea pain, quite unbearable, seized her. She got out on the verandah so that he should not see her. After a while it passed and, looking white, she came back into the room.

"I was going across to the Homestead to-night. Jerry's got a new record and wants to try it on us. But I feel tired. Will you ask Mrs. Twist to come and have a gossip?" she said casually.

The pain came back, quite astonishing her. She had heard that it was horrible, but had not expected it to be quite so horrible as this. Her mind had only room for one thought—that Louis must not suspect—or, in his anxiety; he would lose grip on himself and make away for Cook's Wall and oblivion. Going into her bedroom she took pencil and paper and wrote a note to Mrs. Twist, who understood the plot and was ready to invent some lost sheep for Jerry and Louis to hunt up.

"Can you come up? I think it's happening to me. Please send Louis away," she wrote, and folded the note into an envelope which she fastened down. That moment she found herself crying out without her own volition. She slammed the door and lay down on the floor inside it, to barricade it against Louis. She heard his steps coming along the verandah and clenched her hands fiercely over her mouth.

"Did you cry out then, dear?" came his voice as he pushed at the door. Feeling an obstruction he pushed all the harder: she could not speak, but he took in at a glance her twisted figure and as he bent over her, shaking with fright, she caught at his hands.

"I thought I'd do it all by myself, but I can't bear it," she gasped.

"Oh my darling," he cried, lifting her in his arms and holding her tight. "How long has this been going on?"



It was some time before she was able to speak. In the bleak aloneness of pain she was very glad of his presence.

“All day—only I didn’t want you to know,” she said. He groaned.

“For fear it’d bowl me over? Oh God—”

“I’d a plot to send you away. But I’ll be glad to know you’re not very far! Will you go for Mrs. Twist, Louis? It will be back in a minute.”

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Kissing her, he ran out across the paddock. In that moment he felt he would cheerfully die for her; it was not her illness that made him so tender, so unusually exalted. He had not it in his nature to regard pain as other than interesting. But the rending thought that she had suffered alone rather than risk his getting drunk—that jerked him. He felt he could beat any weakness that night, as he recalled her eyes, trying to smile at him through pain, her hands as they clung to his for help. He lived a thousand lives during the next few hours until, at two o'clock, he heard the heart-stopping cry of a newborn child that brought stuffy London nights in the slums back to his mind for an instant until Mrs. Twist said, with an air of personal pride, that it was a boy.

And then Louis cracked again; kneeling beside Marcella, who was quite calm and very tired, he sobbed out his love and his penitence and his stern and frantic resolves for the future, his undying intention to be as good a man as she was until Mrs. Twist, who was not very used to emotional young men, packed him out of the way to take the news to Mr. Twist, who was sitting up waiting for it.

The two women had never told Mr. Twist of Louis's tragedy. He had guessed that he had been "on the shikker" that week he stayed away, but he took that as the ordinary thing done by ordinary men—he himself was past "having a burst," he had no heart for it now; but no young man was any the worse for it if it didn't take hold of him. And so, when Louis went there with his eyes shining, his hair wild and his hands shaking, he brought out a bottle of brandy.

"We must drink the young fellow's health," said Mr. Twist, pouring out a microscopic dose for himself and passing the bottle to Louis. "I got that bottle a bit ago, as soon as mother told me your missus was like that. You never know when a drop of brandy may save life."

Louis refused the drink, but Mr. Twist laughed at him—and Louis could not bear to be laughed at. He too poured a microscopic dose, and they solemnly toasted the unnamed son. Louis was fidgety, anxious to get back.

"Leave them alone—they're better alone for a bit. All sorts of things to see to," said the man who had weathered seven birthdays. "Have a pipe with me."

They smoked; Mr. Twist talked. Louis answered vaguely, his mind with Marcella; he had suddenly determined that he could not keep his son, as well as his wife, chained in the Bush with him. Visions of the boy growing up—going to school—going to the hospital to do what his father had failed to do—floated before him. He was making titanic resolutions for the future. His eyes strayed past the brandy bottle. Mr. Twist pushed it generously forward.

"Have another dose. You need it, lad," he said. Louis stood up, astonishing Mr. Twist. He was trembling violently, his forehead wet and shining, his eyes wild.

“Put the damned stuff in the fire!” he cried, and dashed off over the paddock as though a pack of devils was after him. It was an epoch; it was the first time he had refused a drink.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

Marcella lay afloat on a warm, buoyant sea of enchantment, her eyes closed; life seemed in suspension; she had never, in her life, known pain of any severity until a few hours before; it had appalled, astonished her. She felt it unfair that a body which could quiver to the swift tingle of frosty mornings on the hills, the buffetings and dashings of the North Sea waves, the still glamour of an aurora evening on a house-top, and the inarticulate ecstasy of love, should be so racked. But as she put out her hand across the bed and felt the faint stirrings of the child at her side she forgot those few nightmare hours as a saint, bowing his head for his golden crown at the hands of his Lord, must forget the flames of the stake, the hot reek from the lion's slaving jaws. She looked across to Louis, who was sleeping heavily in his hammock; he had found time to tell her that, for the first time, he had held temptation literally in his hand and been able to conquer it. And she felt that Castle Lashcain was not big enough to hold all the kindness and happiness that seemed to be focussing upon it from all the round horizon. Faith in the logical inevitability of good had changed to certainty: it seemed to her, now, that faith was only an old coward afraid to face fact. She was looking at the world from her mountaintop that night; it seemed to her that it could never be the same again for anyone in it, since she herself felt so different, so exalted.

The next two days brought complications. When Louis, coming in at noon, all smelling of sunshine and wind and smoke, knelt beside the bed for a moment and, peeping underneath the folded sheet at the pink, screwed-up face of his son, happened to touch her breast with his hand, she was bathed in a sea of pain. Later in the day Mrs. Twist said he would have to go to the township to get a feeding-bottle for the baby; he was inclined to dispute the necessity for it, but he set off at once, for the child, fed with sugar and water in a spoon, kept up a dissatisfied wailing. Marcella forgot to be anxious about him, so completely had she sponged fear from her mind. When, at breakfast-time next morning, Jerry came in with the bottle, she guessed that Louis was washing off the dust of his swift travel before he came to see her. In the absorption of feeding the child and talking to Mrs. Twist she almost forgot him; it was nightfall next day before she saw him, and then he looked haggard and pinched, and she was almost frantic with fear; when he was away from her she never thought he was drunk; always she thought he had met with an accident. He told her, between sobs and writhings, that once again he had failed, but he had been too ashamed to come to her until he had slept off some of the traces of his failure. Seeing him buying a baby's bottle at the store the men of the township had chaffed him into "wetting the baby's head," and he had forgotten

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his recent victory, his adoring love, his fierce resolves, and the little hungry thing waiting to be fed. Once again she felt stunned, incredulous; later, when she was up again and going about the cottage and Homestead, she determinedly forgot. His passionate struggles made it impossible to feel resentment against him, however much he made her suffer. Always she was sure this particular time was the last time; always she thought Louis, like Andrew, had been going along the Damascus road and had seen a great light.

And so, for two years, they lived on at Castle Lashcairn; for long days sometimes Louis went off to Cook's Wall, and she despaired. Most of the time she hoped blindly. Much of the time they were incredibly happy in small things. Some slight measure of prosperity came to Loose End. The uncle who used to send the gramophone records retired from business and, buying himself an annuity, divided his money between his few relatives so that he could see what they did with it before he died. Quite a respectable flock of sheep came to take the place of those drowned in the flood and burnt in the fire; a horse and buggy went to and fro between Loose End and the station; Scottie the collie got busy and two shepherds came, building another hut at the other side of the run. A plague of rabbits showed Mr. Twist the folly of putting off the construction of rabbit-proof fencing any longer, now that he could afford it, and the gorse was once more left uncleared for months in the pressure of new things. Neighbours came, too—the deposit of manganese at Cook's Wall was found cropping up on the extreme borders of Gaynor's run, and a tiny mining township called Klondyke settled itself round the excavations five miles from the Homestead. Marcella made friends with everyone, to Louis's amazement. To him friendliness was only possible when whisky had taken away his self-consciousness; the parties of miscellaneous folks who turned up on Sundays, bringing their own food, as is the way in the Bush where the nearest store is often fifty miles away, worried him at first. He stammered and was awkward and ungracious with them, but Marcella, dimly realizing that it must be bad for him to be drawn in so much upon their *egoisme a deux*, tried to make him more sociable. When he forgot himself and was effortlessly hospitable, he was charming. When he felt shy and frightened, and was fighting one of his rhythmical fits of desire, he was difficult and rude.

Aunt Janet wrote every month: her letters varied little; they were cynical though kindly; especially was she cynical about Louis, for, though Marcella told her nothing about him, she guessed much from the girl's description of their life. She was very cynical about Marcella's breathless descriptions of her happiness: she was frankly despondent about young Andrew, who, as yet, showed no signs of fulfilling her gloomy predictions.

Dr. Angus wrote every mail. Though a world apart, he and Marcella seemed to get closer together. He was growing younger with age, and she older. He told her he had no friend but her letters, and wrote, sometimes thirty pages of his small, neat

handwriting to her—all about his cases, his thoughts, his reading. And every book he bought he passed on to her. Louis had had to put up three more shelves for them.



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"I've been unduly extravagant, Mrs. Marcella," he wrote once, at the end of the second year. "I've left the rheumatically old woman to a sort of patent rubbing oil very much in vogue just now, and I've resigned the coming babies to the midwife at Carlössie, and been to Kraill's Lendicott Trust lectures at Edinburgh. He seems, in my humble and very uninstructed opinion, to have gone very far since 'Questing Cells.' The lectures were on sex psychology. He admits that they are coloured by what he learnt at Heidelberg last year. But he goes further than Germans could possibly go. There's a gentleness, a humanity about him, and a spirituality one doesn't expect from the author of 'Questing Cells' or from those Lendicott lectures a few years ago. The thing that struck me about him is that he's so consummately wise—wise enough, Mrs. Marcella, to grasp at the significance of an amoeba as well as that of the Lord of Hosts! I'm a small man—a little G.P. in an obscure Highland village in rather shabby tweed knickerbockers and Inverness cape (yes, the same ones—still no new clothes! What would be the use in wasting money on adorning an old ruffian like me?) But I went up to him, sort of shaking at the knees, after the second lecture, and discussed a point with him. The point was not what I was wanting to know about. I was wanting, very much, to have a 'bit crack' with him, as they call it here. Lassie, he asked me to lunch with him the next day, and he talked to me as if I was his long-lost brother. In fact, he seems to think that everybody is! He came off the rostrum completely. Even when he's lecturing he seems to be talking to you personally, with an engaging sort of friendliness. He puts me a good bit in mind of Professor Craigie when I was a lad. I felt as if I was a baby in arms beside him, but he seemed as pleased to see me as I was to see him. No, he hasn't got a long white beard, and he doesn't look a bit like Ruskin or Tennyson or Dickens. Do you remember when you said you thought he had bushy eyebrows and a white beard, years ago? He's not above forty-five, I should say; but I'm no judge of age after folks are forty, I'm so afraid of putting my foot in it. He's much bigger than me (I'm talking about appearance now). He gives one the impression of quick blue eyes. I can't remember any more about him; I remember every word he said, but not how he looked when he said it. And now I suppose you want to know all he said; you have an Examining Board's thirst for information, Mrs. Marcella! But I'm sending you the printed lectures and some news. He told me he's going to Harvard this year. In fact, he's there now; and after that he's on his way to Australia. I gather that you're a wandering Jew's journey from Sydney, but wouldn't it be worth your while to take that man of yours and go to hear him? It isn't often one gets a chance of seeing in the flesh someone who has got into your imagination as Kraill got into yours and mine. I'd walk all the way from Carlössie

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to Edinburgh to hear him again. It makes me sad, sometimes, to think how little chance we doctors in practice, with all our responsibilities and opportunities, have of getting this heaping up of wisdom that comes to men like Kraill. Measles and rheumatics, confinements and bronchitis take up all our time, and when we get a man like poor Andrew your father, something out of the ordinary, appealing to us for healing, we give him digitalis or Epsom-salts for the elixir of life. We do our best, but it's bad—very bad. When I talked to Kraill that day I kept thinking of your father. I kept thinking he'd have been alive to-day if he could have caught on to Kraill's philosophy. I feel small, Marcella. I honestly hadn't the brains, the knowledge, to do anything for your father. I talked to Kraill about it. He said something very kind and very queer about the socialization of knowledge. I didn't quite catch on to it at the time, but thinking it out afterwards it seemed to me that he meant knowledge was not to be a Holy of Holies sort of thing, a jealous mystery, an aristocratic thing, any more; but be spread broadcast, so that everyone could have wisdom and healing and clear thinking. And after all, isn't healing, more than anything else, merely clear thinking? I hate the waste of people, you know. I hate that people should rot and die. I feel personally affronted when I think about your father, and some days—I strongly suspect it's when my liver's out of order—I worry about your young son. But by the time he's grown up maybe Kraill's socialization of knowledge will have begun."

Marcella was having an argument with Mrs. Beeton that day when Jerry brought the letter in. Mrs. Beeton seemed to think it was necessary to have an oven, a pastry board, a roller and various ingredients before one could attempt jam tarts. Marcella felt that a mixture of flour, fruit salt, and water baked in the clay oven heaped over with blazing wood ought to beat Mrs. Beeton at her own game. She and young Andrew, both covered in flour because he loved to smack his hands in it and watch it rise round them in curly white clouds were watching beside the fire for the sticks to burn down. When she read the doctor's letter she sat down immediately to write to him. She knew so well that sense of inadequacy that trying to help Louis always gave her, and she wanted to cure him of it. The jam tarts got burned; she forgot about them. It was only when she remembered that the letter could not go to the post for three days that she decided to write it again at greater leisure.

The two years had aged Marcella; the doctor's letters were manna in the desert to her spirit, his books the only paths out of the hard, tough life of everyday. Sometimes she felt tempted to take the cheap thrills of purely physical existence with Louis as she realized more and more that, though his schooled and trained brain was a better machine than hers, his soul was a weak plant requiring constant cossetting

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and feeding while his body was the unreasoning, struggling home of appetites. She had the torturing hopefulness that comes from alternating failure and success in a dear project; she was getting just a little cynical about him; her clear brain saw that she was his mother, his nurse and, perhaps, his mistress. He loved her. She knew that quite well. But he loved her as so many Christians love Christ—"because He died for us." His love was unadulterated selfishness even though it was the terribly pathetic selfishness of a weak thing seeking prop and salvation. She faced quite starkly the fact that her love was a love of giving always, receiving never; also she faced the fact that she must kill every weakness in herself, for, by letting him see her hardness, she gave him something to imitate. Hunger of soul, the black depression that comes to a Kelt like a breath from the grave, weariness of body must all be borne gallantly lest he be "raked up." Once or twice, when Louis had slipped and failed and was fighting himself back again, she felt that she was getting bankrupt. One could never treat Louis by rule of thumb. He might get drunk if she inadvertently spoke coolly to him. Then he would get drunk out of pique. He might get drunk if she had been especially loving. *Then* it would be because he was happy and wanted to celebrate; if she were ill he would get drunk to drown his anxiety: if she got better, he would drink to show his relief; if she died, he would drown his grief. Sometimes she felt that it was quite impossible to safeguard him: she literally had not the knowledge. Such knowledge was locked away in a few wise brains like Kraill's—and meanwhile people were rotting. Once she wrote a long letter to Carnegie asking him to stop giving money for libraries and spend some on helping to cure neurotics. But she destroyed the letter, and went on hoping. Sometimes she felt that her body would either get out of hand as Louis's did, or else crack under the strain put upon it by her temperament, Louis and her work. Sometimes she thought her capacity for happiness would atrophy and drop off if she so defiantly kept it pushed into a dark corner of her being every time it protested to her that it was being starved. Sometimes she hoped that the time would come quickly when she would have killed desire for everything as Aunt Janet had done, and would be going about the world a thing stuffed with cotton-wool, armoured in cotton-wool. And all the time she was fighting the insidious temptation to kill the unconscious aristocracy of her that had, after the first few weeks in Sydney, set a barrier between her and Louis—a barrier of which he was never once conscious. Other people, on a lower range of life, seemed quite happy with a few thunder flashes of passion in a grey sky. Louis did. Except when the end of the month brought pay day, and set him itching to be off to the township, he seemed happy. At these times she deliberately

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made love to him to hold him from the whisky, loathing the deliberateness and expediency of a thing which, it seemed to her, ought to be a spontaneous swelling of a wave until it burst overwhelmingly. She did not realize until long afterwards what good discipline this was, as her brain and spirit refused to follow her body along a meaner path. Louis never guessed how she thought out calmly whether to be hurt or not by him, and decided that it was better to be a wounded thing hiding her wounds under a coat of mail, rather than a dead thing in mummy-wrappings, in cotton-wool.

But the doctor's letter generated hope. She respected the doctor's opinion. For him to be enthusiastic about anyone was very wonderful; there was something wistful and very beautiful in this deferring of an old man to one much younger, something very touching in his frank pride in the big man's friendliness. Always Kraill had been a hero to her, since the days when his cynical early book of lectures had come like revelation to her, even though she had had to take the help of a dictionary on every line. That evening Louis went off to the township after three days' restless nerviness on his part, and three nights' valiant love-making on hers. Taking young Andrew she went down by the lake and leaving him to splash joyously in the ripples at the edge, she read the last lectures.

She read for an hour, gorging the book as a child gobbling sweets before his nurse's return. She was devouring understanding—it seemed to her that the lectures were being written expressly for her. It seemed, with one half of Kraill's wisdom she could save Louis. The child got hungry and she fetched milk and biscuit for him. His crawler was soaked by the water in which he lived half his life. She changed it in a dream and took him back to the lake again, where the shadows were getting long and cool. It was possible to think with detachment there, in the serenity of the evening.

She saw, as she usually saw things, very clear and stark, that all through she had been wrong about Louis. Once only she had come within touching distance of the right, when on the *Oriana* she had told him that his only hope was to throw up the sponge, as people say—acknowledge himself beat to the earth as Saul of Tarsus had done on the Damascus Road. Andrew Lashcairn had done it that night with the little pale cousin; he had made himself “at one with God”: fighting and struggling had ceased; his life, a battle-ground of warring forces, had become, in a mighty flash of understanding, the chamber of a peace treaty, and God—a big man—God outside himself—had taken hold of him and kept him. To Louis that could never happen; he was too unloving, too self-centred, too unimaginative ever to see lights from heaven. Indeed, she thought hopefully, Louis might, in the end, go further than Andrew. He might stand up in the strength of a man without the propping of a God at all.

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"I've weakened him. All along I've weakened him. I've fussed over him like a hen after her duckling when it takes to the water. I wouldn't let him swim for fear he'd get drowned. And so—he just flops about and looks disgusting. I've made him run away from temptation. That was because I couldn't keep on being disappointed in him. Because I couldn't face the disgust of him coming home dirty and smelly and saying filthy things to me—and sleeping close to him. Andrew," she called to the baby, who looked at her solemnly and went on playing with the little pebbles at his feet. "Listen, darling, what mother's telling you. 'He that fights and runs away lives to fight another day.' I made him run away from whisky, and all the time it's throwing down challenges to him, putting out its tongue at him, pulling rude faces at him. I've been protecting myself from the things drunkards' wives have to put up with—Oh, but I was trying to protect him, too!"

The last words were wrung from her in self-defence.

"What I ought to have done was to take the whisky, make him look at it all round and tell it, with his own conviction and not mine, to go to hell. I ought never, never to have protected him, and made him a hothouse plant."

As she said it she knew, incontrovertibly, that she could never do anything but protect people. It was the way she was made. And she became very frightened that, some day, she might make Andrew a hothouse plant, too.

She looked at the thin, grey-backed book again and more light came to her. She flung herself on the ground, her face on the soft grass. The baby, looking at her wonderingly, crawled towards her, and snuggled up to her, his wet little hands on her neck.

"Oh make me weak!" she cried as though praying to the earth and the air and the water to batter her. "Make me weak—smash me and tear me up, so I'll have to be taken care of. Then I'll let him be strong instead of me! Oh but it's cruel! Why should one person be weak to make another strong? Why can't we march on in armour, shoulder to shoulder?"

And then came the thought that, perhaps, had not her father and Louis been the men they were she would never have learnt to wear her armour. The wisdom of nature that made the protective coverings of birds and beasts had given her her armour—made her grow her armour out of her surroundings. This thought made her gasp. She sat still a very long time letting it sink in.

"I wonder," she said slowly, looking out over the lake, a pool of fire in the setting sun, "if that's why Jesus died. He didn't want to, I think. He loved the quiet things of the world, little children and talking to friends, and doing things with his hands. I wonder if he had to die, when his teaching was finished, so that those others he loved might not get to depend on him too much? We're so fond of getting propped. I don't think people ought

to have a Good Shepherd. Unless they only want to be silly sheep all their lives. And here I've been Good Shepherding Louis all this time till now he can't get along without my crook round his arm."

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It was many years since she had consciously prayed, but now she thought of her father's prayers, and whispered:

"God—You know all about this muddle of mine. You gave Louis to me so that, in the end, he might be a path for You to walk along. I've tried to be a path for You towards him, but I thought I'd better help You along. I couldn't keep quiet. Oh how silly of me! God, I see now that I've been all wrong. I've been keeping him out of the world when I ought, all the time, to have been making him brave enough to face the evil in the world. Please God, let me be quiet now—and not keep tripping You up with my own ideas, my own strength when You walk along my life."

Her quick imagination, the imagination of a savage or a child, saw pictures where other people would have seen ethical ideas. She went on, softly:

"Walk over me with burning Feet. Oh don't worry, please, about how much it hurts, so long as You get to him in the end. Because I love him—and because he is the one You gave to me—the man I needed."

She stood up slowly, and felt that, at last, she had given in. The poor baby lay blissfully asleep beside her on the ground. She took him in her arms and carried him home. Then she sat down with pen and ink and wrote a letter. She was not sure when it would be posted, but she decided to get it written, at any rate. She felt fey—she felt that she was being led, now that she had asked to be kept quiet at last.

She wrote:

"'CASTLE LASHCAIRN'  
(It isn't really a castle. It's a hut).

"DEAR PROFESSOR KRAILL,

"Ever since I was fifteen you have been the very heart of my imagination. I used to read your lectures to my father, and because I've never been to school I had to get a dictionary to two words on every line. You enlightened me, and depressed me, and shocked me and annoyed me all at once in those days. But in your last Edinburgh lecture it seems to me that the spirit of God has come upon you to lead captivity captive. (I think that is such a beautiful sentence I can't help putting it in a letter to you, because I would like to write to you in beautiful words.) I would like to quote some more of the Bible to you, but you can read it for yourself. The fifth chapter of the second book of Kings—the story of Naaman the leper. I am the servant maid in that story, and I've just discovered that I've been trying to cure my lord's illness with lumps of cotton-wool. There is someone at home in Scotland who sends me all your lectures, and when I read the last ones I felt that you were the prophet in Samaria. I hear that you are lecturing in Sydney soon. I would come to hear you, but I can't leave my little kingdom here. And I



don't think they'd approve of my small son at a University lecture. He is only two, and very busy always. I feel that, if I could talk to you, I should see a great light; you seem such a very shining person to me. And I'm a duffer. A well-meaning duffer with a task before her that needs brains. You talk of the socialization of knowledge—will you begin the socialization on my behalf? I wonder if you would like to see what life in the Bush is like, you who are a student of life? Then you could show me where Jordan is nowadays.



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"This is very sincere, this request. I shall not be offended if you think it isn't, but I shall feel that there is no more light in the sky. I'd got resigned to failure when I read your lectures, and they wakened me to hope again, because they showed me that I've done every possible thing wrong. If you do come, please write a very long time in advance because we are thirty miles from the station and only go in for letters occasionally. If you can't come, I'll go on worrying with the lectures until I understand without you.

"Yours sincerely,  
MARCELLA LASHCAIRN FARNE."

She fastened the letter up in between two books. It was three months before she read in a week-old Sydney "Sunday Times" that Professor Kraill, the eminent biologist, "whose fame in his newer field of research had preceded him to the Antipodes," was to lecture at Sydney University during the next three months. Marcella did not open the letter; she posted it to Sydney University and left the issue in the hands of the forces that had made her write it.

Professor Kraill got it when he was being bored to death in Sydney and he rather discredited the sincerity of it for he was being wearied to death by lion-hunters. Eminene men from the Old Country either get feted or cut in the Colonies. He was feted because he happened to arrive at a time when "culture" was fashionable, and Shakespeare Societies, Ibsen Evenings, History Saturday Afternoons and Science Sundays were the rage. Foreign legations and Government officials gave him dinners as deadly as any in England. He saw that he was to appear in character at these dinners. He was expected to wear a phylactery on his forehead inscribed "I AM A BIOLOGIST." He was expected to talk biology to the government ladies, who hoped he would say things that were "rather daring" but quotable. In fact, they hoped that he himself would be "rather daring"—but quotable! They talked about Shackleton's expedition, which was the affair of the moment, and thought that they were being flatteringly and intelligently biological when they asked him how seals lived under ice. There was a dance on the flagship which, thanks to the snotties, was quite alive. Then came a month's interim in the lectures when more festivities were threatened. Professor Kraill read Marcella's letter and thought she was probably a rather emotional, rather intense and rather original lion-hunter. But she had the redeeming feature of living in the Bush, thirty miles from anywhere. Conceivably, thirty miles from anywhere, there would be no festivities. He tossed up between the City and the Bush, and the Bush won. Giving out that he felt very unwell after the round of gaities, he basely deserted, got into the most uncomfortable train in the world and, two days later, threw himself on the hospitality of the landlord of the bosker hotel at Cook's Wall, entirely omitting to let Marcella know that he was coming.

## CHAPTER XXVII

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At Klondyke and Loose End they were great on celebrations. So very little except work happened that birthdays wedding-days, and anniversaries of all sorts were greeted hilariously, and the various members of the community took it in turn to hold them at their various homesteads. A birthday happened to Mrs. Twist—her fortieth. She and Mr. Twist were the oldest inhabitants of the district and the birthday was a great occasion. Invitations were passed round from hand to mouth; about twenty grownups and twice as many children turned up one Saturday afternoon just before tea at the Homestead, which, decorated in branches of wattle and boughs of eucalyptus, looked very festive. The gathering had something of the nature of a surprise party in that most of the guests brought something to eat or drink. But most of them, in delicate compliment to the changed fortunes of Loose End, brought not necessities but luxuries. Jerry's gramophone was still hoarsely valiant; three Italians from Klondyke, manganese miners, brought mandolines; Jerry had recently acquired a mouth-organ with bells.

Marcella was always rather depressed about celebrations. Always Louis said, easily, that he would be safe; always he joined forces with the hard-bitten, hard-toiling miners who each brought his bottle of whisky and drank it without ill-effect. She could do nothing to help him: he resented her anxiety more and more as time went on.

The Homestead had grown. At the south side a big storeroom had been built: at one end of it flour-bags were stocked, both empty and full, to serve as seats for the dancers when they were exhausted. The guests sat long over tea, yarning, chaffing, gossiping and talking business; as it grew dusk the men sat on the verandah, smoking reflectively, talking little. In the living room the women all chattered at once. Louis had been working during the day on the gorse clearing again; until it was all burnt off it was a constant menace, for wind-blown seeds and underground leaders seemed to spring up spitefully in the midst of growing lucerne and wheat. Marcella's beloved garden had had a struggle against it: so had Mrs. Twist's patch of vegetables, so they were all making a gigantic effort to uproot the whole thing and get rid of it. Across the clearing the fire crackled and blazed and died down to a ruddy glow; in the storeroom Jerry's gramophone led off with "Oh Dry those Tears," and the youngsters started to dance. A new record was put on, because "Oh Dry those Tears" was not conducive; the sound of rhythmically beating feet drew the others towards the ballroom, and Marcella was left on the verandah listening to the barking of some half-dozen dogs, brought by the guests and tied up behind the Homestead. She knew that the massed force of cups and tumblers was not quite sufficient and decided to wash them before they would be needed for relays of coffee.

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She was feeling very wretched; it was the end of the month; in two days Louis, already nervy and restless, would get the month's money, either by persuasion or force, and either vanish for a week or, coming home every night from Klondyke, reduce her to a state of inarticulate wretchedness. She was on the point of losing hope entirely. Sometimes it seemed to her that he drank deliberately now that the first flush of gratitude and love for her, the first zest of having a son, had worn off. He lied until she was sickened of the sound of his stammering voice—for never once did he lie without stammering. If he had not struggled and been so pitiful she would have given up, then, and been content to take three weeks' strained peace to one of blank horror. But his despair when he came out of his hell goaded her to keep on hoping.

She was washing the cups out on the verandah. Those of enamelled tin Andrew was trusted to carry indoors as she wiped them. She heard a horse coming along in the distance and guessed that it was a delayed reveller from Klondyke as she saw a tall man whom she did not recognize make for the storm centre of things in the ballroom. Clouds of dust and flour were eddying out of the door in a stream of light from the kerosene lamp. He dismounted and stood in the haze for a moment. Then he looked round in bewilderment and caught sight of her. The gramophone was playing "Rock of Ages."

"Can you tell me what *is* going on in there? Is it St. Vitus' Dance?"

Marcella looked at him and gave a little shout of laughter.

"No, it's Mrs. Twist's birthday. Didn't you know?"

"How could I? Never heard of her. I'm looking for Mrs. Farne. They lent me this animal at Klondyke. It seems days ago. They said she knew the way blindfold. They didn't think to tell me she didn't know it unless she was blindfold."

Marcella laughed again, and knew who he was.

"If it hadn't been for those fires I should never have got here. But, perhaps you can tell me where Mrs. Farne lives? They all seemed to know her at Klondyke."

Marcella pointed towards the glowing gorse.

"That's where I live. I'm Marcella Farne," she said. "But why didn't you say you were coming? Mr. Twist would have fetched you in his buggy. He loves meeting people at Cook's Wall because he tries to convince them that it's a real road he's driving them along. And it isn't, you know."

He sat down on the edge of the verandah, looking distastefully at the mare, who shook her head impatiently. Marcella gave her water and let her wander, when she had taken off her saddle and bridle.

“Suppose you hadn’t been able to ride. I didn’t think Professors had time for that sort of thing.”

“Neither did I till a few hours ago,” he said, with a short laugh, taking out a cigarette-case and offering it to her. She sat down rather trustfully on a verandah rail Louis had carpentered. Andrew stared at them both and made off silently towards the noise. “But how did you know who I was?”

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"I only know one other man in the world, you see, and he's an old doctor in Scotland."

He was watching her as she spoke.

"I see," he said. "And you think you know me?"

"Yes. I know you like I know St. Paul and Siegfried and Parsifal—people living in my mind all the time. I've talked to you for hours, you know—hours and hours—"

"It was very good of you to ask me to come. But—embarrassing, you know! I simply had to come, out of curiosity. To find someone reading one's lectures right in the heart of the Bush!—"

"I thought you would come," she said, staring at him gravely, "when Dr. Angus told me what you said about the socialization of knowledge. But I can hardly believe it's you, even now. Yet somehow you look as if you could think those last lectures of yours. Before I read those you seemed tremendously clever and—and rousing. To speak biologically—"

"Oh, please!" he said, smiling. "They've been doing that in Sydney—out of encyclopedias—!"

"I was going to say that your thoughts always fertilize my brain. But you must be hungry, so I'll not tell you what I want to about the lectures yet."

She slipped off the verandah rail and went indoors, leaving the Professor rather amazed. He was not quite sure whether to think she was a serious and dull young person, absolutely sincere and very much a hero-worshipper, or one of the lionizing type he had met in the city. He was deciding that she was too young for the latter role when she called him inside the candle-lit room.

"I hope you drink tea. We drink quarts of it here."

He nodded reassuringly.

"There's some beer, too, but the shepherds and old Mike from Klondyke will have to drink that. It was put into a kerosene tin that hadn't been boiled and it smells terrible. But they won't notice."

"They'll probably be dead," he remarked.

"Mike drinks methylated spirit and the shepherds have a bottle of squareface each on Sunday afternoons when Betty and Andrew and I look after the sheep. Nothing hurts us. We're hard people out here."

“What made you write to me like that?” he asked, still puzzled. “I still have no idea—”

“I wanted to see you, for one thing. But that’s only a small thing. I can’t tell you now. I’m the cook to-day, you see, and they’ll be wanting their supper in a little while. I must go and find somewhere for you to sleep, too. How long can you stay?”

“I’m not sure,” he said guardedly. “I don’t want to embarrass you, however much you embarrass me.”

“I’d like you to stay for months,” she said simply. “I—we’re very lonely.”

The gramophone groaning out the “Merry Widow” waltz seemed to contradict her words, with its accompaniment of tramping feet, laughter and talk. “This only happens on birthdays and things. Even then, it’s lonely.”

“I don’t believe you’re any more lonely than I,” he said.

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"I can understand that. I've felt it in your lectures. You're so much wiser than most people."

"What rubbish!" he said with a laugh, wondering again if she were sincere. "Much less, very much less wise than most people."

"If you tell me that I'll be wishing you'd not come. I'm counting everything on your being wiser than other people—and shining—like your lectures. But Louis once said that people usually *think* much better than they can do—"

"That was very penetrating of Louis," he said. Then—"I hope I don't disappoint you. I do—most people. Women especially—"

"Do you? Why?" she said with her puzzled frown.

"I suppose it's because I'm what you called, in your letter, a student of life. I like to understand things—and people. Particularly do I like to understand women. But one finds it impossible to take them seriously, as a rule."

"I don't know many women—" she began.

"And how many men did you say? Two?" he said, smiling. She shook her head.

"I'm afraid I take everyone rather seriously."

"It's a mistake," he said. "I used to. But they disappoint one. When I stopped taking people, women especially, seriously, and made love to them, I found them quite adorable—"

"It seems silly."

"It's quite a delightful pastime."

They had gone out on the verandah again now, and she looked across at the lake that glimmered red in the fire-glow.

"You didn't seem to think women a pastime in those lectures of yours three years ago. You said then that they were man's heel of Achilles. You seemed rather in a panic about them—"

He nodded his head and, meeting her intent eyes, decided that she had to be taken seriously. He was just going to speak when she went on:

"But you've got past that now—the panic stage, the pastime stage, the cynical stage—"

"I suppose you're thinking of those last Edinburgh lectures? They're the furthest I have got yet. I believe they are a very clever piece of work, a sort of high-water mark. But there are so many pulls to jerk us back from the high-water mark, don't you think? And as Louis—wasn't it?—said, we most of us think better than we do—"

They had reached the haze of the ballroom by this time. People sitting on the flour-bags sent up white auras which mingled with the dust and the smoke of strong pipes to make an effective screen. Kraill looked astonished. Marcella smiled.

"They say Englishmen take their pleasures sadly," he whispered confidentially. "I don't think they could say the same for Colonials."

"They work so hard, and they like to let off steam sometimes," she said. "By the way, I must simply say you are a friend from England. If I say you are someone very wise they'll either be rude to you or frightened of you. And all the girls will want to dance with you if I say you're from London. They're mad on dancing, and they'll take it for granted that you are. They'll expect you to teach them all the new things."



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He looked startled as he watched the swaying crowd. It certainly looked dangerous, if it was not difficult. The gramophone was playing the “March of the Gladiators”; the mandolines were tinkling anything and the mouth-organ had given it up entirely, merely punctuating the first beat of every bar with a thin concussion of the bell. Betty had sprinkled the floor with a slippery preparation she got from the store, called “ice-powder.”

“Be careful when you cross the floor. It’s worse than ice, to make it easy for those who can’t dance. You just cling to someone and slip if you don’t know any steps. Some of them say their slip is a waltz: others call it a gavotte, and some say it’s the tango. Old Mike’s very definite that it’s a jig. The great thing is to make the slip coincide with a groan from the gramophone. Just watch a minute, and you’ll see that there is quite a lot of method in it.”

She looked round for Louis, who was in a corner with some of the miners. By his flushed face, his high voice and hysterical laugh she guessed that she must try to keep him from seeing Kraill that night. She never could be quite sure what he would do or say.

Mrs. Twist was pathetically honoured that the “gentleman from England” should have chosen her birthday for his visit, and Marcella left him with her.

“It’s a pity to be Martha to-night, Professor Kraill,” she said in a low voice. “I want to be Mary—”

She was gone before he could answer.

The noise had made Andrew cross and tired, and she put him to bed in the hammock under the gum trees, and hitched up her own hammock in the bedroom next to Louis’s. She knew that he would be drunk to-night; experience had given her a plan of action. She had to pretend to go to bed with him and stay with him until he was asleep. Then she crept out into the open air beside the boy.

She tried to transform the storeroom into the semblance of a bedroom, but it did not occur to her to apologize for discrepancies; she would not have done so had the king come to visit her: indeed, she considered that he had, for Kraill had always taken his place in her imagination, as she had told him, with heroes of romance.

When she got back to the Homestead everyone was ready for supper. They had to get away early, for most of them had to walk the five miles to Klondyke. The Professor seemed to be at home with the miners. His air of intense interest that had so won Dr. Angus’ heart had immediately flattered and enslaved them all. Before they said good night he had committed himself to visiting them all. Marcella won a good deal of reflected glory by possessing him as friend.



"Are you tired of us?" she asked him after a while.

"I am very glad I won that toss!" he said.

"Which?"

"I tossed up whether to stay in Sydney or come here"—he stopped sharp, for it seemed to him that she looked hurt. He decided that, with Marcella, it would be better to be honest than pleasant.

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“As a matter of fact, your letter completely puzzled me. I’m a modest sort of person, you know. To be asked to help anyone seemed such a wonderful thing to me that I scarcely believed it. If a man had written the letter I should have believed it more. But as I told you, I can’t take women seriously—”

“Before you’ve finished with me you will,” she said, and laughed.

She was just going to suggest to him that he was tired and should go to bed: she was so anxious to get him out of the way before Louis came out of his corner that she could scarcely talk coherently. But just at that moment Louis came up to her. He took no notice of Kraill or Mrs. Twist, who was quite used to him by this time. At the back of Louis’s mind was the obsession that in two days he would draw his pay; half of him was a blazing hunger for whisky after three weeks’ abstinence and hard work and peace; the other half of him was fighting the desire desperately; he wanted to win over one of these warring halves to the other; the fact that he had been drinking all the evening had weakened the finer half; his brain worked quickly. If he could find some grievance against Marcella he would be able to excuse himself to himself for getting drunk, for taking the money that he knew she needed. He wanted peace—unity within. So he raved at her because the tag had come off his shoelace, and it was her wifely duty to see that a new lace had been put into the shoe that morning. From that he went on to the usual gibberish of French, the usual accusation against men in the neighbourhood, the usual *melange* of Chinese tortures and gruesome operations. From Kraill’s horrified face Marcella saw that he understood more than she did. She had never been sufficiently morbid to ask anyone to translate his words for her, even after more than three years of them.

She wondered weakly what would happen. Judging Kraill by her father and Dr. Angus she knew that his ordinary code of convention could not let him disregard Louis as the others did, as being merely a rather weak, silly young man, who “went on the shikker” every month and made many varieties of a fool of himself. Everyone gave him the mixture of disgusted toleration and amusement given to a spoilt child who kicks his nurse in the park, and pounds his toys to pieces. Marcella never talked about him to anyone; she cut off ungraciously the attempts at sympathetic pumping made by the women at Klondyke. They concluded that she did not feel anything since she never cried out. But, looking at Kraill’s face for one fleeting instant Marcella knew that he understood how sore and shamed she was.

“He’s very ill, really,” she said in a low voice. “But no one believes it. They think he’s just wicked. I’ll tell you all about it to-morrow. I expect you know without my telling you. But I didn’t want you to see him like this. I’ve fixed up a bed for you at home. Will you let Jerry show you the way?”

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He decided instantly that she knew her own business better than he did, and that his desire, both natural and conventional, not to leave a woman to see a drunken man to bed, was not going to help her.

“Shut your door up tight, please,” she said. “He may not go to sleep for a long time.”

He nodded, looked at her to show her that he had begun to take her seriously, and turned away with Jerry, rather astonished to find himself dismissed so coolly from the scene. She turned to Louis, forgetting Kraill. Jerry, who adored Marcella, became very voluble on the subject of Louis; Kraill listened mechanically to all he was saying as they crossed the paddock.

It was one of Louis's bad nights; he had been drinking both whisky and squareface. A letter from his mother, saying how she was longing to see her grandson, had roused him to great deeds. His fall after such resolutions was always the more bitter; always it needed more than usual justification; always Marcella was the scapegoat. She had forgotten Kraill in the intensity of her misery until, worn out by his ravings, Louis fell asleep. She knew, then, that he was safe for the rest of the night and she crept out silently into the cool cleanness of the garden, closing the door softly. Only his loud, stertorous breathing came to her with mutterings and groans. The moon had risen and little mist-wreaths walked in and out among the wonga-vines on the fence: Marcella's golden flowers with which she had planted the clearing all round the house—nasturtiums, sunflowers, marigolds and eczcoltzias—shone silvery and ethereal. The smoke from the dying fires rose in thin white needles, plumed at the top: out in the Bush a dingo barked shrilly and some small beast yelped in pain. Andrew stirred and she tucked the clothes round him, kissing his brown, round arm and fingers, wishing he were awake so that he could be crushed in her arms and let her bury her aching head on his wriggling little body for an instant—he was never still for longer.

She sat down on the edge of the verandah, her arm round the post; her eyes were aching; she felt too tired and helpless to go on living and yet the relief of having got Louis to sleep was really very great. She was trying to decide to write to Dr. Angus, asking him to give her some sort of sleeping draught she could give Louis when he had one of his bad times; she had forgotten that, in a week's time, all the money would be spent again and they would be happy for another period: but to-night's misery, more and more each time, was beginning to shut out pictures of a peaceful to-morrow, a vindication of faith.

A faint sound behind her made her start in horror, afraid lest he had wakened. But it was Kraill who was standing quite still looking down at her.

“Does this sort of thing happen very often?” he said with an air of intimate interest that reassured her.

“I’d forgotten about you,” she said jerkily. “I’m so sorry—if I’d known you were coming I’d have arranged for you to stay at the Homestead to-night.”

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"But does it?"

"He can't help it."

"It can't go on, you know," said Kraill, lighting a cigarette and throwing it down impatiently.

"I know. That's why I wrote you that letter. He is so unhappy."

Kraill made an impatient gesture. Marcella stood up slowly.

"Are you tired? You must be," she said.

"No. I want to see this thing settled," he said. She felt very hopeful to hear him speak so determinedly.

"It's queer that you think as I do about that, Professor Kraill," she said with a faint smile. "People say other's troubles are not their business. But I think that's a most wicked heresy. I always interfere if I see people miserable. I can't bear to be blank and uninterested."

"Neither can I. I often get disliked for it, however," he said with a quick, impatient sigh. "And they don't often accept one's interference."

"I shall," she said gently. "I shall do whatever you tell me if it will make Louis well. I think that is really all I care about in the world. Sometimes, even, I think I care more about Louis than Andrew. I've a feeling that he's much more a little boy than Andrew is. You know, all my life, since I saw my father very unhappy and ill, I've wanted to save people—in great droves! And now I'm beginning to think I can't save one man."

"And you think I can?"

"I'm quite sure of it. People are not wise like you are just for fun. But will you come along the clearing with me a little way? I'm afraid our voices will waken Louis, and then he won't get any sleep. That is, if you're really not tired."

They went through the moon-silvered grass down to the lake. She sat under the big eucalyptus which clapped its leathery hands softly.

"I was sitting here when I read your lectures—the last ones—and decided to write to you. It is like—like Mount Sinai to me now. Will you talk to me out of the thunders, Professor Kraill?"

He looked at her for a moment, recalling the rather heart-breaking calmness and common-sense with which she had soothed Louis a while ago; he remembered her

cool, patient logic in the midst of the drunken man's ravings—and he decided in a flash of insight that this rather rhetorical way of talking to him was very real to her. She saw him with the dream-endowed eyes of the Kelt and, embarrassing though it might be to him, and unreal though it made him feel, he had to accept the fact that, for her, he was clothed in a sort of shine. He saw, too, that she could not do without some sort of shine in her life.

“Tell me all about it,” he said. “You don’t mind talking to a stranger about these things?”

“You have never been a stranger to me, Professor Kraill. And I don’t believe there is such a thing as a stranger, really. I like to think of the way the knights always went about ready to interfere with a good stout sword when they saw anyone in trouble.”

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And so she talked to him, and as she talked his quick mind gained an impression of her going about sordid ways and small woman tasks in knightly armour. After awhile he said something unexpected. It made her impatient for it showed that he was thinking of her. She was thinking only of Louis.

"You know, you make the years slip away," he said. "I have dreamed that women might go shoulder to shoulder with men, standing up straight and strong."

"Yes, I know," she said softly. "I think many a time I've very deliberately stood up straight when I wanted to lie down and cry my eyes out, just because I got the idea of a woman knight from those lectures of yours. And your talk about the softness of women rather goaded me. I *wouldn't* be soft."

"Soft! You're not soft," he interrupted.

"But think how expensive it is!" she said with a voice that shook a little. "It took a lifetime of discipline and two weak men to make me hard. I know now, very well, that Louis has been softened, weakened by me. To save him I think I must crumple up."

She caught her breath sharply.

"And I don't see how I can," she added.

"One might pretend," he said slowly, looking reflectively at her face.

"I couldn't. I can't pretend anything. That's the worst of me. And it seems so wrong to me that, to make one human being strong, another must be weak. And it seems to me that the weak thing kills the strong in the end. Like ivy, you know, choking out the life of an oak."

"I don't think he is likely to kill you."

"I very much wish he would, except that I dare not leave him. I have weighed it all up very carefully, and I feel it would be better to die than live this way. Sometimes I feel I shall get unclean—right inside. I can't explain it. There are things in Louis I can't bear—little meannesses, and selfishnesses. He locks things up—even here, where no one ever comes. That's a horrible spirit of selfishness, isn't it?"

She told him calmly, uncomplainingly, impersonally as one talks to a doctor, of his locking up his cigarettes, his tobacco, his writing paper; of how he carried the only pencil about in his pocket and hid away the papers from his mother, the books from Dr. Angus until he had read them. One day last week they had been short of milk, and Marcella had been anxious about the boy's food. The breakfast was on the table; she had to run to her bedroom for a bib for Andrew. When she got back Louis had already poured all the milk into his tea, saying that he had done it by accident. Another time she





had thrown away the boy's tablet of soap by accident, and could not find it anywhere. Louis had his own tablet, locked away; there was no other nearer than Klondyke except the home-made stuff composed of mutton fat and lye, very cruel to tender skin. And he had made a scene when she asked him for his soap for Andrew and, when she, too, made a scene threw it away into the scrub where she could not find it. Little things—little straws that showed the way of the hurricane.

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"You see," she said calmly. "It wouldn't do for me to die, and leave Andrew to that sort of love, would it? I knew a little boy once who had to look after his father," and she told him of Jimmy Peters on the ship. "I think if it came to dying, the only thing would be to take Andrew along too."

"Don't you think you're being rather conceited?" he said suddenly. "Has it occurred to you that you're taking too much on yourself? You admit that you're keeping your husband a parasite. Are you going to do the same to your child? Are you the ultimate kindness of the world? You tell me of your own stern childhood. Has it hurt you? You must be logical, you know!" he added, smiling at her.

"I think I want Andrew to be happy rather than heroic. Heroism is such a cold fierce thing. I'm only just realizing what a coward I've been, and how utterly unheroic my hope in Louis has been. But it's so natural, isn't it? I didn't dare face the rest of life without the belief that some day we should be happy. Every time he gets drunk I've told myself, very decidedly, that this was the last time. And I know I've been lying to myself because I daren't face the truth."

Kraill smoked thoughtfully for a few minutes.

"I suppose it never occurred to you that, without the drink to consider, you would not be happy with him?" he said at last.

"Oh yes. We are quite happy in between," she said with a sigh.

"On the edge of things? Always with reservations?" he said quickly.

"Only on the edge of things," she said slowly. "How well you know!"

"I know all about it. I have never been past the edge of things myself. But always I think I shall be some day. I suppose I am quite twice your age, and still I am romantic, still I think there's a miracle waiting for me round the corner of life."

"I used to think that until just a little while ago. I used to think there would be a day when I should shine. Now I daren't think of it because I know I never shall. After all, stars and suns and things must be lonely, don't you think?"

"I don't know."

The moon sank, the dawn wind ruffled the grass and whispered in the tops of the rustling trees, making soft, eerie sounds.

She stood up suddenly. Unconsciously she held out her hand to help him up. Then she laughed bitterly, and twisted her hands in each other behind her.

"I'm sorry. I forgot you didn't need helping up," she said. He looked at her curiously.

"This is an appalling way to treat a guest," she said as they walked slowly towards home. "To sit out with him in the middle of the night and keep him awake. You make me selfish. I've never talked about Louis to anyone before. You make me dependent, Professor Kraill."

"And that, you say, is what you need."

Louis was calling out thickly, wildly, as they came within distance. She started and began to hurry. "I wouldn't go in there!" said Kraill sharply.

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"It doesn't worry me now. If I don't go in, he's too frightened to sleep, and then he'll wake Andrew. And if he doesn't sleep he's very ill next day. Sleep gets rid of the effects of whisky, you know. Oh just listen to him! Why can't I do something? You will help me—you must!" she cried, clutching at his hands for a minute. To his intense distress he saw her eyes full of tears, and saw her cover them with her hands as she ran into Louis's room. He stood on the verandah watching her shut the door. Through the trellis window came sounds of a soft voice and a wild one mingling.

### CHAPTER XXVIII

Louis, when he had got over his amazement at hearing that Kraill was his guest, tried frantically to pull himself together. He was indignant with Marcella for asking Kraill to stay in a hut, but he realized that it was only another evidence of what he called the "Lashcairn conceit" and that, if Marcella had thought it desirable to ask the Governor-General to tea, she would have done so unhesitatingly. When he met Kraill he was very nervous and shaky, unable to think coherently because of the fight that was going on within him. When she came back from her work at the Homestead, where the relics of the party had to be cleared away, the two men had vanished. They walked round the rabbit-proof fences and came back in time to welcome a "surprise party" from Klondyke drawn by the magnetism of the "gentleman from England" who had won them the night before. Marcella thought several times of Dr. Angus and wished that he could have been there to see Kraill "getting off the rostrum" as he had done in Edinburgh. But she got no chance to talk to him all that day; there was too much miscellaneous chatter.

"He's great, isn't he?" said Louis at bedtime. Marcella was startled. She had never heard him praise anyone but a few doctors at the hospital before.

"I wish I could be like that—not frightened of people," he said. "I've worn my nerves to shreds, now. You don't understand nerves. You don't possess any."

He turned over in his hammock ready to go to sleep. She came across to him and bent over him.

"Louis, what's going to happen to-morrow?" she asked presently.

"Gorse-grubbing. We've to get it all cleared now without delay."

"You know what I mean, dear. Can't you—won't you try not to go to Klondyke at all? Louis, it would be so splendid if we could save all the money for a few months and go home to England so that your mother can see Andrew. Wouldn't it?"

He sighed.

“Shall I ask Mr. Twist to keep the money, and not give us any for six months? That would be a good plan. We are always so happy except on pay days, and you are so wretched after you’ve been to Klondyke.”

He agreed absolutely, with such alacrity that she was a little doubtful of him. Next morning when she went over to the Homestead at eight o’clock she learned that he had come to Mr. Twist with a tale about wanting the money for a visit to the store, and had gone off at six o’clock. It was three days before he came back, dirty and haggard and despairing almost to the verge of suicide.

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During those three days Marcella deliberately left her work; she went to the Homestead in the mornings, and fired some gorse in the afternoons; dense clouds of smoke rose into the windless air. For the rest she made Kraill talk, listening to him with an air of sitting at his feet. She felt more despairing than ever. Kraill seemed to share her pity for Louis and she, feeling in a way that Jove had spoken from the thunders and the earth had not trembled, was dulled and dead. She knew that he would go back to Sydney soon; she wondered how she would bear her aching loneliness, her bankruptcy of spirit when he was gone.

The night Louis came back was even more dreadful than ever. His talk with Kraill had made him bitterly jealous. It hurt him like a wound to see an Englishman there, and an Englishman who could come and go about the world as he liked, unchained. Like Kraill he had tossed up for his chance that morning he went to Klondyke—whether to finish the whole miserable business in the lake and leave Marcella and the boy to go their way to England in peace, or whether to get drunk as usual. And tails had won. Cussedly he paid the cost.

And that night, sore and aching at heart, longing beneath the whisky madness to sob out all his penitence and misery into her ear, with her hair over his face, her arms around him, he raved at her all the foul things he could think, in sheer self-excuse. She had been to bed for hours. It was about two o'clock when he came home and, afraid that he should waken Kraill, she led him away from the house until he was quietened by her sudden turning on him and shaking him until he could not find his breath for awhile. That always sobered him; her kisses and caresses and forgiveness soothed him to sleep afterwards.

The next morning Kraill said that he must go to Sydney. He bade her good-bye and went without a word of kindness, of hope. Louis took him to Cook's Wall. When he came back he said nothing in answer to all Marcella's enquiries about what they had said on the long drive. Louis went back to the gorse-grubbing and worked feverishly for almost a month, as he always did after being drunk. And it seemed as though Kraill had never been except that in all the little things that used to be a joy she now could find no joy at all. The shine had gone from her golden flowers, the softness from the wind rustling in the scrub, which now was an irritating crepitus; there was no music in Andrew's laugh, no ecstasy in the words he was learning every day, words that, at first, she had written proudly on a sheet of paper to send to his grandmother. The gentleness seemed to have gone even from Mrs. Twist's kindly face, and the negative peace of three moneyless weeks to come brought no healing. She felt that she would welcome strife.

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One day she found it impossible to work; she felt fey, restless. She wrote a letter to Dr. Angus but tore it up, dissatisfied. Taking down the little grey book of the Edinburgh lectures, which she had not had the heart to touch, she read the last one again. Into it she read Kraill's voice, pictured his gesture, saw how his quick eyes would look friendly, interested, arresting as he talked. On the last page was a paragraph that someone had marked in pencil. In the margin was "J.R.K." written faintly. She read the paragraph hungrily. Evidently he had meant it as a message for her.

*"One of the greatest of human triumphs is to read the need in another's eyes and be able to fulfil it. The difficulty lies in comprehending the need. Most of us have rich storehouses, but to the man who needs of us a crutch we give dancing shoes: to him who needs a spur we offer wrappings of cotton-wool. ... We ask tolerance and sympathy for our failings, patience for our inadequacies ... we give and get only disappointment.... Partly this is because our needs are the things we hide most jealously from each other, partly because we only see needs subjectively ... this is the explanation of most of the sex muddles that tangle life."*

As she read Kraill's message she thought again of her prayer for weakness down by the lake. As she stood there, with all the lights of her life burning dim, all the virtue gone out of her, it was forced upon her that her prayer was being answered. She was getting weak! Never before had she felt despairing about Louis; never before had she felt so dull, so unable to help him, so unable to care that he should be helped.

As this thought came and held her, making her feel that something stronger than herself had taken possession of her and was merely using her as it would, she felt quietened. She had prayed for the blazing Feet of God to walk along her life to Louis. Perhaps this dulness, this weariness was their first pressure.

She turned to go out of the room and saw Kraill standing in the sunlight. He looked tired.

"You've come back, then?" she said, and laughed suddenly at the futility of her words. "It's a very long way for you to come."

"I went away for a whole month to think about it," he said in a low voice. "And all I can think is that I must take you away. You'll have to leave him."

She shook her head hopelessly.

"I've thought that too, very often, when I felt I couldn't bear it. But always I *have* borne it. And he would die without me."

“The best thing is for him to die,” he cried harshly. “In a decent community he would be put in a lethal chamber. But I’m not thinking of him. I’m thinking of you. And I’m thinking of myself.”

He threw his hat on the ground, and turned away from her.

“You’ve got into my imagination,” he began almost indignantly.

“You’ve been in mine years and years,” she said.



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He came back then, and she was frightened of him.

"Let's get out of this," he said impatiently. "I can't talk to you here in his house. Let us get off into the Bush somewhere. Where's the boy?"

"He's playing with Betty."

"You'd better fetch him along," he said unevenly.

She shook her head.

"Louis would be worried if he came in and found me out at tea-time," she said. "It made him very unhappy to see you, you know. He can't bear to think that you are free while he is a slave."

She walked before him to look at the distant smoke of the fires. The clearing was almost finished.

"Damn Louis!" he cried. "He is a slave because he lets himself be! And you're a slave because he's one. I shall not let you stay here, chained. Armour suits you better."

"Whatever do you mean?" she gasped.

He strode along without her, knowing that she would follow; it was so good to follow instead of leading always.

"You know quite well what I mean," he said at last when they were out of sight of the house and only faint pungency of burning wood reached them, with the crackle of wind in the scrub. "I've made a woman like you, in my dreams. I never thought to see her in the flesh—yet—. One who could march along by me shining—not wanting to be carried over rough places—getting in a man's way, stooping his back—"

She tried to speak, but his eyes silenced her. She stared at him, fascinated.

"Oh I'm so sick of pretty, pathetic, seductive little women. Always I have to make love to them. It's the only meeting-ground between a man and most women. You—I couldn't make love to you! You're not seductive, in the least. You're hard and quick and taut. There's a courage about you—"

"Please, Professor Kraill," she began, but he silenced her by an impatient gesture.

"Listen to me, Marcella. You listened to me before, like a little meek girl on a school-bench. I'm sick, sick, sick of women! Soft corners and seduction!—Narcotics—when what a man needs is a tonic. Miserable, soft, uncourageous things. I want the courage of you."

"Can't you see that you're all wrong about me?" she said at last. "I'm not hard, really—only a bit crusty, I think. See what I've done to Louis!"

"Louis!" he cried contemptuously. "You're not going to be wasted on that half thing any longer. I'm not saying it isn't fine to save a man's life. It is. It's very fine and splendid. But you've to be honest with yourself, Marcella, and think if it's worth while. He's not worth it. If you save him from drinking there's very little to him, you know."

"Don't tell me that, because what you say I believe," she cried in a stricken voice. "It's all my life you're turning to ashes."

"I shall give you beauty for ashes, Marcella. You and I together, we can go marching on in seven-league boots! There's a kingliness about you. Listen to the things I say to you unconsciously! I can't say the pretty, graceful, soft things we say to women! There's a kingliness, Marcella—not only about you, but about me too. We're not the common ruck. You're not happy, are you?"

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"Sometimes," she said softly.

"No, you're not—not honourably! Kings can't be happy with commoners! They don't speak the same language. If you're happy it's because you let yourself consciously come down. And—wallow. As I have—"

Her face flamed to think how he had seen through her. He saw it, and cried triumphantly:

"I knew it! In the higher parts of you you're always adventuring, always lonely, always hungry. As I am. You never find a harbour, a friend, a feast. Do you? No, I don't need you to tell me. I know all about it. I have known it for more years than you have lived yet."

"But really, I am happy sometimes," she protested. He caught her hands and held them so that she had to look at him.

"With Louis? Is your brain happy with Louis? Do you ever come within touching distance of each other? Is your spirit happy with Louis? Isn't it always hungry, holding out begging hands? Are your brain and your spirit not always calling you back and scorning you when you let your body wallow—slacken and take cheap thrills?"

"Oh, it's wicked that you should know these things about me," she cried.

"No. It isn't wicked at all. I know the same about myself. I've taken cheap things. Biology got me on the wrong tack at first; with a biological mind I saw everything *via* the body. Biology's a dragon one has to slay; that's why, in my work, I've taken to psychology instead. Love-making! I told you, right at the first, I always made love to women—. I always have done it, and always should have gone on doing it if I had never met you."

"But why—if you despise it?"

"I wasn't doing it as an end. It was a means. All the adorable, tender prettiness of love-making leads to physical love inevitably, and I always thought and hoped and believed that after it I'd arrive at some Ultima Thule of understanding, of comradeship, of equality. Never! Ugh, they were soft! Soft flesh, soft spirit, tricky brain! Sometimes I have a nightmare of trying to get to heaven up mountains of woman-flesh—soft, scented stuff, sucking one in like quicksands. You're the only woman I've ever thought much about and not made love to! To you I couldn't make love—"

"Whatever is this, then?" she asked faintly.

"This is one king coming to another, asking his alliance, his comradeship! You there, with that man—that jelly thing! You sicken, nauseate me. It's like seeing a queen go on

the streets! Marcella, you can't do these things, you know. You're letting down your spiritual caste. You and I—we've been along lower paths. There wasn't really any disgust in it then, because we were adventuring, finding each other. But if we go on the lower paths now we're doing a thing that's damnable. All my life I've waited for the wonder that should come round the corner. So have you. And here it is, for both of us —"

"How many love affairs did you tell me you had had?" she broke in, in a queerly casual voice.

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"You're not going to be conventionally horrified, are you?"

"No. But I think you're muddled. I think this is satiety, you know."

"It's you who are muddled, Marcella. This is satisfaction, not satiety. I know I've got all I need in you. Body, mind and spirit. Most of all, spirit—and courage."

She dropped on to the crackling ground. He looked down at her.

"I don't believe you know anything at all about control, Professor Kraill," she said very quietly, so quietly that he dropped down beside her to listen as she kept her face averted. "Do you remember, once, you said 'Women have no inhibitions'?"

"I was young. And even now, it's true—" he cried.

"I'm a woman. But I've never deliberately wallowed—as you seem to have done. Once or twice, perhaps—I was sort of weak, or perhaps hopeful. I thought it might be very beautiful—"

"You were seeking, as I was," he said, suddenly gentle.

"And—it meant softness, being bowled over, loss of control and finally cynicism," she said.

"No, no. Not finally cynicism, Marcella. Cynicism half-way along, if you like. But finally—anchoring."

She looked at him, very slowly, all over: her hands were quite still on her blue print frock that smelt of fire: many and many a night and day of hard schooling and cold patience had gone to make them lie there so untremulous now. She reflected on that for a moment; she reflected that, in years to come, by enduring hardness, people would be able to school their hearts from beating the swift blood to a whirlpool, their lips from hungering for a kiss. She thought next of Aunt Janet, desiccated, uncaring, and knew that Aunt Janet's way of life was wrong because it shirked rather than faced things. Her long gaze had reached his beautiful eyes and stayed there; she seemed to see down into a thousand years, a thousand lives. She knew quite well that here was the place of dreams come true; here was the deliverer with whom she had thought to ride to battle, and he too had dreamed. He saw her armour. He did not see the chinks in it. And he never should. And—he had said women had no inhibitions!

"It's hard," she said, her eyes still resting on his, "to keep your thoughts brave as well as your actions, isn't it?"

"What do you mean, Marcella?"

She was sitting motionless and white; he thought he had never seen a live thing so still, so impassive. As she watched his lips, and heard his voice speak her name, blazing floods of weakness were pouring over her.

“There are things one mustn’t do,” she said slowly. “But they would be most beautiful to think about, right deep down and quiet inside—like Mary had to hide and ponder in her heart the things the angel told her. One mustn’t. I mustn’t even think about you—that way—”

“What? What do you mean?”

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"Thoughts drag people down, down, don't they? Except for a minute or two I've thought clean and selfless about Louis. Always about you I've thought very shingly. If I let go a minute the shine of you will be out of my eyes. Do you see? Then I'll be like—like any of the other women! All soft corners and seduction. Just while you've been talking to me I've understood that I *want* to be like that; that's why I've been so dead this last month since you went away. It seems a pity, doesn't it?"

He found that it was his turn to sit speechless, watching her.

"There, now I've told you," she said, and lifted her hands and let them drop again hopelessly. "And now I'm going back to Louis. You want my courage.... Oh God, you've got it!"

He still stared at her. Quick, understanding as he was, he had not quite understood yet. He only saw that she was still whiter, that the still hands were clenched.

"If we get any closer you'll see the chinks in my armour. I suppose I'll see little dark patches in your shine.... If you didn't think so well of me, I suppose I should just let Louis drop out—if I didn't think so well of you I'd give you the kisses and narcotics and seduction you're tired of."

"Marcella, I don't care—if I thought—" he began, almost savagely.

"Oh, thoughts, thoughts! They're cruel! Here we both are, thinking so much better than we can do. No—no! We *can* do it! Only—we can't do it happily. Some day, I think, shining thinking and shining doing will be hand in hand—"

She stood up slowly then, and turned away. He saw her going right out of his life. And it seemed to him just as it had seemed to her, that all he had ever done or had done to him had led up to that moment.

"Marcella," he cried, and seized her hands again. "I can't let you go. Whatever you have, whatever you are, I want you."

"I!" she cried. "I! Always I! What do you and I and any of us matter, really? What does it matter if we do get smashed up like this if only we manage to keep our thoughts of each other clean and free from slinking things—fears, and greeds?"

"I can't *help* thinking about you!" he cried.

"I know. I can't, either. That's why we've to be so careful *what* we think. And it's going to be a hard, austere sort of thing for us both. Once I saw you a beautiful thing with swift wings all torn off in a sticky mess. Now I see you very shining—"

She looked at him with blinded eyes.

“Always I’m going to make myself see you like that now. Never, never will I let a greedy or unclean thought of mine dull you. And—please—you’ll try to—to—do the same for me, won’t you?”

He could not speak yet. He realized how terribly right she was.

“It’s harder for us both, that you’ve been here and this has happened,” she said.  
“Harder! But better! Neither of us, for each other’s sake, can have any more cheap thrills, slothful moments, thoughts without courage. Oh good-bye.”





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She turned towards him and saw that he was lying on the grass. His shoulders were shaking. She knew that he was crying. That seemed terrible to her. She had to run, then, very quickly away from him or she would have stayed—and been soft. As she ran she, too, was crying.

### CHAPTER XXIX

Louis was on the verandah as she came round the fence. She saw his eyes blazing madly, his face distorted, his hands clenched. He came to meet her, raging.

"Where've you been?" he choked out.

She waved her hand over towards where Kraill was. She could not speak.

"Whose is this hat? It's that damned professor's!"

"Yes."

"Where is he? Why are you crying? He's come here after you!" he raved.

"He's gone," she said faintly. "Gone—for always. Except in my thoughts—inhibited thoughts—thoughts washed and boiled—thoughts—Oh—sterilized."

"What in hell are you talking about?" he cried, taking her by the shoulders and shaking her fiercely. "Why are you crying, I say?"

"Because he's gone," she said, and cried all the more.

"My God! The impudence of it—telling me," he shouted, and seemed to be strangling with rage.

"The—the—honesty of it, Louis. Oh and—the—the awfulness of it! I'm crying because I can't bear it!"

"You—you—" he gasped, and paused for a word.

"Louis," she said, raising wet, miserable eyes to his. "I've sent him away, but I daren't, daren't trust myself not to run after him. Oh and it would so spoil things for him and all of us if I did! Listen, Louis, can't you grab me and not let me go after him? I can't hold myself back, and I *did* promise him I wouldn't let my thoughts get greedy! He said I was in armour—Louis, my dear, I've tried to help you so often when you were being torn in two. Can't you—my dear—it's your turn now."

"You damned adulterer!" he gasped, finding the word at last.

She sobbed, and in her sobs he saw fear, guilt. He flung her to the ground, repeating the word.

“Oh you silly, silly fool,” she cried. “He’s better than that—if I’m not.”

“Then what in hell are you crying about?”

“Because I’m not—not a damned adulterer!” the words were torn from her. “But I can’t clean my thoughts of wanting to be. My dear—after so long—I’ve helped you and been patient. Can’t you do something—now, to make me able to bear it?”

“Now *you* know what it is to—” he began with an ugly laugh. Then rage seized him. “I’ll break his damned neck,” he cried.

“That’s no use! What will that do to me? You can’t kill the love that’s tearing me up, by smashing his body to bits! You see, Louis, I’ve got him, for ever and ever. The shining, knightly side of me has. But it’s the greedy side of me—the side that makes you grab out for whisky—that’s sticking teeth into me now. And you know how it hurts.”

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"God! I'll break his damned neck," he cried again, and raged off into the Bush.

She crept into the house. A wild thought came to her that, if there were any killing it would be Kraill who would do it. And he and she would run away for awhile, right into the Bush, before people came to hang them. She stopped breathing at the gloriousness, the primitive full-bloodedness of it, and then writhed in horror at the greed of such thoughts, and prayed passionately that a sentry might be put at the door of her mind.

And she knew, very well, that presently Louis would be back—that he would say once again all the foul things he had said before, now with some glimmering of truth in them: that he would get money from somewhere and be drunk to-night, for now, at least, he had excuse. Then he would grin foolishly, and cry weakly, and rage and be futilely violent, and she would have to take this quivering thing that housed her armoured soul and make it do his service; she would have to undress him and wash him so that Andrew, trotting in in the morning, should not see his father in bed dirty; she would have to kiss away his ravings, soothe his fears. Presently she shook her head many times. She knew that she could never do that any more.

An hour, two hours passed. She sat quite still. Then a shadow crossed the window and steps came on to the verandah. She did not move. Louis stood by the door. Kraill was beside him. Louis looked quite sane, and very unusually young and boyish. There was a queerly different look about him. She stared at him for a moment; almost it seemed as though she could see a shine about him for an instant. Then she looked at Kraill, and he at her. She did not move, but her soul was on its knees worshipping his beautiful, still eyes that were tragic no longer, but very wise and sad. He read all that she did not say.

Louis coughed.

"Marcella—I'm sorry, old girl. Kraill has talked to me about it. He's been—or rather—we've been bucking each other up."

He coughed awkwardly.

"Bucking each other up—no end, old lady," he added, and ran his hand through his hair, making it wild, and rough.

She smiled faintly with her lips. For another moment she could not snatch her eyes away from Kraill's.

Then she said faintly:

"It's all very well, Louis. You're always being sorry! Aren't you?"

“This is the last time, Marcella, that there’ll be any need to be very sorry,” he said solemnly. “I was going to clear out for good, but Kraill made me come back.”

“That’s all very well, too. Professor Kraill is going away. He doesn’t have to put up with you. He doesn’t have to sleep with you. You will be drunk to-night, and every night when there’s any money. And next day you’ll be whining about it. I’ve lost hope now. I’m tired, tired of to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow.”

Kraill’s eyes were on her. The echo of a cock that crowed outside a door in Jerusalem nineteen hundred years ago came to her and her eyes filled with tears.



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"Oh I'm so sorry! You asked me for my courage," she said to Kraill.

"There's no need for it now—on Louis's account, Marcella. You believe what I say to you, don't you?"

He smiled at her; he looked very friendly, very kindly.

"You know I believe you!" she cried.

"Then I tell you that Louis is quite better now. He is going to take care of you and Andrew. I can't prove it to you, yet. But you will see it as time goes on."

"I don't want him any more," she cried, "I want you—Oh no—no—!"

His eyes held hers again, tragic and terrible. Then again he smiled, and she felt that she had failed him.

"No, of course not, Marcella," he said gently. "These slinking greeds of ours—"

He turned to Louis.

"We'd better be getting along to the station, don't you think?" He stood looking at Marcella, who seemed stunned.

"Don't you think you could make us some tea before we go?" he said casually. She stared at him dully.

"Tea?" she said dazedly, and began to laugh shrilly. "Tea? Oh, men are funny! You're both so funny! *'The greatest of human triumphs is to read the need in another's eyes and be able to fulfil it.'* Tea! Oh Louis, isn't it funny—making tea—now."

She laughed and laughed, and then Kraill and Louis began to dance about before her eyes most erratically, until a black curtain all shot with fires came down and hid them, and waves of cold, green water went over her. She felt someone lift her out of the water and then she went to sleep.

## CHAPTER XXX

In the months that followed Marcella often tried to find out what had caused the Miracle—for Miracle it seemed to her. The desire for whisky that had obsessed him for ten years seemed to have died: he frankly admitted that it gave him no trouble now at all. When she seemed inclined to praise him for his bravery he laughed at her; there was no bravery in doing a thing that was perfectly easy and natural to him. He looked different: he was just as different as Saul of Tarsus after he saw the blinding light on the

Damascus road. His nerves never cracked now; the little meannesses of which both she and the boy had been victims had disappeared; he gave her a kind of wistful, protecting love that proved to her, more even than his frequent safe visits to the township, that something radical had happened that day in the Bush—something so radical that, if it were taken from him, he would not be there at all. She felt that he was safe now; she felt that the boy was safe; she felt that in everyone on earth who was sick and sad and unhappy was the capacity for safety. But she did not know how they might come by it.

But she knew, incontrovertibly, that she could never love Louis again with any degree of happiness or self-satisfaction. That much Kraill had shown her. She and Louis had no part in each other's spiritual nights and days; the typhoon of physical passion that had swept her up for a few minutes she saw now as a very cheap substitute for the apotheosis Kraill had indicated. It was Louis's weakness that had been their strongest bond in the past: now that that was gone there was little left in him for her. But peace after pain was very beautiful.

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It was not until after six months of sanity that he told her all about the miracle. One evening, after the child had gone to bed, they were sitting on the verandah. Louis had been talking of going home to start afresh in England.

"The voyage would do you good, Marcella. My diagnostic eye has been on you lately," he said as he lighted a cigarette and passed it to her. "You're looking fagged, and it's unnatural to see you looking fagged. You're getting thin. I don't want to see you suddenly evaporate, old girl."

She shook her head and stared unseeingly over the soft green of springing life that, before they came, had been devastating gorse.

"Yes, clearly a trip to England is indicated," he said. "You're alone too much. Marcella, I believe you're thinking every minute about Kraill."

"I—can't help it," she said in a low voice. "They're—good thoughts, now."

He looked at her, and something about the droop of her shoulders contracted his throat, made a pain at his heart.

"It's hard—" he began.

"It's a hunger, Louis. You understand it, don't you? But I can't buy it in a bottle!"

"Marcella!" he cried passionately. "I'll—I'll come into your thoughts in time. Lord knows I'm trying hard enough."

"Oh my dear, don't I know?" she said gently. "And has it occurred to you what a mercy it is for me that you're like this now? If I had to hide everything up, like I used to, I couldn't bear it—never seeing him again—if you didn't help me to."

"It's queer," he said slowly. "Most people—husband and wife—would not be able to talk about this sort of thing to each other. They'd hide and lie to each other."

"We've both been weak—and we've both been helped. And these demands we make of each other teach us so much. If Kraill had not demanded courage of me I'd—he'd have had me. It's no use lying about it, is it? Why should you be so frank about your whisky, and give yourself away to me every time about it, and I hide up my weakness from you?"

"You're—weirdly honest, old girl," he said with a short laugh.

"Yes. Even now, if I had not promised him courage of thinking, I suppose—he'd have me—but I had to live up to what he saw in me."

“And that, of course, is what saved me,” he said quietly.

“I’ve often wondered,” she said. “Are you going to tell me now?”

There was a long silence. He smoked two cigarettes as his mind went back to that hot, strange day.

“I went out,” he began at last, “to kill him. I’d always been a coward before. But then I didn’t know what fear was. In a crisis like that—Marcella, listen to me getting back the psychology I learnt at the hospital!—the ruling emotion comes on top. And my ruling emotion, I think, is selfishness. Brutally frank, old lady! Learnt that from you. But do you remember that soap, when young Andrew got his face skinned because I wouldn’t let him have mine? And—heaps of times—about grub, and things. Oh yes,” he went on, as she looked startled, “I’ve quite realized how selfish I always was to you. Well, don’t you see how it worked? I thought Kraill had got you. You were my property. I just couldn’t bear that. The only thing seemed to be to kill him.”



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"I didn't think you loved me," she murmured.

"I don't believe I did—till Kraill gave me a few tips! You see, I went roaring off to him, and he was standing by a tree looking stunned. I was flaring, frantic. I called him a damned adulterer. He laughed at me, and said just what you said, 'If I'm not better than that, she is!' Then he told me that I'd deliberately thrown you away. Mad as I was with him, I saw that he was quite right."

He paused, and puffed at his cigarette.

"Lord, it was a set-out, Marcella! He said quite calmly, that he was going to take you. Then it was I saw what life without you would be. He gave me a thumb-nail sketch of myself—and of you and him. You both seemed rather fine. I seemed a stinking, grovelling, strawy sort of thing. To my amazement it seemed right that he should have you. Lord, it scorched! I stopped thinking about killing him, and wanted to kill myself."

She put out her hand to him silently and he took it in his.

"Then, quite unexpectedly, he asked me if I was happy. Happy! In that strife! I found myself telling him—and I'd just called him a damned adulterer, mind!—all about it, the awful fighting, the awful losing, and the hunger. And I knew he would understand all of it. He said he'd had just such hungers, and had got through with them. He said the getting through came to different people in different ways. He said something I want to have framed up in the sky for miserable neurotics to read, Marcella. He said, 'With you, Louis, it's got to be drastic. It's got to be an earthquake. There's more than the drink in you that's got to be rooted out. All the foundations of you, all the structure of you, have to crumble, to fall together in a heap. Your spiritual centre of gravity has got to shift. Do you see?' I didn't see. But that's the very most important thing, Marcella—about the centre of gravity."

She nodded. She thought she understood.

"Then he gave me another, gentler picture of myself—a fight here, a failure there, a hunger somewhere else, and Lord knows how many old shreds of cynicism and belief, of selfishness and ambition and wantonness and pride, and just a little bit of love and desire for beauty. I told him that madness of mine, about the Mater's letters that I told you to take to King George. He was interested in that—said it was symbolical of my love for the Mater. I think I told him every bally thing in my life. And I never lied once to him. He was quiet a bit, and then he said I'd to be shaken up, smashed and crumbled, so that these old things would all go from me, and new things come in by the crevices and let the axis of me get changed. That seemed reasonable. What was so queer was how he treated me like a kid. Rather an intelligent kid, you know. He said: 'Did you, at school, Louis, have the lamp and orange and hatpin trick to explain night and day to you?' I said yes, and it all came back to me, being a kid in school

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and under orders, you know. And he said: 'Suppose your master had jabbed the hatpin just anywhere, nowhere near the centre—how the orange would have wobbled, wouldn't it?' I said it would, and he went on to say the hatpin wasn't jabbed through my centre, and that's why *I* wobbled so much. That was very reasonable, too—but I told him I didn't see how the hatpin was going to be pulled out. Yet all the time I listened to him, sort of fascinated by a charm he has—seems a ridiculous thing to say about a man, doesn't it?"

"No—not a bit," she said faintly.

"He seemed to care a lot about me. No one but you ever had. And then he asked me if I realized what a thin time you had of it. 'Does it ever occur to you, Louis, that your wife has had a superhuman job? And she's only a girl after all. You know what women are,' he said. They pretend to us that they're so very strong and independent. Like a child trying to lift a great weight, and saying: 'No, no—you shan't help. I can do it,' and in the same minute dropping it on his toes with a smash and coming to be comforted! Marcella's like that. She's brave. But she's got to the cracking stage now. She's got to be taken care of. I didn't believe it. It seemed incongruous."

"After what I'd just told you?"

"Yes. I've always, even as a kid, been such a liar that when anyone was brutally honest I thought they were posing. Kraill said, 'You'll never be fit to take care of her. You're just a parasite. She's coming away with me now.' That squared with what I'd thought of your brutal honesty. I thought it was a blind, and that you were just coming back to fetch Andrew and then go. I wasn't cross with Kraill then. I simply crumpled up."

There was a long silence. When he spoke again he spoke as though sharing a secret with her.

"Do you know, I believe Kraill was playing with us both, Marcella? I believe he'd gauged you right, and me too. I believe he made love to you, knowing your cussed pride. He knew you'd turn to me, and that your turning to me would save me. I believe he was bluffing when he said he was going to take you. You never know, with men like that. Biology and psychology—! He's got people's bodies and brains and souls dissected, and nothing they can do is unaccountable to him! Men like that are beyond the ordinary human weaknesses, you know."

She did know, very much better than he, and hugged dear thoughts as she smiled faintly at him.

“Then he began to take whisky out and hold it up in front of me by its hind legs, kicking. And it looked pretty silly before he’d finished with it. I was sick of it, I tell you.”

She started. She remembered how ashamed he had made her of those momentary cheap thrills of hers. What was it he had said—“Like a queen going on the streets?”

“He’d smashed me up, I tell you.”

“And me,” she said softly.

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"Though I knew I'd lost you then, I knew I'd lost whisky too. All the striving things that had made me up, you see, were lying in ruins, and the whisky seemed such a disgusting, ridiculous thing it wouldn't fit in anywhere. Like one of those jigsaw puzzles—the whisky bit put all the rest out. I felt a most blissful peacefulness ... like, I suppose, when a cancer is taken away after months of hellish pain. You can't imagine it! It was just like those Salvation Army chaps you hear in the street sometimes talking about being at peace with God. You can see they are, they look so beaming! I felt like that. Only God didn't seem to come into it. I was just at peace with myself."

She nodded, and he went on slowly:

"I'm not clear about the rest. Having smashed me, you see, he began to put me together again. I felt I could worship him—that sounds rather like hot air, old girl, but it's quite true" he added, reddening a little. "He'd got rid of that bally cancer for me."

"But how did you know—?"

"How do you know the sun has risen, dear? How did that poor devil that was tearing himself in the tombs know that he need fear no more when Christ spoke to him? How did the blind man know he could see? I just don't know, but it happened. And Marcella, do you know what I did? Lord—it was awful. I cried like anything, and asked him to give you back to me. It came to me like a flash that I'd no right to you, that you and he were much righter for each other. But I just couldn't spare you. More selfishness! And it seemed I'd such a lot to make up to you. He said: 'Are you sure you can take care of her now, Louis?' I laughed. It seemed such cool, calm impudence the way our positions were reversed. He laughed too, and said: 'Queer how we still look upon women as goods and chattels, isn't it?'"

"You didn't seem to take me into account much," she said.

"Kraill answered for you in the surest possible way. And then we started to come back to you. He said an astonishing thing on the way back—asked me if I'd read a book on 'Dreams,' by a German chap named Freud. I said I left dreams and 'Old Moore's Almanac' to housemaids and old ladies. He laughed, and we talked about dreams. He told me some of his—rather racy ones. I told him lots of mine—those horrors I used to have, and all that. And he kept nodding his head, and saying: 'Yes, I thought so.' I've often wondered what he was getting at, or if he wasn't getting at anything at all, but just simply changing a difficult subject—like when he asked you to make that tea."

"So that's that," he said at last, and talked of England. Presently she surprised him by saying that she very much wanted to go to Sydney.

"Want to test me among pubs, old lady? Well—I am armed so strong in honesty that dangers are to me indifferent! I can't help swanking bits from 'Julius Caesar,' you know

—my only Shakespeare play! But it'll be great to go to Sydney. Only—what are we going for? Shopping?"

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She evaded his question, and in a flash he thought he saw the reason for the journey and became very tender and considerate of her. They made plans immediately; he was like a child being taken out for the day. He kept telling her how delightful it was not to be kept on a lead; and she could have told him how delightful it was not to be at the controlling end of a lead.

They left Andrew with Mrs. Twist; Marcella was very quiet during the drive in to Cook's Wall, though for some moments she was almost hysterically gay. Just beyond the station was a gang of navvies and a camp; the railway was pushing on to Klondyke; great Irishmen and navvies from all parts of Australia, drawn by the phenomenal pay, sweated and toiled under the blazing sun making the railway cutting. The sound of rumbling explosions came to them as the rocks were blasted: she watched the men running back with picks over their shoulders; she loved to see their enormous bull-like strength as they quarried the great boulders.

They stayed at Mrs. King's, and went to a theatre the first night. Louis grew more hungry for England every moment as he came into touch with civilization. Marcella sat in a dream; the music that would once have delighted her to ecstasy was muted; the people were things moving without life or meaning; she answered Louis every time he spoke to her, but her mind was drawn in upon itself by a gnawing anxiety.

The next day, leaving Louis to his own resources, she and Mrs. King went out.

He was a little inclined to chaff them about their air of mystery, but, taking Marcella's tiredness and whiteness into account, he was expecting them to say they had been buying baby clothes, though it was rather unlike Marcella to keep anything secret.

Her tragic face and Mrs. King's eyes, red with weeping, froze the gay words on his lips when they came in just before lunch, where he was playing a slow game of nap with some of the boys in the kitchen.

They went upstairs to their old room. When the door was closed she said to him: "Louis, I've been to a doctor. He says I'm not well."

"I knew it. I told you, didn't I? You want a change, my dear," he said anxiously.

"I'm afraid it's rather more serious than that, Louis," she said gravely. "He seems to think it—it may be—cancer. Oh, I wish they'd call it something else! I hate that word. It's such a hungry word."

She was feeling stunned, and very frightened.

"But Marcella, it's ridiculous! For one thing, you're too young—"

“That’s what the doctor thought. But he says it’s been known—in textbooks, you know. A girl of eighteen that he knew had it. I’m to see two other doctors to-morrow.”

He began to pace about the room. Then he laughed a little shrilly.

“Oh, it’s a silly mistake. Doctors are not infallible, you know! He’s brutal to have suggested it even. Oh damn these colonials! No English doctor would have told you.”

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"I insisted," she said quietly, and he guessed that the doctor was not to be blamed.

"But," he went on, "it couldn't have happened except through an injury. You've had no injury that I can think of—"

"No, of course I haven't," she said rapidly. "But these things seem to happen without cause, don't they? Anyway, we won't believe it until we've got to. I've been ill for months, and noticed things. I've been an awful fool. But I didn't think it was dangerous, and—I don't think I'd have cared much if I had known."

The next day confirmed the first doctor's opinion. Marcella was a little incredulous. It did not seem to her that she was ill enough to be in danger. It was only when the doctors advised immediate operation that the horror and terror of it came flooding in upon her.

"Louis, we'll tell them what we think about it to-morrow, please," she said.

They went back to Mrs. King's almost in silence. Both of them seemed as creatures walking in a dream. With one accord they looked at each other when they got back in the room. Mrs. King, anxious-eyed, was talking to someone in the kitchen. To avoid having to talk to her they went up on the roof. The city rumbled beneath their feet, very, very much alive. Everything seemed to be blatantly alive, flaunting its bounding life at them. They sat down on the coping.

Without warning she clung to him and began to cry.

"Louis—please don't let me be chopped up," she sobbed. He held her as though he would snatch her out of life and pain and danger. But he did not know what to say.

"Louis, I hate my body to push itself into notice like this," she cried after awhile. "I always did—as a child, and when Andrew was coming, I hated you to see me—like that—Oh and Louis, I can't die—yet—"

"My darling, you're cracking me up!" he cried. "But don't think of dying. Surgeons don't let people die nowadays! You can't die. You're too much alive. You'd fight any illness —"

They sat trying to think some alleviation into their misery. Presently she snatched herself away from him.

"It's such a beastly, slinking sort of way to die! In a bed—sick and ill! Why can't they have wars—so that I could die quick on a battlefield? You wouldn't have time to be getting cold beforehand, then. Louis, it's like father, lying in bed till his poor heart was drowned. Louis—Oh—"





She stopped, breathless. Her eyes narrowed; she was thinking deep down.

“I wonder if it’s—necessary?”

He shook himself impatiently.

“How can pain and illness ever be necessary?”

“They may be—perhaps not to the sufferer, you know,” she said, and would not explain what she meant. She was seeing pictures of herself praying for weakness—and of burning Feet—

“I wish Andrew had come with us. Is there time to send for him?” she said presently.

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"Every day is important now," he said, choked.

"Yes. I've not to be sentimental," she said, and tried not to grieve him as she remembered very vividly her own sick misery when her father and mother were ill and there was nothing she could do.

But even as she tried to be brave little fears would crop up, little jets of horror burst out and wring words from her lips.

"Louis, it's the beastliness of it, you know," she cried. "Imagine something taking possession of your body against your will. I hate that. Like a madman seizing hold of you—like that gorse being burnt out and growing up and breaking through other things that tried to grow—"

Louis was dumb. After awhile, when she had thought and thought again, she said:

"I'm a wretched coward to say these things to you. It makes it harder for you. But I can't help it. Kraill was right when he said I'd got to cracking-point. If I were heroic I'd lie down and be a beautiful invalid, waiting for a happy release. It would be easier for you if I could. Louis, I just can't. It wouldn't be honest. If I die, it won't be a beautiful spectacle, my dear. I'll fight every inch of the way! There's such a lot of me to kill. I'm so alive, and I love to be alive. It—it won't be dignified—"

"Oh God, I wish I were a Christian, or a theosophist, or something, and believed people went on!" he groaned.

"I don't want to go on anywhere else," she said. "I want to go on here with you and Andrew. And I want to see Dr. Angus and Aunt Janet and all the others at Lashnagar—and—No, I don't want to see him," she added, and thought again for a while in silence. "I don't need to—"

He looked at her quickly, and said nothing.

"Louis, do you think I've been wrong? I remember I said something to Kraill about not wanting to die, though it seemed worlds away then. And he said: 'It seems to me that you take too much on yourself. Are you the ultimate kindness of the world?' Perhaps it will be better for Andrew if I'm not there—Oh, but that's morbid!"

"It is," he said decidedly. "And you're not going to die—"

She broke in quickly: "Just think if this had happened last year! I'd have been frantic for fear of leaving you and Andrew. Why, I would never have dared to go to the hospital, for fear of what might happen to you while I was there. And now I'm not a bit afraid of that."

“Then don’t be afraid at all. Look here, let’s talk as if you’re not my Marcella at all, dear. Let’s talk as if you were someone we’re both keen about. Can’t you see that you’re in very little danger, really? You’re so young, and so tremendously hard—”

She tried to make him think she was reassured, but a little later the fear cropped out again.

“If I die,” she said quietly, “what are you going to do? No, don’t look miserable about it. I’m miserable enough for two of us, goodness knows. But people have been known not to wake up after an operation, haven’t they?”

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"Just as they've been known to be run over by a taxi," he said.

"Yes. Well then, let's try to be quite unemotional about this stranger called Marcella that we're both keen about. If she did happen to finish up—out of sheer cussedness and desire to make a sensation, next week, you'd be the victim of a ghost, Louis! I'd simply have to be back to see what you're up to! You know what a managing sort of person Marcella is, don't you?"

He made a desperate effort to be unemotional, and presently he said, very decidedly:

"I know now what I'm going to do, old girl! I absolutely refuse to allow illness to go on! There! That's a challenge to the Almighty, if He likes to take it—"

She laughed gently, with tears in her eyes.

"I feel helpless. And I'm fed up with feeling helpless. That socialization of knowledge has got to begin, or I'll—Oh. I don't know! Look at the idiocy of it! Here we are in the twentieth century, and people are dying like flies all over the show. Why, there's no room for houses because there's so much room needed for grave-yards! And—even if they don't die, they're ill, most of them. And I'm not going to have it!"

"Louis! What are you going to do?" she said, staring at him, taken out of her fear by his enthusiasm. "I've never seen you like this before."

"No. I never have been. But this business of illness has just come and touched me on the raw, you see! You ought not to be ill. It's waste and lunacy to think of it. And I—ten years of my life wasted by a neurosis! And your father, and Lord knows how many millions more! I'll tell you this much, Marcella! Before five years have gone by I'll be in the battlefield against illness, and I'll be damned if illness won't have to look out! I loathe it, just as you do! I resent it! I'm going to stop it. Listen, old girl, as soon as you're out of that hospital, you're off to England, and I'm going to the Pater, and I'm going on my knees to beg him to give me another go at the hospital. I've got to get my tools ready, you know—"

"Do you think your father will?"

"He'll be sceptical. I should if I were he. I've been such a bounder to him in the past. But if he's too sceptical to help—well, I'll go to Buckingham Palace and ask King George to lend me the money! I should think he'd be jolly glad to think there was a chance of wiping out illness for ever."

Tears brimmed over: it was when she saw the eternal child in Louis that she loved him most, and was most afraid for him; not afraid now that he would waste himself again, but afraid that he would never touch the mountain-tops at which he was aiming.

“Yes, we’ll go home,” she said dreamily. “And I’ll take you on Lashnagar—and we’ll see them all again. I’ll ask Uncle to give us the money to take us home. This wretched illness will take all we have.”

“Don’t you worry about your Uncle’s money,” he said grimly. “I’ll see to that! Marcella, there’s nothing I can’t do now. If only I hadn’t monkeyed about at the hospital, probably I’d have had the knowledge to save you all this now.”

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"Why, how silly!" she laughed. "If you hadn't monkeyed about at the hospital we should never have met!"

The next day she went into hospital: as the anesthetic broke over her in delicious warm waves she was frantically afraid that she was going to die; it seemed to her that these calm, business-like surgeons and nurses only treated her as one of millions, not realizing that she was Marcella Lashcairn, immensely important to Louis and Andrew. She began to feel that it would be much better if she did not have an anesthetic at all, and superintended the whole business herself intelligently. It seemed wrong that she should have no hand in a thing of such profound importance. Then her will relaxed a little and she was horribly afraid that she would feel sharp knives through the anesthetic. A blinding flash of realization abased her utterly. Just on the borders of unconsciousness she saw Kraill looking at her with his beautiful eyes clouded with disappointment.

"He knows I'm afraid of being cut up—and he knows I'm afraid of dying I—Naturally he knows—he lives in my imagination!—and he wanted my courage—But I'm not really frightened, you know. Can't you see I'm not?"

It became immediately necessary to explain this to Kraill. She tried to push the mask away. A very steady, pleasant voice was saying "breathe deeply," and she realized that she had once more been taken up by things much stronger and wiser than herself: quite conceivably they might make a mess of her, hurt her and even kill her. But they were doing wisely; and anyway, she herself could do nothing more—buoyant warm waves took her up and carried her right away from caring.

When she wakened again all fear had gone; she was conscious of a burning corkscrew boring into her body somewhere, but she was too lazy to localize it. A long, long time after that she saw sunshine and smelt something very beautiful.

She focussed her eyes on something that swayed drunkenly: after awhile it stood still, and she saw that it was a little blue vase filled with boronia. The breeze from the open window was tapping the blind softly to and fro, and wafting the scent of the boronia over her face. Then she saw Louis's face, very white, above her.

"All right, old girl?" he whispered.

She tried to find her hand to raise it to him, but it seemed so far from her that she would have to go to the end of the world to fetch it. And that was too far. So she smiled at him.

"You're all right, you see," he said nervously. "Gloomy forebodings are so silly, aren't they?"



"I—thought I should feel it," she said.

"I told you you wouldn't, didn't I? The nurse said you took an awful time to go under—"

"Yes. I wanted to explain something. And I wanted to help the surgeons—I thought I'd—do it—much better than they could."

"Just like you, old lady," he said, with his eyes wet.

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"Silly to fight, Louis—strong things—wise things—like those surgeons—even if they are making awful pains for you to bear—"

"I wouldn't talk, darling," he whispered anxiously, his face against hers.

"I'm not talking, Louis—I'm thinking," she said anxiously. "Something I was thinking—all mixed up with old Wullie, and a pathway. It seems to me God is like those surgeons—only—strong and wise, you know—only He never gives you chloroform, does He?"

She lost sight of Louis's face then for a very long time.

## CHAPTER XXXI

Three months later they were aboard a P. and O. steamer, calling their good-byes to Mrs. King and half a dozen of the boys, and Mr. and Mrs. Twist who had come all the way from Loose End to see them off.

Marcella had stayed in hospital for two months; for another month she had been struggling with inability to begin life again in a nursing home overlooking the thunders of the Pacific. Louis had gone back to the Homestead. He would not explain what he was going to do. He merely fetched Andrew, and put him in charge of Mrs. King, who brought him every day to see her. And then he vanished. But she had no fears for him. They had vanished; her sudden yielding to the chloroform in the hospital had been symbolical of a deeper yielding; she felt that these strong, wise forces of her life, if pain became unendurable, would either cure it or find an anesthetic for it.

And one day, towards the end of the three months, Louis had come to the nursing home to see her. His hands, as he seized her passionately, felt hard and stuck to her thin silk blouse.

"Louis!" she cried, taking one of the hands in hers, which had grown very soft and white, "I've seen them pretty bad before with the gorse. But whatever have you been doing? Where have you been? They're like a navvy's hands!"

"Were you worried about me, old girl?" he asked.

"No, but dreadfully curious," she began. He took a roll of dirty notes out of his pocket and threw it in her lap.

"Look! Alone I did it! Monish, old girl! Filthy lucre! Just enough to take us home. I meant to do it off my own bat, without asking your uncle!"

"But how on earth could you, in the time?" she asked.



“Navvying! That bally railway cutting at Cook’s Wall! Lord, Marcella, if I don’t get the Pater to pay for me to go to the hospital, I’ll do a year first on the music-halls as the modern Hercules. I should make millions! My hands were blistered till they got like iron; my back felt broken; I used to lie awake at nights and weep till I got toughened. I had a few fights, too.”

“Why? Didn’t they like you?”

“No, they’re not so silly as you. They resented my English particularly, and they resented my funking whisky when they were all boozing. They thought I was being superior. Lord, if they’d known! One night, when they were calling me Jesus’ Little Lamb and Wonky Willie, I saw red and tackled an Irishman. Of course, he knocked me out of time. I knew he would. And just to show them that I wasn’t wonky, and wasn’t a Cocoa Fiend—that was another name they had for me—I downed a tumbler full of whisky neat.”

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She drew a deep breath.

"Oh, don't worry! It made me damned sick! Lord, wasn't I bad! There's something in my brain so fed up with the stuff that my body won't give it house-room."

"Good thing too," said Marcella.

"I'm not so sure," he said reflectively. "In a way, it's weak. Whisky still beats me, you see. There ought not to be anything on earth one's afraid of."

"I think that's a bit morbid. I'm very much afraid of snails, and I certainly don't think I'm called upon to go and caress snails."

"Ah, this is different. This isn't physical. It's psychological. Just as, once, I hungered for whisky, now I loathe and dread it. The ideal thing would be to be indifferent to it. That may come in time."

Marcella asked him nothing about herself. What the doctors had told him she did not know: she was content to wait. All she wanted, now, was to get home.

They stayed a week in London with Louis's people. It was pathetic to see the mother's wistful anxiety and the father's open scepticism change to confidence as the week went by.

"He's a changeling, my dear," said Mrs. Fame to Marcella when, in spite of the old lady's wish to keep them in London, they told her they must go North.

"Louis has always been a puzzle to me," said his father. "Even as a little chap he did things I couldn't understand—selfish things, crooked things—I don't understand what has happened to him."

"If I told you you would think General Booth had been getting at me," said Marcella. "But Louis will explain it all to you, some day."

From the slowly dawning pride on the father's face and the pathetic hope of the mother Marcella guessed that Louis would not have to raise his fees on the music-halls.

The winds were black and wintry already round the station at Carlrossie as the train drew in. Marcella had wired that she was coming, giving no explanations. Andrew had been very fidgety. He was wearing his first small suit and what he gained in dignity from knickers and three pockets he lost in comfort. At last he fell asleep. Marcella looked from him to Louis and felt that it was very childish of her, but she was really anxious to get them both home, put them on exhibition, as it were. She had never got over the feeling that Andrew had not merely happened, but was a voluntary achievement. Lately

she had had the same idea about Louis. She wanted to see the effect of them both upon the people at home.

The station at Carlrossie was just the same: it looked much smaller, and the people, too, seemed smaller. Dr. Angus was there in his Inverness cape, smiling with the same air of conscious achievement as Marcella felt.

“So ye’re back again, Mrs. Marcella? I knew we’d be getting ye back soon. And bringing two men with ye!”

He shook hands gravely with Andrew and gave Louis a swift, appraising look that seemed to satisfy him.

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"Your aunt's getting a wee bit frail, Mrs. Marcella! So I brought the old machine along."

They climbed into the machine—his old, high dog-cart, and drove along through tearing winds which were like the greeting embraces of friends to Marcella. The doctor told her all the news; all about the new babies, and the few deaths and illnesses while she had been away. The dashing of the water on the beach came to them. He told her that Jock had been washed from his little boat one rough night, and his body had never been found. The reek of the green wood fires came to them on the salt breeze.

"What's that remind you of, Louis?" she asked him.

"Gorse!" he said with a grimace.

"I love it!" she said simply.

The door of Wullie's hut stood open. He was silhouetted dark against the light within. The doctor drew up.

"Must stop and speak to Wullie," he said rather apologetically, to Louis. The old man came out and stood looking at Marcella. He did not seem a day older.

"So ye're back again, Marcella?" he said. "I knew ye'd be back! I knew ye'd soon wear the wings off yer feet! But ye're not well?"

"How could I be, away from home?" she said gently. "I'll be well again here."

Tammas came up then, with his wife and the six big children Marcella knew, and two littler ones she had never seen. Jock's Bessie came out and put a small bundle on the floor of the machine.

"Juist a cookie for the bit laddie," she explained.

They all stared at Louis and then spoke to him: he got the idea that they were sizing him up, calling him to account for how he had dealt with Marcella, who belonged to them. They claimed young Andrew whom they coolly called "Andrew Lashcairn." As they drove on through the village they took on something of the nature of a triumphal progress, for everyone came out, and talked. And everyone seemed to be Marcella's owners.

Aunt Janet was on the step when they reached the farm: her eagle face was thinner, quite fleshless; in her black silk frock, shivered at the seams, and the great cairngorm brooch, she looked quite terrifying.

"So you're back, Marcella? I knew you would be coming back," she said.

Louis wondered if this were the stock greeting at Lashnagar.

"I wonder what you've got for going across the world?" she said. "You're not well."

"I've got my two men," laughed Marcella, as she kissed the old lady.

"Humphm!" said Aunt Janet. "He'd have found you out if you'd stayed here all the time."

"Do you know, Marcella," said Louis, as they went along the windy passages to her father's room in which Aunt Janet had elected to put them. "I've an extraordinary feeling that I've nothing to do with you any more. All these people—they seem to own you! You're an elusive young beggar, you know. First Kraill—I had to ask his permission to keep you. Now a whole village full!"

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She shook her head and put her hand in his.

“Who’s got me most, do you think?”

He answered as he thought.

There was a great spurting wood fire on the hearth in the book-room. As she looked round Marcella saw that most of the furniture left in the farm had been brought in. Jean came in, carrying a dish of scones. Andrew ran straight to her, just as Marcella used to. She explained that she had come back because the mistress was lonely without her, and she could not get used to any ways but those of the farm.

The doctor stayed to the meal. There was no bread on the table. Louis seemed surprised to see the oatcakes and the cheese and the herrings. To Marcella they were a feast of heaven. They put young Andrew in old Andrew’s chair beneath the dusty pennant. He sat with his fat brown legs swinging, exceedingly conscious of their manly appearance which he compared with his father’s and the doctor’s, delighted to see that the doctor’s old tweed knickerbockers were very much the same shape as his.

“There’s bramble jelly for the boy,” said Aunt Janet, who scarcely took her eyes from him for a moment. “Mrs. Mactavish sends me some every year—one pot. There’s been four pots since you went away. And I’ve never been minded to open one. Maybe it’s mouldered now.”

They talked quietly; out on Lashnagar the winds began to howl; in the passages they shrieked and whined, and whistled and groaned in the chimney sending out little puffs of smoke. Up above their heads something scuttled swiftly. The little boy forgot his dignity and drew nearer to his mother.

“That’s the rats, Andrew,” said Aunt Janet, watching him. His mother explained that rats were a pest, to be hunted out like rabbits in Australia.

He drew away from her then and stood with his back to the fire, his hands behind.

“Andwew kill wats,” he announced. “Wiv a big stick.”

The doctor and Louis smoked and talked together of days forty years ago in Edinburgh, of days seven years ago at St. Crispin’s. Marcella and Aunt Janet spoke softly, sitting by the fire.

“I wouldn’t be sitting so near the fire, Marcella. You’ll have all the colour taken out of your skirt. Not that it matters particularly,” said Aunt Janet.

“It’s lovely by the fire,” murmured Marcella.

Aunt Janet reached over suddenly and spread an old plaid shawl over the girl's knees. She suddenly felt that Louis and Andrew and the last four years were unreal and dreamlike. They had happened to her, but now she was back home again, being told what to do.

Andrew began to rub his eyes.

"Yell be getting away to your bed now, Andrew," said Aunt Janet.

Jean stood up, waiting for him. He hugged his father and mother, shook hands with the doctor and looked searchingly at Aunt Janet before he kissed her. She put her hand behind the curtain, rustled a piece of paper and gave him an acid drop.

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"I used tae pit Marcella, yer mither, tae her bed when she was a wee thing," said Jean, taking his small brown hand. He put the sweet into his mouth and trotted off beside her. At the door he stopped to kiss his hand to his mother. The rats scuttled across the floor above; one in the wainscoting scratched and gnawed. Andrew hesitated and came back a few steps. They were all watching him.

"Mummy!" he began in a very thin little voice. Marcella started as if to go to him, and sat back suddenly.

"Andwew will kill wats—wiv a big stick," he said, and marched out of the room before Jean.

Before a week had gone by it seemed to Marcella that she had never been away from Lashnagar. The place wrapped her round, took possession of her. She took Louis down to the huts to see Wullie; she toasted herrings over the fire, and Louis was unexpectedly friendly; the only difference was that Jock was not there any more when the fishing boats came in; and where she had left girls and boys she found young men and women and little babies: they grew up quickly on the hillside. Louis went with her on Ben Grief and saw the old grey house. He wandered on Lashnagar and looked down the terrifying chasms, and heard the screaming of the gulls; and he was unutterably wretched and out of it all.

On Lashnagar he said to her, one day:

"Marcella, it ought to be made compulsory for people, before they think of being married, to find out all about each other's youth."

"Like that poem of poor Lamb's?" she said. "Oh thou dearer than a brother! Why wast thou not born within my father's dwelling? So might we talk of the old familiar faces—Yes, I believe there's a lot in it."

"Since I've been here and seen things, I've understood you better. Seeing your home, and mine, and thinking how we were the products of those homes! I'm glad young Andrew is here, till it's time for him to go to school. I see where you get your friendliness that used to shock me, and your hardness. I'd like him to get it all."

"I was hoping to protect him from it," she said. "But I know you're right, really," she said slowly.

That was the day before he went south to Edinburgh to join the hospital. His mother wanted him in London, and his father wrote saying that his old room was ready for him. But Louis told them that Marcella must be at Lashnagar, and Edinburgh was nearer Lashnagar than London was. Dr. Angus felt personally responsible for the resources of Edinburgh when he heard the news and once again he made a pilgrimage, taking Louis



to his old rooms in Montague Street, and doing the honours of the city with a proprietorial air. He took to running down to Edinburgh quite frequently; he said he was brushing up his knowledge.

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The winter passed; Louis spent Christmas at Lashnagar and then took Marcella and the boy to London. Marcella was feeling very ill, but he was too happy and too full of his work to notice it. She was very glad to get back again, to sleep in her father's old four-poster bed looking out on Ben Grief. When he had gone back to Edinburgh she spent many wakeful nights, drawn in upon herself, thinking herself to nothingness like a Buddhist monk until pain brought her to realization again. In those hours she thought much of her father and heard his voice in her ears, saw him standing there before her, clinging to the post as he prayed for strength. Louis wrote her immense letters: sometimes in the night she would light her candle and read them with tears blinding her eyes and an unspeaking gratitude in her heart. She said nothing to Aunt Janet about her illness in Sydney, or about her pain, but one evening the old lady, looking across the firelit hearth, said quietly:

"I shall outlive you, Marcella. Seems foolish! You—young, all tingling for life and joy, and people to care about you. I like a last year's leaf before the wind, dried and dead. The one shall be taken and the other left. It seems foolish."

"How did you know? Did Louis tell you?" asked Marcella in a low voice. The pain had been unbearable all day but she had wrapt herself in a great cape of her father's and taken it out on Lashnagar, where no one could see her, leaving Andrew at the hut with Wullie. For a long time she had lost consciousness, to waken very cold in the winter dusk.

"No, Louis said nothing. But I've eyes. You're marked for death. I saw it when you came in at the door that night. Besides, you and I are very much alike, so I understand you. And you're getting very much like your mother."

"I think I'll see Dr. Angus to-morrow," said Marcella presently. "But I don't think it's much use. That's the worst of being married to an enthusiastic medical student! You know so much!"

The wood crackled for a while before Aunt Janet spoke.

"We are getting wiped out, Marcella! Only an old stick like me, who has repressed everything, lives to tell the tale. I've ruled myself never to feel anything."

"I'm glad I haven't. I'd rather be smashed up with pain than be dead. You see, Aunt Janet, you repressed things and I took them out and walked over them."

"Maybe I would if I had my time to go over again. But I don't know. It's a blessing not to feel. I'm fond of you, you know, but I scarcely felt your going away. And I don't suppose I shall feel your dying very much."

"You care about Andrew," said Marcella quickly.

“Yes, I care about Andrew,” said Aunt Janet and gathered herself into the past.

The next day Marcella went to see Dr. Angus who was horrified and incredulous, and wired for a specialist from Edinburgh. Marcella knew it was all useless, and when the specialist went away after talking to Dr. Angus, without saying anything more about operations, she felt very glad.

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Louis suspected nothing; he was working very hard for his first examination the week before Easter and she would not have him worried; she wrote to him every day, though writing grew more and more difficult. She fought desperately against being an invalid and staying in bed, but at last she had to give way; Dr. Angus came every day and talked to her for hours; sometimes he gave her morphia; once or twice when the pain had stranded her almost unbreathing on a shore of numbness and exhaustion she wished that she had died in the hospital in Sydney: but not for long; in spite of the pain she wanted to live. Once or twice, when all was quiet, and the pain was having its night-time orgy with her, she cried out in the unbearable agony of it. She would have no one with her at nights, but Aunt Janet's uncanny penetration guessed at the pain and she made Dr. Angus leave morphia tablets for her. At first, though they were at her hand, she refused them.

"I don't want to waste time in unconsciousness," she said once. Later, she grew glad to waste time: she understood how her father used to pray for drugs when he was too tired to pray for courage in those weary nights of his. Another time she said that it was cowardly: Louis, in his whisky days, had been seeking anesthesia from painful thoughts; she was too proud to seek it for a painful body. She tried hard, too, to keep shining Kraill's conception of her courage; she did not realize that he would never know, however much she gave way: always, for her, he lived just on the threshold of her consciousness.

One day when the doctor was sitting beside her and she had got out of a maze of pain into a buoyant sea of bodily unconsciousness, she talked to him about his letter in which he had grieved at his inadequacy. Then she told him about Louis, and about Kraill, for she thought it might encourage him to know how the miracle of healing had come about.

"He wrote to me this morning, doctor," she said. "Will you feel under my pillow and get the letter? I know he wouldn't mind your reading it."

The doctor unfolded the thick bundle of pages and read—and as he read he saw that the words were all blurred by tears, and guessed that they were certainly not tears shed by the exuberant young man who had written the letter.

"Three cheers, old girl. The week of torture is past! I know I got through. I simply sailed through. My brain is a fifty times better machine than it was seven years ago. And they're accommodating at these Scotch medical schools. I told 'em I'd got through part of my Final in London before the bust-up came, and the Dean sent for me to-day and said it seemed a pity for me to slog at the donkey-work again, when I knew it. So we talked it over, and he says I ought to do the Final next year. And then, Marcella, look out! I've told you I've laid down my challenge to sickness! I'll have it whacked before I die. I can't see why anyone should die

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except of senile decay or accident—and those we'll eliminate in time! I feel that there's only a dyke of matchboarding between me and the ocean of knowledge. One day it's going to break, and I'll be flooded with it. It's a most uncanny feeling, old girl. One of the chaps here—a rather mad American—says that there are people who've broken that dyke down—Shakespeare, for instance. (But if I broke it down, I wouldn't be such a footler as to write plays and poems, would you?) Corlyon—that's the mad American—is the son of a big psychologist at Harvard; he gave me some light on Kraill's remark about dreams that day. He says they're being used a lot by some German and American alienists in curing all sorts of neuroses. (By the way, old girl, next time you write, tell me if you understand all these technicalities. I want you to understand them, and if you don't I'll explain as I go on. One never can be sure about you. Sometimes you seem no end of a duffer, and next minute you come out with an amazing piece of penetration.) Well, these new psychologists say that things like drinking, sex, drugging, kleptomania, and all these bally nuisances that make people impossible members of a community, come from repression. A man has a perfectly well-meaning impulse to do something. His education, or his religion or his convention tells him it's wrong, so he represses it. He fights it, pushes it back. It gets encysted and, in time, forms a spiritual abscess. It's got to break through. Of course, the idea is not to repress things at all. I don't say let things rip, and go in for a whole glorious orgy of wine, woman and song. But take the desire out, have a talk with it, and make it look silly like Kraill made whisky look silly to me. There, I thought that would interest you. (A bit more proof how damnably clever he was!)

“Marcella, I told you then I'd be the same to you as Kraill was, didn't I? I worshipped you; I wanted you; you were my saviour, and I'd have picked up the Great Pyramid and walked off staggering with it if you'd asked me. That was the path that carried me over my particular messy morass (that, and my acquisitive spirit that objected to giving up part of my goods and chattels!) And now—listen here, old lady! It's a thing a chap couldn't say to most of his wives. I can say it to you and know that you'll understand. (That's the heavenly safeness of you. You do understand, and never judge resentfully) Marcella, I'm going to be the sort of man Kraill is! And I'm going to be it not for you at all now! I'm going to be bigger than he, even. And I know he'll be big enough to be glad if I am. A good doctor's reward is in his patient's recovery, and in a way, whatever the patient does afterwards counts to the doctor, doesn't it? So now, old girl, if there was no you on earth, I'd still keep my tail up! Put that in your pipe of peace and smoke it! Different days, isn't it to the time when I couldn't be sent to buy a

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baby's feeding-bottle without getting boozed? I knew you'd like to know that. Oh, wasn't I a fool to think you wanted to tie me to your apron strings? I've got to neglect you for a bit now. I've got to run on without you, dear. Thank God you're not the sort to get huffy about it, and want me dancing attendance on you. A man with a man's job to do can't have time for the softness of women about him: he can't stop to look to right or left! But when I'm in Harley Street—well there! No more decayed castles or wooden huts for you!

"I'm aching to see you, Marcella. It's the Mater's birthday on Easter Sunday, so I'm running down to see her on Saturday. I shall travel back by that train that leaves Euston at midnight on Sunday. It's great to be away from you, because it's so great to come back."

The doctor looked at her as he put the letter down, and blew his nose and polished his glasses.

"Two or three years ago I'd have been sick to think I was only the bridge to carry him over—to his job. But now—" She smiled a little, wondering why he should talk to her of the softness of women, that he must dispense with for a while; and Kraill had seen her hard, and asked her to be courageous for him!

After the doctor had gone Andrew came in, warm and rosy from his bath. He had had a glorious day on the beach with Wullie; he scrambled into Jean's arms to be carried to bed, because they had forgotten his slippers and his feet were cold.

"Night, night, mummy," he said. "Inve morning I shan't wake you up, 'cos I'm going to see the boats come in at five! An' Jean's putting oatcake in my pocket—like a man—!"

He went off, laughing. After he was in bed, she heard him singing for a long time until his voice droned away to drowsiness.

She lay silent and motionless. Aunt Janet came in. She took up the hypodermic syringe impassively. Marcella shook her head.

"No. I want to think to-night. Louis's coming on Monday. I've to think of some way of not letting him know how ill I am, because of his work," she said. "But will you put pencil and paper where I can get it?"

"You'll not be writing letters to-night, Marcella?" said Aunt Janet.

"No. I'm going to make my will," she laughed. "I've only Louis and Andrew to leave—"

Her aunt kissed her and turned away. Through the open window came the soft roar of the sea. It was very still to-night; the moon shone across it, but that she could not see: she had seen it so often that it was there in her imagination. On Ben Grief the shadows lay inky in the silver light. She looked at the syringe, and then at the tabloids, and sighed a little; the pain was a thing tearing and burning; several times she tried to begin to write and had to lie back with closed eyes floating away on a sea of horror. Several times her hand quivered towards the tabloids and came back to the pencil. The shadows seemed to jostle each other about the room. Kraill's eyes shone out of them for an instant, blue and impelling. She got a grip on herself and wrote, a word at a time, making each letter with proud precision:

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DEAR PROFESSOR KRAILL,

I am sending you a letter I had from my husband to-day. Have you forgotten us, and that wonderful thing you did out in the Bush? You told me then that you liked to interfere in other people's business, but that they didn't always take the interfering nicely. I want you to know what your interfering has meant to us.

You will gather from Louis's letter what you meant to him. It is more difficult to explain what you meant to me. Can you understand if I say you've been a constant goad to me? It would have been easier for me if I had never seen you, because you have been the censor of my spirit ever since. After you went away I was blazing with misery. I hadn't got so far as you, you see. I was passionately wishing that I'd known you when you were more on my level. And I saw that you had had a vision of me that was very much better than I shall ever be now. As Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, there are three Marcellas—the one Marcella herself knows, the one the people round about know, and the one God knows. That was the one you saw for a minute and, not to disappoint you, I've had to live up to it. It hasn't been easy. As you will see from his letter, even Louis doesn't need me now. And as for my boy—I know now, that though beasts claw at his life and colds and hungers and desolations come to him, they cannot put out the shine of him. But for me it has been very lonely. I wanted to be the thing of soft corners and seduction that you were sickened of. I had to rip myself to bits and make myself the rather rarefied sort of thing you demanded. I didn't dare not to be brave, because you were so much enthroned in my life that every thought was a deliberate homage to you. I might have got considerably happy, and found many thrills out of thinking about you softly, imagining kisses, adventures, perhaps. Many women would, and I'm sure many men. I couldn't do that because it would have made you less shining, though more dear in my mind. And when I tell you that almost ever since you went away I have been very ill, much of the time in horrible pain, you will see that you gave me something to live up to when you said you needed my courage. There's a fight going on all the time between my spirit and my body. Sometimes, when the pain has been appalling, I have thought I would write to you and ask you to release me from being brave. But I did not want to seem to you a tortured thing—Sometimes, too, I have deliberately pushed the morphia on one side and stuck it out. It was one way of getting my own back on this bundle of nerves and sensations that has played such havoc with me and that, as you scornfully told me, has once or twice cheapened me to an unworthy pleasure—'like a queen going on the streets.' I've been damned, damned, by this overlordship of the body. Now I'm going to get rid of it, and even now I don't want to! I know now I am dying, and there is morphia here under my hand. But I'll be damned in pain rather than be beaten by it! I won't die a cow's death, as the old Norsemen used to call it! I'll fight every inch of the way.—But I wish Aunt Janet would come in and jab the needle in me, forcibly. That would be quite honourable, wouldn't it?



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The candle began to flicker and, turning, she saw that it was spending its last dying flame. It was impossible to write. She lay still, watching the glimmering dark square of the window. She could not see another candle there. All she could see was the little phial of tabloids. But she lay back and let the pain fasten on her. The blazing needles that were piercing her, the blazing hammers that were battering her, gathered in fury and for a few merciful hours she lost consciousness.

When she wakened again the pain had completely gone and the first faint cool light was struggling through the mists on Ben Grief. She groped about the counterpane and found her pencil, and went on writing. This time the letters were not so proudly neat. Many of them were shaky and spindlegged and she knew it.

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The candle went out, then. Some hours have passed, and with them the pain. A very beautiful thing has come to me;—the peace that passeth all understanding until you've lost your body. I understand now, very well. Our lives are just God's pathway, and we get in His way and have to be hurt before He can get along us. I was, unconsciously, His pathway to Louis until you came along—and you were a smoother pathway than I. His feet have blazed along my life now, burning out all the roughnesses—crushing me down. It's been a heavy weight to carry—the burden of salvation. It is such a heavy weight that one can't carry anything else. I tried to carry myself, and prides and hungers and love for you. All of them had to be blazed out.—No—not the love. That could not go. That and the courage will go on; pity perhaps will go, for only our bodies are pitiful. But the love is deathless. God's banner over me was love. I think I've read that somewhere His footmarks over my life were love. I've not read that. I had to find it out—slowly, hungrily, painfully, strivingly, because I've always been such a fool. But just this minute I've seen that I've been God's Fool—and God is Love.

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The sun came up behind the pines on Ben Grief, golden and silver in the April morning. Very faintly came the voices of the fishermen; in the next room she heard small, busy sounds; two faint falls made her smile. Andrew had mechanically put on his shoes, thought better of it and kicked them off again. She heard him creep along the landing to her door and listen. When she tried to call him to come and kiss her she found that her voice had died. She heard him say, quietly:

"Mummy's fast asleep," and smiled again as she felt that he was running through the unbarred door shrieking and laughing in the delight of the soft air, the dancing sea, the kindly sun. She knew that he had not washed his face, and worried a little about it, and then smiled again.

His voice grew fainter. She tried to lift her hand to fold her letter. It felt as though it were miles away from her, and too heavy to move.



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"Why, I'm dying now," she thought, and was surprised to find it such an ordinary, unvolitional thing to do. It was very good to do something unvolitional, very restful.— Little snappings sounded in her ears, and distant crashings and thunders as of a storm perceived by a deaf man who can see and understand without hearing.

She thought very clearly of Death for a moment, and then of God. She had often thought of Death and of God, and was surprised to find that she had been wrong about both.

"I thought—He never gave you—anesthetics—" she told herself. "Why, that's what death is—"

Then came the clear vision of God—not the Great Being with devastating feet at all: He seemed to be like the surgeon in Sydney, for a moment, very sure of His work, very strong, very much stronger and wiser than she was. It was no use at all to fight a thing so wise and strong and tender—

At that moment, as this most beautiful, most kindly thing came to her, she wanted to tell Kraill about it, so that he should be filled with the beauty of it without having to come to death to find it out. The pencil was in her hand, resting on the page. Her brain willed her fingers to conquer their heaviness, their farawayness, and write:

"God seems like you when you told me I needn't be frightened about Louis any more—"

The crashings in her ears grew fainter. More light came.

"No. He is more than that. He is the sun that is shining and the soft noise that is coming up from the sea—and Andrew's laughing—No—those were only His robes that I was looking at!—God is the courage you loved—God is the courage; His clothes are loving-kindness—"

In that moment that the structure of her life fell inwards she saw still more.

"I know now that I need not regret all these greeds and hungers and prides of mine that have been unfulfilled. They have been burned out by the courage and the loving-kindness—"

The pencil rolled on to the floor; what her spirit had willed to tell him her fingers had made a weak scrawl of straggling, futile marks.