

The Parts Men Play eBook

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THE PARTS MEN PLAY.

CHAPTER I.

Lady Durwent decides on A dinner.

I.

His Majesty's postmen were delivering mail. Through the gray grime of a November morning that left a taste of rust in the throat, the carriers of letters were bearing their cargo to all the corners of that world which is called London.

There were letters from hospitals asking for funds; there were appeals from sick people seeking admission to hospital. There were long, legal letters and little, scented letters lying wonderingly together in the postman's bag. There were notes from tailors to gentlemen begging to remind them; and there were answers from gentlemen to their tailors, in envelopes bearing the crests of Pall Mail clubs, hinting of temporary embarrassment, but mentioning certain prospects that would shortly enable them to

Fat, bulging envelopes, returning manuscripts with editors' regrets, were on their way to poor devils of scribblers living in the altitude of unrecognised genius and a garret. There were cringing, fawning epistles, written with a smirk and sealed with a scowl; some there were couched in a refinement of cruelty that cut like a knife.

But, as unconcerned as tramps plying contraband between South America and Mexico, His Majesty's postmen were delivering His Majesty's mail, with never a thought of the play of human emotions lying behind the sealed lips of an envelope. If His Majesty's subjects insisted upon writing to one another, it was obvious that their letters, in some mysterious way become the property of His Majesty, had to be delivered.

Thus it happened, on a certain November morning in the year 1913, that six dinner invitations, enclosed in small, square envelopes with a noble crest on the back, and large, unwieldy writing on the front, were being carried through His Majesty's fog to six addresses in the West End of London.

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Lady Durwent had decided to give a dinner.

An ordinary hostess merely writes a carelessly formal note stating that she hopes the recipient will be able to dine with her on a certain evening. The form of her invitations varies as little as the conversation at her table. But Lady Durwent was *unusual*. For years she had endeavoured to impress the fact on London, and by careful attention to detail had at last succeeded in gaining that reputation. She was that *rara avis* among the women of to-day—the hostess who knows her guests. She never asked any one to dine at her house without some definite purpose in mind—and, for that matter, her guests never dined with her except on the same terms.

Therefore it came about that Lady Durwent's dinners were among the pleasantest things in town, and, true to her character of the *unusual*, she always worded her invitations with a nice discrimination dictated by the exact motive that prompted the sending.

II.

H. Stackton Dunckley looked up from his pillow as the man-servant who valeted for the gentlemen of the Jermyn Street Chambers drew aside a gray curtain and displayed the gray blanket of the atmosphere outside.

'Good-morning, Watson,' said Mr. Dunckley in a voice which gave the impression that he had smoked too many cigars the previous evening—an impression considerably strengthened by the bilious appearance of his face.

'Good-morning, sir. Will you have the *Times* or the *Morning Post*? And here are your letters, sir.'

The recumbent gentleman took the letters and waved them philosophically at the valet. 'Leave me to my thoughts,' he said thickly, but with considerable dignity. 'I am not interested in the squeaky jarring of the world revolving on its rusty axis.'

Being an author, he almost invariably tried out his command of language in the morning, as a tenor essays two or three notes on rising, to make sure that his voice has not left him during his slumber.

Mr. Watson bowed and withdrew. H. Stackton Dunckley lit a cigarette, opened the first letter, and read it.

'8 *Chelmsford gardens*.



'My dear STACKY,—Next Friday I am giving a little dinner-party—just a few *unusual* people—to meet an American author who has recently come to England. Do come; but, you brilliant man, don't be too caustic, will you?

'Isn't it dreadful the way gossip is connecting our names? Supposing Lord Durwent should hear about it!—Until Friday,

'*Sybil Durwent.*

'P.S.—How is *the* play coming on? Dinner will be at 8.30.'

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H. Stackton Dunckley put the letter down and sighed. He was an author who had been writing other men's ideas all his life, but without sufficient distinction to achieve either a success or a failure. He had gained some notoriety by his wife suing him for divorce; but when the Court granted her separation on the ground of desertion, it cleared him of the charge of infidelity—and of the chance of advertisement at the same moment. Later, by being a constant attendant on Lady Durwent, he almost succeeded in creating a scandal; but, to the great disappointment of them both, London flatly refused to believe there was anything wrong. For one thing, she was the daughter of a commoner—and the morality of the middle classes is a conviction solidly rooted in English society. And then there were his writings. How could one doubt the character of a man so dull?

Undiscouraged, they still maintained their perfectly innocent friendship, and, like kittens playing with a spool, invested it with all the appearances of an intrigue.

Dismissing his depressing thoughts, H. Stackton Dunckley noticed that his cigarette was out, and closing his eyes, fell asleep once more.

III.

Madame Carlotti, clothed in a kimono of emphatic shade, sat by the fire in her rooms in Knightsbridge and read her mail while sipping coffee. She was the wife of an Italian diplomat, a sort of wandering plenipotentiary who did business in every part of the world but London, and with every Government but that of Britain. It was the signora's somewhat incomprehensible complaint that her husband's duties forced her to live in that fog-bound metropolis, and having thus achieved the pedestal of a martyr, she poured abuse on everything English from climate to customs. Possessed of a certain social dexterity and the ability to make the most ordinary conversation seem to concern a forbidden topic, Madame Carlotti was in great demand as a guest, and abused more English habits and attended more dinner-parties than any other woman in London.

From beneath seven tradesmen's letters she extracted one from Lady Durwent.

'8 CHELMSFORD GARDENS,

'DEAREST LUCIA,—I am counting on you for next Friday. A young American author studying England—I suppose like that Count Something-or-other in *Pickwick Papers*—is coming to dinner. I understand he drinks very little, so I am relying on you to thaw him.

'Stackton Dunckley *insists* upon coming, though I tell him that it is dangerous; and of course people are saying dreadful things, I know. He is so persistent. There will be just half-a-dozen *unusual* people there, my dear, so don't fail me. Dinner will be at 8.30.—
So sincerely, SYBIL DERWENT.

'P.S.—Don't you think you could make Stackton interested in you? Your husband is away so much.'

Madame Carlotti smiled with her teeth and drank some very strong coffee.

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'It ees deefficult,' she said, with that seductive formation of the lips used by her countrywomen when speaking English, 'for a magnet to attract putty. Still—there ees the American. At least I shall not be altogether bored.'

IV.

That noon, in a restaurant of Chelsea, the district of Pensioners and Bohemians, two young gentlemen, considerably in need of renovation by both tailor and barber, met at a table and nodded gloomily. One was Johnston Smyth, an artist, who, finding himself possessed neither of a technique nor of the industry to acquire one, had evolved a super-futurist style that had made him famous in a night. He was spoken of as 'a new force;' it was prophesied that English Art would date from him. Unfortunately his friends neglected to buy his paintings, and as his art was a vivid one, consisting of vast quantities of colour splashed indiscriminately on the canvas, it took more than his available funds to purchase the accessories of his calling. He was tall, with expressive arms that were too long for his sleeves, and a nose that would have done credit to a field-marshal.

The other was Norton Pyford, the modernist composer, who had developed the study of discord to such a point that his very features seemed to lack proportion, and when he smiled his face presented a lop-sided appearance. He had given a recital which set every one who is any one in London talking. There was but one drawback—they talked so much that he could persuade no one to listen, and he carried his discords about with him, like a bad half-crown, unable to rid himself of them. He was short, with a retreating forehead and an overhanging wealth of black, thread-like hair, gamely covering the retreat as best it could.

'Hello, Smyth!' drawled the composer, who affected a manner of speech usually confined to footmen in the best families. 'Hah d' do?'

'Topping, Pyford. How's things?'

'Rotten.'

'Same here.'

'I say, you couldn't'——

'Just what I was going to ask you.'

The composer sighed; the artist echoed the sigh.

'Have you seen Shaw's show?'



'Awful, isn't it?'

'Putrid—but the English don't'——

'Ah! What a race!'

'Just so. I say, are you going to Lady Durwent's on Friday?'

'Yes, rather.'

'Look here, old fellow—don't dress, eh?'

'Right. Let's be natural—what? Just Bohemians.'

'The very thing. By-the-by, you don't know a laundry that gives'——

'No, I can't say I do.'

'Well, so long.'

'Good-bye.'

'See you Friday.'

'Right.'

V.

Mrs. Le Roy Jennings looked up from her task of drafting the new Resolution to be presented to Parliament by the League of Equal Sex Rights and Complete Emancipation for Women, as a diminutive, half-starved servant brought in a letter on a tray.

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Mrs. Jennings took the missive, and frowning threateningly at the girl, who withdrew to the dark recesses of the servants' quarters, opened it by slitting its throat with a terrific paper-knife.

'8 CHELMSFORD GARDENS.

'DEAR MRS LE ROY JENNINGS,—An American author is coming to dinner next Friday. There will just be a few *unusual* people, and I have asked them for 8.30. I want him to meet one of England's intellectual women, and I *know* he will be interested to hear of your ideas on the New Home.

'My daughter joins with me in wishing you every success.—Until Friday, dear,

'SYBIL DURWENT.'

Mrs. Jennings, who had made a complete failure of her own home, and consequently felt qualified to interfere with all others, scribbled a hasty note of acceptance in a handwriting so forceful that on some words the pen slid off the paper completely.

Then, with a look of profundity, she resumed the Resolution.

VI.

And so, by the medium of His Majesty's mail, a little group of actors were warned for a performance at Lady Durwent's house, No. 8 Chelmsford Gardens.

Through the November fog the endless traffic of the streets was cautiously feeling its way along the diverging channels of the Metropolis—a snorting, sliding, impatient fleet of vehicles perpetually on their way, yet never seeming to get there. Taxi-cabs hugged the pavements, trying to penetrate the gloom with their meagre lights; omnibuses fretted and bullied their way, avoiding collision by inches, but struggling on and on as though their very existence depended on their reaching some place immediately or being interned for failure. Hansom-cabs, with ancient, glistening horses driven by ancient, glistening cabbies, felt for elbow-space in the throng of motor-vehicles. And on all sides the badinage of the streets, the eternal wordy conflict of London's mariners of traffic, rose in cheerful, insulting abundance.

On the pavements pedestrians jostled each other—men with hands in their pockets and arms tight to their sides, women with piqued noses and hurrying steps; while sulky lamps offered half-hearted resistance to the conquering fog that settled over palaces, parks, and motley streets until it hugged the very Thames itself in unholy glee.

And through the impenetrable mist of circumstance, the millions of souls that make up the great city pursued their millions of destinies, undeterred by biting cold and grisly



fog. For it was a day in the life of England's capital; and every day there is a great human drama that must be played—a drama mingling tragedy and humour with no regard to values or proportion; a drama that does not end with death, but renews its plot with the breaking of every dawn; a drama knowing neither intermezzo nor respite: and the name of it is—LONDON.

CHAPTER II

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CONCERNING LADY DURWENT'S FAMILY.

I.

Lady Durwent was rather a large woman, of middle age, with a high forehead unruffled by thought, and a clear skin unmarred by wrinkles. She had a cheerfulness that obtruded itself, like a creditor, at unpropitious moments; and her voice, though not displeasing, gave the impression that it might become volcanic at any moment. She also possessed a considerable theatrical instinct, with which she would frequently manoeuvre to the centre of the stage, to find, as often as not, that she had neglected the trifling matter of learning any lines.

She was the daughter of an ironmonger in the north of England, whose father had been one of the last and most famous of a long line of smugglers. It was perhaps the inherited love of adventure that prompted the ironmonger, against his wife's violent protest, to invest the savings of a lifetime in an obscure Canadian silver-mine. To the surprise of every one (including its promoters), the mine produced high-grade ore in such abundance that the ironmonger became a man of means. Thereupon, at the instigation of his wife, they moved from their little town into the city of York, where he purchased a large, stuffily furnished house, sat on Boards, became a councillor, wore evening-dress for dinner, and died a death of absolute respectability.

Before the final event he had the satisfaction of seeing his only child Sybil married to Arthur, Lord Durwent. (The evening-clothes for dinner were a direct result.) Lord Durwent was a well-behaved young man of unimpeachable character and family, and he was sincerely attracted by the agreeable expanse of lively femininity found in the fair Sybil. After a wedding that left her mother a triumphant wreck and appreciably hastened her father's demise, she was duly installed as the mistress of Roselawn, the Durwent family seat, and its tributary farms. The tenants gave her an address of welcome; her husband's mother gracefully retired to a villa in Sussex; the rector called and expressed gratification; the county families left their cards and inquired after her father, the ironmonger.

Unfortunately the new Lady Durwent had the temperament neither of a poet nor of a lady of the aristocracy. She failed to hear the tongues in trees, and her dramatic sense was not satisfied with the little stage of curtsying tenantry and of gentlefolk who abhorred the very thought of anything theatrical in life.

On the other hand, her husband was a man who was unhappy except on his estate. He thought along orthodox lines, and read with caution. He loved his lawns, his gardens, his horses, and his habits. He was a pillar of the church, and always read a portion of Scripture from the reading-desk on Sunday mornings. His wife he treated with simple courtesy as the woman who would give him an heir. If his mind had been a little more

sensitive, Lord Durwent would have realised that he was asking a hurricane to be satisfied with the task of a zephyr.

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They had a son.

The tenants presented him with a silver bowl; Lord Durwent presented them with a garden fete; and the parents presented the boy with the name of Malcolm.

Two years later there came a daughter.

The tenants gave her a silver plate; Lord Durwent gave them a garden fete; and he and his wife gave the girl the name of Elise.

Three years later a second son appeared.

There was a presentation, followed by a garden fete and a christening.
The name was Richard.

In course of time the elder son grew to that mental stature when the English parent feels the time is ripe to send him away to school. The ironmonger's daughter had the idea that Malcolm, being her son, was hers to mould.

'My dear,' said Lord Durwent, exerting his authority almost for the first time, 'the boy is eight years of age, and no time must be lost in preparing him for Eton and inculcating into him those qualities which mark'——

'But,' cried his wife with theatrical unrestraint, 'why send him to Eton? Why not wait until you see what he wants to be in the world?'

Lord Durwent's face bore a look of unperturbed calm. 'When he is old enough, he must go to Eton, my dear, and acquire the qualities which will enable him to take over Roselawn at my death'——

At this point Lady Durwent interrupted him with a tirade which, in common with a good many domestic unpleasantries, was born of much that was irrelevant, springing from sources not readily apparent. She abused the public-school system of England, and sneered at the county families which blessed the neighbourhood with their presence. She reviled Lord Durwent's habits, principally because they *were* habits, and thought it was high time some Durwent grew up who wasn't just a 'sticky, stuffy, starched, and bored porpoise—yes, PORPOISE!' (shaking her head as if to establish the metaphor against the whole of the English aristocracy). In short, it was the spirit of the Ironmonger castigating the Peerage, and at its conclusion Lady Durwent felt much abused, and quite pleased with her own rhetoric.

Lord Durwent glanced for courage at an ancestor who looked magnificently down at him over a ruffle. He adjusted his own cravat and spoke in nicely modulated accents: 'Sybil, nothing can change me on this point. In spite of what you say, it is my intention to keep to the tradition of the Durwents, and that is that the occupant of Roselawn'——



'What! am not I his mother?' cried the good woman, her hysteria having much the same effect on Lord Durwent's smoothly developing monologue as a heavy pail dropped by a stage-hand during Hamlet's soliloquy.

'Sybil,' said Lord Durwent sternly, 'it was arranged at Malcolm's birth that he should go to Eton. I shall take him next Tuesday to a preparatory school, and you must excuse me if I refuse to discuss the matter further.'

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Lady Durwent rushed from the room and clasped her eldest child in her arms. That young gentleman, not knowing what had caused his mother's grief, sympathetically opened his throat and bellowed lustily, thereby shedding tears for positively the last time in his life.

When he returned for the holidays a few months later, he was an excellent example of that precocity, the English schoolboy, who cloaks a juvenile mind with the pose of sophistication, and by twelve years of age achieves a code of thought and conduct that usually lasts him for the rest of his life. In vain the mother strove for her place in the sun; the rule of the masculine at Roselawn became adamant.

Life in the Durwent *menage* developed into a thing of laws and customs dictated by the youthful despot, aided and abetted by his father. The sacred rites of 'what isn't done' were established, and the mother gradually found herself in the position of an outsider—a privileged outsider, it is true, yet little more than the breeder of a thoroughbred, admitted to the paddock to watch his horse run by its new owner.

She vented her feelings in two or three tearful scenes, but she felt that they lacked spontaneity, and didn't really put her heart into them.

During these struggles for her place in a Society that was probably more completely masculine in domination than any in the world (with the possible exception of that of the Turk), Lady Durwent was only dimly aware that her daughter was developing a personality which presented a much greater problem than that of the easily grooved Malcolm.

The girl's hair was like burnished copper, and her cheeks were lit by two bits of scarlet that could be seen at a distance before her features were discernible. Her eyes were of a gray-blue that changed in shade with her swiftly varying moods. Her lower lip was full and red, the upper one firm and repressed with the dull crimson of a fading rose-petal. Her shapely arms and legs were restless, seemingly impatient to break into some quickly moving dance. She was extraordinarily alive. Vitality flashed from her with every gesture, and her mind, a thing of caprice and whim, knew no boundaries but those of imagination itself.

Puzzled and entirely unable to understand anything so instinctive, Lady Durwent engaged a governess who was personally recommended by Lady Chisworth, whose friend the Countess of Oxeter had told her that the three daughters of the Duchess of Dulworth had all been entrusted to her care.

In spite of this almost unexampled set of references, the governess was completely unable to cope with Elise Durwent. She taught her (among other things) decorum and French. Her pupil was openly irreverent about the first; and when the governess, after the time-honoured method, produced an endless vista of exceptions to the rule in

French grammar, the girl balked. She was willing to compromise on *Avoir*, but mutinied outright at the ramifications of *Etre*.

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Seeing that the child was making poor progress, and as it was out of the question to dismiss a governess who had been entrusted with the three daughters of the Duchess of Dulworth, Lady Durwent sent for reinforcement in the person of the organist of their church, and bade him teach Elise the art of the piano. With the dull lack of vision belonging to men of his type, he failed to recognise the spirit of music lying in her breast, merely waiting the call to spring into life. He knew that her home was one where music was unheard, and his method of unfolding to the girl the most spiritual and fundamental of all the arts was to give her SCALES. He was a kindly, well-intentioned fellow, and would not willingly have hurt a sparrow; but he took a nature doomed to suffer for lack of self-expression, and succeeded in walling up the great river of music which might have given her what she lacked. He hid the edifice and offered her scaffolding—then wondered.

II.

Elise was consistent in few things, but her love for Richard, the youngest of the family, was of a depth and a mature tenderness that never varied. Doomed to an insufficient will-power and an easy, plastic nature that lent itself readily to the abbreviation 'Dick,' he quickly succumbed to his fiery-tinted sister, and became a willing dupe in all her escapades.

At her order he turned the hose on the head-gardener; when told to put mucilage on the rector's chair at dinner, he merely asked for the pot. On six different occasions she offered him soap, telling him it was toffy, and each time he bit of it generously and without suspicion. Every one else in the house represented law and order to him—Elise was the spirit of outlawry, and he her slave. She taught him a dance of her own invention entitled 'The Devil and the Maiden' (with a certain inconsistency casting him as the maiden and herself as the Devil), and frequently, when ordered to go to bed, they would descend to the servants' quarters and perform it to the great delight of the family retainers.

A favourite haunt of theirs was the stables, where they would persuade the grooms to place them on their father's chargers; and they were frequent visitors at feeding-time, taking a never-ending delight in the gourmandism of the whinnying beasts, and finding particular joy in acquiring the language and the mannerisms of the stablemen, which they would reserve for, and solemnly use at, the next gathering of the neighbouring gentry.

When Elise was ten and Dick seven, she read him highwaymen's tales until his large blue eyes almost escaped from their sockets. It was at the finish of one of these narratives of derring-do that she whispered temptation into his ear, with the result that they bided their opportunity, and, when the one groom on duty was asleep, repaired to the stables armed with a loaded shot-gun. After herculean efforts they succeeded in

harnessing Lord Durwent's famous hunter with the saddle back to front, the curb-bit choking the horse's throat, the brow-band tightly strapped around the poor beast's nostrils, the surcingle trailing in the dust.

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With improvised masks over their faces, they mounted the steed and set out for adventure, the horse seeming to comprehend its strange burden and stepping as lightly as its tortures would permit, while the saddle slid cheerfully about its back, threatening any moment to roll the desperados on to the road.

They had just emerged from the estate into the public highway, when a passing butcher's cart stopped their progress. The younger Durwent, who had been mastering the art of retaining his seat while his steed was in motion, was unprepared for its cessation, and promptly overbalanced over the horse's shoulder, reaching the road head first, and discharging a couple of pellets from the shotgun into a fleshy part of the butcher-boy's anatomy.

The groom was dismissed; the butcher-boy received ten pounds; Richard (when it was certain that concussion of the brain was not going to materialise) was soundly whipped; and Elise was banished for forty-eight hours to her room, issuing with a carefully concocted plan to waylay the rector coming from church, steal the collection, and purchase with the ill-gotten gains the sole proprietary interests in the village sweet-shop.

There is little doubt but that the *coup* would have been attempted had not Lord Durwent decided that the influence of his sister was not good for Dick, and sent him to a preparatory school at Bexhill-on-Sea, there to imbibe sea-air and some little learning, and await his entrance into Eton.

Robbed of her brother's stimulating loyalty, Elise relapsed into a sulky obedience to her governess and her mother. To their puny vision it seemed that her attitude towards them was one of haughty aloofness, and everything possible was done to subdue her spirit. Being unable to see that the child was lonely, and too proud to admit her craving for sympathetic companionship, they tried to tame the thoroughbred as they would a mule.

Only when Dick returned for holidays would her petulant moods vanish, and in his company her old vitality sparkled like the noonday sun upon the ocean's surface. And if her affection for him knew no variation, his was no less true. The friendships and the adventures of school were forgotten in the comradeship of his sister as, over the fields of Roselawn or on the tennis-court, they would renew their childhood's hours. He taught her to throw a fly for trout, and she initiated him into the mysteries of answering the calls of birds in the woods. Mounted on a couple of ponies, they became familiar figures at the tenants' cottages, and though the spirit of outlawry mellowed with advancing years, Lady Durwent never saw them start away from the house without the uneasy feeling that there was more than a chance they would get into some mischief before they returned.

In the meantime the elder son was bringing credit to his ancestors and himself. His accent became a thing of perfection, nicely nuanced, and entirely free of any emphasis

or intensity that might rob it of its placid suggestion of good-breeding. His attitude towards the servants was one of pleasant dignity, and the tenantry all spoke of Master Malcolm as a fine young gentleman who would make a worthy ruler of Roselawn.

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Between him and Richard there was little love lost. The elder boy disapproved of his hoydenish sister, and sought at all times to shame her tempestuous nature by insistence on decorum in their relations. Richard, who invariably brought home adverse reports from school, could find no fault in his colourful sister, and blindly espoused her cause at all times.

On one occasion, when Malcolm had been more than usually censorious, Dick challenged him to a fight. They adjourned to the seclusion of a small plot of grass by a great oak, where the Etonian knocked Dick down five times in succession, afterwards escorting him to the cook, who placed raw beefsteak on his eyes.

It was characteristic of the worthy Richard that he bore his brother no malice whatever for the punishment. He had proposed the fight, conscious of the fact that he would be soundly beaten, but he was a bit of a Quixote—and a lady's name was involved.

And no nurse ever tended a wounded hero more tenderly than the little copper-haired creature of impulse who bathed the battered face of poor Dick. Wilful and rebellious as she was, there was in Elise a deep well of love for her brother that no other being could fathom. And it was not his loyalty alone that had inspired it. Her solitary life had quickened her perceptive powers, and intuitively she knew that, in the years before him, her weak-willed, buoyant-natured brother would be unable to meet the cross-currents of his destiny and maintain a steady course.

But he thought it was because of his swollen eyes that she cried.

CHAPTER III.

ABOUT A TOWN HOUSE.

I.

It was perhaps not inconsistent with the character of Lady Durwent that, although she had striven to secure the guiding of Malcolm's development, she should find herself totally devoid of any plan for the training of a daughter.

Vaguely—and in this she mirrored thousands of other mothers—there was a hope in her heart that Elise would grow up pretty, virtuous, amiable, and would eventually marry well. It did not concern her that the girl was permeated with individuality, that the temperament of an artist lay behind the changing eyes in that restless, graceful figure. She could not see that her daughter had a delicate, wilful personality, which would rebel increasingly against the monotony of a social regime that planned the careers of its sons before they were born, and offered its daughters a mere incoherency of good intentions.

Full of the swift imaginativeness which makes the feminine contribution to life so much a thing of charm and colour, Elise pursued the paths which Youth has for its own—those wonderful streets of fantasy that end with adolescence in Society's ugly fields of sign-posts.

Lacking the companionship of others of a similar age, she wove her own conception of life, and dreamed of a world actuated by quick and generous emotions. With every pulsing beat of the warm blood coursing through her veins she demanded in her girl's mind that the world in which her many-sided self had been placed should yield the wines to satisfy the subtle shades of thirst produced by her insistent individuality.

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And the world offered her sign-posts. This must you do and thus must you talk; hither shall you go and here remain: these are the Arts with which you may enjoy a very slight acquaintance, but do not aspire to genuine accomplishment—leave that to common people; be lady-like, be calm and reserved; behold your brothers, how they swank!—but they are men, and this is England; desire nought but the protected privileges of your class, and in good season some youth of the same social stratum as yourself will marry you, and, lo! in place of being a daughter in a landed gentleman's house, you will be a wife.

Into this little world of a kind-hearted, chivalrous aristocracy (whose greatest fault was their ignorance of the fact that the smallest upheaval in humanitarianism, no matter what distance away, registers on the seismograph of human destiny the world over) Elise Durwent found her path laid. Increasingly resentful, she trod it until she was fourteen years of age, when her mother, who had long been bored with country life, made an important decision—and purchased a town house.

Having done this, Lady Durwent sent her daughter to a convent, a move which enabled her to get rid of the governess discreetly, and left her without family cares at all, as both boys were now at school. Unencumbered, therefore, she said *au revoir* to Roselawn, and set her compass for No. 8 Chelmsford Gardens, London.

II.

Chelmsford Gardens is a row of dignified houses on Oxford Street—yet not on Oxford Street. A miniature park, some forty feet in depth, acts as a buffer-state between the street itself and the little group of town houses. It is an oasis in the great plains of London's dingy dwelling-places, a spot where the owners are rarely seen unless the season is at its height, when gaily cloaked women and stiff-bosomed men emerge at theatre-hour and are driven to the opera. Throughout the day the Gardens (probably so styled on account of the complete absence of horticultural embellishments) are as silent as the tomb; there is no sign of life except in the mornings, when a solemn butler or a uniformed parlour-maid appears for a moment at the door like some creature of the sea coming up for air, then unobtrusively retires.

No. 8 was exactly like its neighbours, consisting of an exterior boasting a huge oak door, with cold, stone steps leading up to it, and an interior composed of rooms with very high ceilings, an insufficient and uncomfortable supply of furniture, large pictures and small grates, terrific beds and meagre chairs, and a general air of so much marble and bare floor that one could almost imagine that house-cleaning could be accomplished by turning on the hose.

After Lady Durwent had taken possession she sent for her husband, but that gentleman reminded her that he was much happier at Roselawn, though he would be glad if she

would keep a room for him when business at the 'House' or with his lawyers necessitated his presence in town. Unhampered, therefore, by a husband, Lady Durwent prepared to invade London Society, only to receive a shock at the very opening of the campaign.

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The Ironmonger had preceded her!

It is one of the tragedies of the *elite* that even peers are not equal. The law of class distinction, that amazing doctrine of timidity, penetrated even the oak door of 8 Chelmsford Gardens. The Ironmonger's daughter found that being the daughter of a man who had made an honest living rendered her socially the unequal of the daughters of men who, acting on a free translation of 'The earth is the Lord's,' had done nothing but inherit unearned substance.

Then there was her cheerfulness, and the menacing voice!

Turning from the aloofness of the exclusive, Lady Durwent thought of taking in famous performing Lions and feeding them. Unfortunately the market was too brisk, and the only Lion she could get was an Italian tenor from Covent Garden, who refused to roar, but left a poignant memory of garlic.

It was then that a brilliant idea entered her brain. Lady Durwent decided to cultivate *unusual* people.

No longer would she batter at oak doors that refused to open; no more would she dangle morsels of food in front of overfed Lions. She would create a little Kingdom of remarkable people—not those acclaimed great by the mealy mob, but those whose genius was of so rare and subtle a growth that ordinary eyes could not detect it at all. Her only fear was that she might be unable to discover a sufficient number to create a really satisfactory *clientele*.

But she reckoned without her London.

For every composer in the Metropolis who is trying to translate the music of the spheres, there are a dozen who can only voice the discordant jumble of their minds or ask the world to listen to the hollow echo of their creative vacuum. For every artist striving to catch some beauty of nature that he may revisualise it on canvas, there are a score whose eyes can only cling to the malformation of existence. For every writer toiling in the quiet hours to touch some poor, dumb heart-strings, or to open unseeing eyes to the joy of life, there are many whose gaze is never lifted from the gutter, so that, when they write, it is of the slime and the filth that they have smelt, crying to the world that the blue of the skies and the beauty of a rose are things engendered of sentimental minds unable to see the real, the vital things of life.

To this community of *poseurs* Lady Durwent jingled her town house and her title—and the response was instantaneous. She became the hostess of a series of dinner-parties which gradually made her the subject of paragraphs in the chatty columns of the press, and of whole chapters in the gossip of London's refined circles.

Her natural cheerfulness expanded like a sunflower, and when her son Malcolm secured a commission in the —th Hussars, her triumph was complete. Even the staggering news that Dick had been taken away from Eton to avoid expulsion for drunkenness proved only a momentary cloud on the broad horizon of her contentment.

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When she was nineteen years of age Elise came to live with her mother, and as the fiery beauty of the child had mellowed into a sort of smouldering charm that owed something to the mystic atmosphere of convent life, Lady Durwent felt that an ally of importance had entered the arena.

Thus four years passed, and in 1913 (had peeresses been in the habit of taking inventories) Lady Durwent could have issued a statement somewhat as follows:

ASSETS.

1 Husband; a Peer. 1 Son; aged twenty-five; decently popular with his regiment. 1 Daughter; marriageable; aged twenty-three. 1 Town House. 1 Country Estate. The goodwill of numerous *unusual* people, and the envy of a lot of minor Peeresses.

LIABILITIES.

1 Son; aged twenty; at Cambridge; in perpetual trouble, and would have been rusticated ere now had he not been the son of a lord. 1 Ironmonger.

* * * * *

'My dear,' said Lady Durwent, glancing at her daughter, who was reading a novel, 'hadn't you better go and dress?'

'Is there a dinner-party to-night?' asked the girl without looking up.

'Of course, Elise. Have you forgotten that Mr. Selwyn of New York will be here?'

'Is he as tedious as Stackton Dunckley?'

Lady Durwent frowned with vexation. 'My dear,' she said, 'you are very trying.'

CHAPTER IV.

PROLOGUE TO A DINNER-PARTY.

I.

Even *unusual* dinner-parties begin like ordinary ones. There is the discomfiture of the guest who arrives first, subjected to his hostess's reassurances that he is not really early. After what seems an interminable length of time, during which a score of conversational topics are broached, and both hostess and guest are reduced to a state bordering on mutual animosity, the remainder of the party arrive *en masse*, as if by



collusion. The butler (who likes to chew the cud of reflection between the announcements) is openly pained, while the distracted hostess must manage the introductions, and, as friendships are begun or enmities renewed, endeavour to initiate the new-comer into the subject of conversation immediately preceding his or her entrance. As the good woman's subconscious mind is in the kitchen, and as she is constantly interrupted by the necessity of greeting new arrivals, she usually succeeds in mystifying every one, and creating that atmosphere of 'nerves' so familiar to denizens of the best sets.

But we had almost forgotten—there is always one guest who is late.

The fateful hour mentioned in the dinner invitation arrives, strikes, and floats down the mists to the eerie catacombs of the Past. The hostess knows that the cook, with arms akimbo, is breathing rebellion, but tries to blot out the awful vision by an extra spurt of hollow gaiety.

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Ten minutes pass.

Conversation flags. The portly bachelor who lives at his club wonders why he didn't have a chop before he came. His fellow-diners try to refrain from the topic, but it is as hopeless as trying to talk to an ex-convict without mentioning jails. Finally, in an abandon of desperation, they all turn inquiringly to the hostess, who, affecting an ease of manner, says pleasantly, 'Dear me! What *can* have detained Mr. So-and-so? I wonder if we had better go in without him?'

And then he arrives—the jackass—and in a sublime good-humour! He tells some cock-and-bull story about his taxi breaking down, and actually seems to think he's done rather a smart thing in turning up at all. In short, he brings in such an air of geniality and self-appreciation that the guest who arrived first has more than a notion to 'have him out' and send him to a region where dinner-parties are popularly supposed to be unknown.

No—the lot of a lady who gives dinners is not a happy one.

II.

On this Friday night of November in the year 1918, Lady Durwent sat by the fire in the drawing-room and discussed music with Norton Pyford. Having sacrificed his watch on the altar of art, he had been compelled to rely on appetite, with the result that he arrived just as eight was striking. Lady Durwent did her best, but as she knew nothing of music, nor he anything of anything else, the situation was becoming difficult, when the entrance of Madame Carlotti brought welcome relief.

That lady was wearing a yellow gown rather too tight for her, so that her somewhat ample flesh slightly overran the confines of the garment, giving the effect that she had grown up in the thing and was unable to shed it. This impression was heightened by a mannerism, repeated frequently during the evening, of grasping her very low bodice with her hands, exhausting her breath, pulling the bodice up, and compressing herself into it. It was an innocent enough performance, but invariably left the feeling that she should retire upstairs to do it.

She wore a yellow flower in her hair; her stockings were a rich yellow with a superimposed pattern like strands of fine gold, and her dainty feet were enclosed in a pair of bronzed shoes. As her lips were heavily carmined and her eyes brilliantly dark, Madame Carlotti's was a distinctly illuminating presence.

But the sunniness of her entrance was dimmed by the lack of audience. She had not expended her genius to throw it away on a strangely dressed young man whose hair fell straight and black over a large collar that had earned a holiday some days before, and

whose velvet jacket was minus two buttons, the threads of which could still be seen, out-stretched, appealing for their owners' return.

'Lucia, my dear,' said Lady Durwent, just like an ordinary hostess, 'you look' (*sotto voce*) 'simply wonderful! I think you have met Mr. Norton Pyford, *the* Norton Pyford, haven't you?'



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'Hah d' ye do?' said the Pyford.

'Chairmed,' minced Madame Carlotti.

'Lucia, take this chair by the fire. You must be frozen.'

'Ah, *grazie*, Sybil. What a perfectly meeserable climate you have in this London!'

'Just what I tha-a-y,' bleated Mr. Pyford, sinking into his chair in an apparently boneless heap. 'The other night, at a fella's thupper-party, I'——

'MRS. LE ROY JENNINGS.'

The resolutionist swept into the room clothed in black disorder, much as if she had started to dress in a fit of temper and had been overtaken by a gale.

She knew Madame Carlotti.—She did *not* know Mr. Norton Pyford, *the* Norton Pyford.—She was glad to know him.

He muttered something inarticulate, and glancing at the ring of women about him, shrank into his clothes until his collar almost hid his lower lip.

'We were discussing,' said Lady Durwent, vaguely relying on the last sounds retained by her ear—'discussing—suppers.'

'Don't believe in 'em,' said Mrs. Jennings sternly; 'three regular meals—tea at eleven and four, and hot milk with a bit of ginger in it before retiring—are sufficient for any one.'

The Italian took in the forceful figure of the New Woman and smiled with her teeth.

'Madame Jennings,' she said, 'perhaps finds sufficient distraction in just ordinary life—and *una tazza di te*. But we who are not so—*comment dirai-je?*—so self-complete must rely on frivolous things like *una buona cena*.'

'Don't believe in 'em,' reiterated the resolutionist; 'three regular'——

'Ah, *c'est mauvais*,' gesticulated Madame Carlotti, who alternated between Italian and French phrases in London, and kept her best English for the Continent.

'Mr. Pyford,' put in Lady Durwent, descrying a storm on the yellow and black horizon, 'has just written'——

'MR. H. STACKTON DUNCKLEY,' announced the butler, with an appropriate note of *mysterioso*. Lady Durwent summoned a blush, and rose to meet the ardent author, who

was dressed in a characterless evening suit with disconsolate legs, and whose chin was heavily powdered to conceal the stubble of beard grown since morning.

'You have come,' she said softly and dramatically.

'I have,' said the writer, bowing low over her hand.

'I rely on you to be discreet,' she murmured.

'Eh?'

'Discreet,' she coquetted. 'People will talk.'

'Let them,' said Mr. Dunckley earnestly.

'Madame Carlotti, I think you know Mr. Dunckley—H. Stackton Dunckley—and you too, Mrs. Le Roy Jennings; you clever people ought to be friends at once.—And I want you to meet Mr. Pyford, *the*'——

'Hah d'ye do?'

'How are you?'

'Ro—splendid, thanks.'

'We were discussing,' said Lady Durwent—'discussing'——

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'MR. AUSTIN SELWYN.'

Every one turned to see the guest of the evening, as the hostess rose to meet him. He was a young man on the right side of thirty, with dark, closely brushed hair that thinned slightly at the temples. He was clean-shaven, and his light-brown eyes lay in a smiling setting of quizzical good-humour. He was of rather more than medium height, with well-poised shoulders; and though a firmness of lips and jaw gave a suggestion of hardness, the engaging youthfulness of his eyes and a hearty smile that crinkled the bridge of his nose left a pleasant impression of frankness, mingled with a certain *naivete*.

'Mr. Selwyn,' said Lady Durwent, 'I knew you would want to meet some of London's—I should say some of England's—accomplished people.'

'*Oime!* I am afraid that obleeterates me,' smiled Madame Carlotti, whose social charm was rising fast at the sight of a good-looking stranger.

'No, indeed, Lucia,' effused the hostess. 'To be the personification of Italy in dreary London is more than an accomplishment; it—it'——

'It is a boon,' said Dunckley, coming to the aid of his floundering loved one.

'Exactly,' said Lady Durwent with a sigh of relief. 'Madame Lucia Carlotti—Mr. Selwyn of New York.'

'*Buona sera, signora.*'

'*Buona sera, signore.*'

He stooped low and pressed a light kiss on the Neapolitan's hand, thus taking the most direct route obtainable by an Anglo-Saxon to the good graces of a woman of Italy.

'How well you speak Italian!' cooed Madame Carlotti; 'so—like one of us.'

The American bowed. It was rarely he achieved a reputation with so little effort.

The remaining introductions were effected; the clock struck eight-thirty; and there followed an awkward silence, born of an absolute unanimity of thought.

'Of course, you two authors,' said Lady Durwent, forcing a smile, 'knew of each other, anyway. It's like asking H. G. Wells if he ever heard of Mark Twain.'

The smile in the American's eyes widened. 'Lady Durwent flatters me,' he said. 'I am not widely known in my own country, and can hardly expect that you should know of me on this side of the Atlantic.'

‘What,’ said Mr. Dunckley—‘what does New York think of “Precipitate Thoughts”?’

The American considered quickly. He wished that in conversation, as well as in writing, people would use inverted commas.

‘Whose precipitate thoughts?’ he ventured.

‘Mine,’ said H. S. D., with ill-concealed importance.

‘Oh yes, of course,’ said Selwyn, wondering how any one so stationary as the other could project anything precipitate. ‘New York was keenly interested.’

‘Ah,’ said the English author benignly, ‘it is satisfactory to hear that. Of course, the great difference between there and here is that in New York one impresses: in London one is impressed.’

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An ominous silence followed this epigrammatic wisdom (which Dunckley had just heard from the lips of a poet who had succeeded in writing both an American and an English publishing house into bankruptcy) while the various members of the group pursued their trains of thought along the devious routes of their different mentalities.

'Dear me!' said Lady Durwent anxiously, 'what *can* have detained'——

'MR. JOHNSTON SMYTH.'

With a jerky action of the knees, the futurist briskly entered the room with all the easy confidence of a famous comedian following on the heels of a chorus announcing his arrival. He looked particularly long and cadaverous in an abrupt, sporting-artistic, blue jacket, with sleeves so short that when he waved his arms (which he did with almost every sentence) he reminded one of a juggler requesting his audience to notice that he has absolutely nothing up his sleeves.

'Lady Durwent,' he exclaimed, striking an attitude and looking over his Cyrano-like nose with his right eye as if he were aligning the sights of a musket, 'don't tell me I'm late. If you do, I shall never speak to the Duke of Earldub again—never!'

As he refused to move an inch until assured that he was not late, and as Lady Durwent was anxious to proceed with the main business of the evening (to say nothing of maintaining the friendship between Smyth and the Duke of Earldub, whose part in his dilatory arrival was rather vague), she granted the necessary pardon, whereupon he straightened his legs and winked long and solemnly at Norton Pyford.

'Good gracious!' cried Lady Durwent just as she was about to suggest an exodus to the dining-room, 'I had forgotten all about Elise!' She hurriedly rang the bell, which was answered by the butler. 'Send word to Miss Elise that'——

'Milady,' said the servitor, addressing an arc-light just over the door, 'she is descending the stairs this very minute.'

III.

There are moments when women appear at their best—fleeting moments that cannot be sustained. Sometimes it is a tremor of timidity that lends a fawn-like gentleness to their movements, and a frightened wistfulness to the eye, too subtle a thing of beauty to bear analysis in words. A sudden triumph, noble or ignoble, the conquering of a rival, the sound of a lover's voice, will flush the cheek and liberate the whole radiancy of a woman's being. Such moments come in every woman's life, when the quick impulse of emotion achieves an unconscious beauty that defies the ordinary standards of critical appreciation. It is that little instant that is the torch to light a lover's worship or a poet's

verses—to send strange yearnings into a young man's breast and set an old man's memory philandering with the distant past.

It was such a moment for Elise Durwent as she stood in the doorway, the overhanging arc touching her hair and shoulders with the high lights of some master's painting. Conversation ceased, and in every face there was the universal homage paid to beauty, even though it be tendered grudgingly.

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She was dressed in a gown of deep blue, that colour which renders its ageless tribute to the fair women of the world, and from her shoulders there hung a black net that subdued the colour of the gown and left the graceful suggestion of a cape.

'I am so sorry, mother,' she said. 'I was reading, and quite forgot the time.'

Austin Selwyn stroked the back of his head, then thrust both hands into his pockets. There was something in the girl's appearance and the contralto timbre of her voice that left him with the odd sensation that she was out of place in the room—that her real sphere was in the expanse of unbridled nature. He could see her wealth of copper-hued hair blown by the western wind; he could picture her joining in Spring's minuet of swaying rose-bushes.

'My daughter Elise—Mr. Austin Selwyn.'

He bowed as the words penetrated his thoughts; then, glancing up, he felt a sudden contraction of disappointment.

The girl's eyes had narrowed, and were no longer sparkling, but steady—almost to the point of dullness; her lower lip was full, and too scarlet for the upper one, which chided its sister for the wanton admission of slumbering passion; and her voice was abrupt. He almost cried out '*Legato, legato,*' to coax back the lilt which had caressed his ear a moment before.

He was dimly conscious that dinner was announced, and that amidst a babel of tongues he was being led by, or was leading, Lady Durwent into the dining-room. He heard the resolutionist and Dunckley both talking at once, and felt the melancholy languor of Pyford floating like incense through the air. He had an obscure recollection of sitting down next to his hostess; that the table, like Arthur's, was a round one; that Johnston Smyth was seated beside Miss Durwent and was ogling one of Lady Durwent's maids. Then he remembered that he had heard some voice in his ear for several minutes past, and, growing curious, took a surreptitious glance, to find that it belonged to Madame Carlotti.

'Meester Selwyn,' she said indignantly, 'you have not been listening to me.'

'That is true, signora,' he said; 'but I have been thinking of you.'

'Yes?' she purred, leaning towards him. 'What did you thought?'

He turned squarely to her in an impassioned counterfeit of frankness. 'Are all Italian women beautiful?' he murmured.

'Hush-sh!' Her hand touched his beneath the table, reprovngly and tenderly.

‘Mr. Selwyn,’ said Lady Durwent, ‘you have not tasted your soup.’

CHAPTER V.

THE OLYMPIANS THUNDER.

I.

Lady Durwent was blessed in the possession of a cook whose artistry was beyond question, if the same could not be said of the guests to whom she so frequently ministered. She was a descendant of the French, that race which makes everything tend towards development of the soul, and consequently looks upon a meal as something of a sacrament. She prepared a dinner with a balance of contrast and climax that a composer might show in writing a tone poem.

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On this eventful evening, therefore, the dinner-party, stimulated by her art and by potent wines (gazing with long-necked dignity at the autocratic whisky-decanter), rapidly assumed a crescendo and an accelerando—the two things for which a hostess listens.

H. Stackton Dunckley had held the resolutionist in a duel of language—a combat with broadswords—and honours were fairly even. The short-sleeved Johnston Smyth had waged futurist warfare against the modernist Pyford, while the Honourable Miss Durwent sat helplessly between them, with as little chance of asserting her rights as the Dormouse at the Mad Hatter's tea-party. The American had held his own in badinage with the daughter of Italy on one side and his hostess on the other, the latter, however, being too skilled in entertaining to do more than murmur a few encouragements to the spontaneity that so palpably existed.

'Let me see,' said Lady Durwent as the meal came to a close and the butler looked questioningly at her. 'Shall we'—she opened the caverns of her throat, producing a volume that instantly silenced every one—'SHALL WE HAVE COFFEE IN HERE OR IN THE DRAWING-ROOM? I suppose you gentlemen, as usual, want to chat over your port and cigars alone.'

H. Stackton Dunckley protested that absence from the ladies, even for so short a time, would completely spoil his evening—receiving in reward a languorous glance from Lady Durwent. Johnston Smyth, who had done more than ample justice to the wines, offered to 'pink' at fifty yards any man who would consider the proposition for a moment. Only Norton Pyford, in a sort of befuddled gallantry, suggested that the ladies might have sentimental confidences to exchange, and leered amorously at Elise Durwent.

'Well,' said Lady Durwent, 'I am sure we are all curious to hear what Mr. Selwyn thinks of England, so I think we shall have coffee here. Is it agreeable to every one?'

Unanimous approval greeted the proposal, and, at a sign from the hostess, cigarettes, cigars, and coffee made their appearance, with the corresponding niceties of 'Just one, please,' 'Well, perhaps a cigarette might be enjoyable,' 'I know men like a cigar,' 'After you, old man,' and all those various utterances which tickle the ear, creating in the speaker's breast the feeling of saying the right thing and doing it rather well.

Throughout the dinner the daughter of the house had sat practically without a remark, and even when chorus effects were achieved by the rest, remained with almost immobile features, merely glancing from one to another, momentarily interested or openly bored. Several times the American had looked furtively at the arresting face, marred by too apparent mental resentment, but the barricade of Johnston Smyth's angular personality had been too powerful for him to surmount with anything but the most superficial persiflage.

He had watched her take a cigarette, accepting a light from Smyth, who surrounded the action with a ludicrous dignity, when she looked up and met his eyes.

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'Mr. Selwyn,' she said, speaking with the same rapidity of phrasing that had both held and exasperated him before, 'we are all waiting for the verdict of the Man from America.'

'Over there,' he smiled, 'it is customary to take evidence before giving a verdict.'

'Good,' boomed the resolutionist; 'very good!'

'Then,' said Lady Durwent, 'we seven shall constitute a jury.'

'Order!' Johnston Smyth rose to his feet and hammered the table with a bottle. 'Oyez, oyez, you hereby swear that you shall well and truly try'——

'Can't,' said Norton Pyford, pulling himself up; 'I'm prejudiced.'

'For or against?'

'Against the culprit.'

'My discordant friend,' said Smyth, producing a second bottle from an unsuspected source and making it disappear mysteriously, 'means that he is prejudiced against England. Am I right, sir?'

'Not exactly,' drawled the composer. 'I don't mind England—but I think the English are awful.'

'That is a nice point,' said Lady Durwent.

'Ah,' broke in Madame Carlotti, 'but, much as I detest the English, I hate England more. *Nom de Dieu!* I—a daughter of the Mediterranean, where the sun ees so rarely a stranger, and the sky and the water it ees always blue. In Italy one lives because she ees alive—it ees sufficient. Here it ees always gray, gray—always g-r-ray. When the sun comes—*sacramento!* he sees his mistake and goes queek away. Ah, Signor Selwyn, it ees *desolant* that I am compelled to live here.'

A roar of unfeeling laughter greeting her familiar complaint, Madame Carlotti took a hitch in her gown and reimprisoned some of her person which had escaped from custody.

'Then,' said Johnston Smyth, 'if we are all of a mind, there is no need to have a trial. You have all seen the accusation in Mr. Selwyn's eye, you have considered the unbiassed evidence of the lovely Carlotti'——

'But jurors can't give evidence,' muttered Mr. Dunckley.

'My dear sir, I know she can't, but she did,' said Smyth triumphantly. 'Oyez, oyez—all in favour'——

'But,' interrupted the American, 'are we not to hear any one for the defence?'

'No,' said Smyth, who was thoroughly happy as a self-constituted master of ceremonies. 'No one would accept the brief.'

'Then,' said Selwyn, 'I apply for the post of counsel for the defence, for in the limited time I have been in your country I have seen much that appeals to me.'

'Of course, it is a well-known fact,' said Dunckley sententiously, 'that American humour relies on exaggeration.'

'No, no,' said Johnston Smyth, hushing the voices with a *pianissimo* movement of his hands, 'it is not humour on Mr. Selwyn's part, but gratitude. In return for Christopher Columbus discovering America, this gentleman is going to repay the debt of the New World to the Old by discovering England.'

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'SHALL WE HAVE SOME PORT?' said Lady Durwent, opening the sluice-gates of her vocal production.

II.

'Speaking of America,' said Mrs. Le Roy Jennings a few minutes later, Johnston Smyth having sat down in order to do justice to the wine of Portugal, 'she is in the very vanguard of progress. Women have achieved an independence there unknown elsewhere in the world.'

'That is true,' said Lady Durwent, who knew nothing whatever about it.

'You are right,' said Madame Carlotti.

'The other day in Paris I heard an American woman whistling. "Have you lost your dog?" I asked. "No," she says; "my husband."'

A chorus of approval greeted this malicious sally, followed by the retailing of various anti-American anecdotes that made up in sting what they lacked in delicacy. These showed no signs of abatement until, slightly nettled, Selwyn put in an oar.

'I had hoped,' he said, 'to find some illuminating points in the conversation to-night. But it seems as if you treat not only your own country in a spirit of caricature, but mine as well. We are a very young race, and we have the faults of youth; but, then, youth always has a future. It was a sort of post-graduate course to come to England and Europe to absorb some of the lore—or isn't it one of your poets who speaks of "The Spoils of Time"? Your past is so rich that naturally we look to you and Europe for the fundamental things of civilisation.'

'And what have you found?' asked Elise Durwent.

'Well,' said the American, 'much to admire—and much to deplore.'

'In other words,' said Johnston Smyth, 'he has been to Edinburgh and to London.'

'That is so,' smiled Selwyn; 'but I don't'——

'All people,' said Smyth serenely, 'admire Edinburgh, but abuse London. Over here a man will jest about his religion or even his grandfather, but never about Edinburgh. On the other hand, as every one damns London, and as an Englishman is never so happy as when he has something on hand to grouse about, London's population has grown to some eight millions.'

'I think, Mr. Smyth,' said Lady Durwent, 'that you are as much a philosopher as a painter.'

'Lady Durwent,' said the futurist, 'all art is philosophy—even old Pyford's here, though his amounts almost to theology.'

For a few minutes the conversation drifted in inconsequential channels until H. Stackton Dunckley becalmed everything with a laborious dissertation on the lack of literary taste in both England and America. Selwyn took the opportunity of studying the elusive beauty of Elise Durwent, which seemed to provoke the eye to admiration, yet fade into imperfection under a prolonged searching. Pyford grew sleepy, and even Smyth appeared a little melancholy, when, on a signal from Lady Durwent, brandy and liqueurs were served, checking Mr. Dunckley's oratory and reviving every one's spirits noticeably.

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'Mr. Selwyn,' said Mrs. Le Roy Jennings in her best manner, 'after you have subjected England to a microscopic examination for a sufficient length of time, you will discover that we are a nation of parasites.'

'I would rather you said that than I, Mrs. Jennings.'

'Parasites,' reiterated the speaker, fixing an eye on some point on the wall directly between Selwyn and the hostess. 'We sprawl over the world—why? To develop resources? No! It is to reap the natural growth of others' endeavours? Yes! The Englishman never creates. He is the world's greatest brigand'——

'Too thoroughly masculine to be really cruel,' chimed in the irrepressible Smyth.

'Brigand,' repeated Mrs. Jennings, not deigning the artist so much as a glance, 'skimming the earth of its surface riches, and rendering every place the poorer for his being there.'

There was an awesome silence, which no one seemed courageous enough to break.

'Yes,' said H. Stackton Dunckley finally, 'and in addition England is decadent.'

'But, Mr. Selwyn'—again the American heard the voice of Elise Durwent, that quick intensity of speech that always left a moment of startled silence in its wake—'you have discovered something admirable about England. Won't you tell us what it is?'

'Well,' he said, smiling, 'for one thing, no one can deny the beauty of your women.'

'All decadent nations,' said H. Stackton Dunckley, 'produce beautiful women—it is one of the surest signs that they are going to pieces. The Romans did at the last, and Rome and England are parallel cases. As Mrs. Le Roy Jennings says, they are parasitic nations. What did the Romans add to Greek art? The Greeks had this'—he made an elliptical movement of his hands—'the Romans did that to it'—he described a circle, then shrugged his shoulders, convinced that he had said something crushing.

'So you think English women beautiful, Mr. Selwyn?' said Lady Durwent, trying to retrieve the conversation from the slough of her innamorato's ponderosity.

'Undoubtedly,' answered the American warmly. 'It is no doubt the out-of-door life they lead, and I suppose the moist climate has something to do with their wonderful complexions, but they are womanly as well, and their voices are lovely.'

'I smell a rat,' said Smyth, who had in his mouth an unlit cigarette, which had fastened itself to his lip and bobbed up and down with his speech, like a miniature baton. 'When a man says a woman's voice is sweet, it means that she has bored him; that what she

has to say interests him so little that he turns to contemplation of her voice. This American is a devilish cute fellow.'

A babble of voices took up the charge and demanded immediate explanation.

'To a certain extent,' said Selwyn stoutly, 'there is much in what Mr. Smyth says.'

'List to the pigmy praising the oracle,' chanted the artist.

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'I do not think,' went on the American, 'that the English girls I have met are as bright or as clever as the cultured young women of the continent of America. In other words, with all her natural charm, the English girl does not edit herself well.'

'In that,' said H. Stackton Dunckley, 'she reflects the breed. The Anglo-Saxon has an instinctive indifference to thought.'

'As soon as an Englishman thinks,' minced Madame Carlotti, 'he leaves England with its *cattivo* climate and goes to the Colonies. *C'est pourquoi* the Empire ees so powerful—its brains are in the legs.'

'Come, come,' laughed Selwyn, 'is there no one here but me who can discover any merit in Old England?'

'Yes,' said Pyford gloomily; 'London is only seven hours from Paris.'

'Ah—*Parigi!*' ejaculated Madame Carlotti with the fervour born of the feeling in all Latin women that Paris is their spiritual capital.

'And yet,' said Selwyn, after a pause to see if Madame Carlotti's exuberance was going to develop any further, 'in literature, which I suppose is the natural art of the Anglo-Saxon temperament, we still look to you for the outstanding figures. With all our ability for writing short stories—and I think we are second only to the French in that—England still produces the foremost novelists. In the sustained effort required in the formation of a novel, England is yet first. Of course, musically, I think England is very near the bottom.'

'And yet,' said Johnston Smyth, 'we are the only people in the world candid enough to have a monument to our lack of taste.'

Every one looked at the artist, who stroked his left arm with the back of his right hand, like a barber sharpening a razor.

'In that part of London known as Kingsway,' he said, 'there is a beautiful building called "The London Opera House"! He thrust both hands out, palms upwards, as if the building itself rested on them. 'It stands in a commanding position, with statues of the great composers gazing from the roof at the passing proletariat emanating from the Strand. Inside it is luxuriously equipped, as bents the home of Opera.'

'Yes,' said the American, as the speaker paused.

Smyth produced a watch from nowhere in particular. 'It is just past ten,' he said. 'I am not sure whether it is Charlie Chaplin or Mary Pickford showing on the screen at this hour, at the London Opera House.'

A murmur of applause acknowledged the artist's well-planned climax. He looked about with a satisfied smile, then replaced the watch with the air of pocketing both it and the subject.

'But—you have opera?' said Selwyn wonderingly.

'Of course,' said Smyth; 'and where? In a vegetable-market. In Covent Garden. Yet England has been accused of hypocrisy! What other nation is so candid?'

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By one of those unspoken understandings that are the rules of mobs and dinner-parties, it was felt that the topic was ceasing to be exhaustive and becoming exhausting. Lady Durwent glanced, interrogatively about the table; Madame Carlotti took a hitch in her gown; Norton Pyford emptied his glass and sat pensively staring at it as if it had hardly done what he expected, but on the whole he felt inclined to forgive it; Johnston Smyth made a belated attempt to be sentimental with the Honourable Miss Durwent, whose lips, always at war with each other, merely parted in a smile that utterly failed to bring any sympathy from her eyes; Mrs. Le Roy Jennings took a last sip of coffee, and finding it quite cold, put it down with a gesture of finality.

‘Lady Durwent,’ said Austin Selwyn—and the quality of his voice was lighter and more musical than it had been—‘I suppose that a man who deliberately goes to a country to gather impressions lays himself open to the danger of being influenced by external things only. If I were to base my knowledge of England on what her people say of her, I think I should be justified in assuming that the century-old charge of her decadence is terribly true. Yet I claim to have something of an artist’s sensitiveness to undercurrents, and it seems to me that there is a strong instinct of race over here—perhaps I express myself clumsily—but I think there is an England which has far more depth to it than your artists and writers realise. For some reason you all seem to want to deny that; and when, as to-night, it is my privilege to meet some of this country’s expressionists, it appears that none has any intention of trying to reveal what is fine in your life as a people—you seek only to satirise, caricature, or damn altogether. If I believe my ears, there is nothing but stupidity and insularity in England. If I listen to my senses, to my subconscious mind, I feel that a great crisis would reveal that she is still the bed-rock of civilisation.’

Madame Carlotti raised her glass.

‘To America’s next ambassador to England!’ she cried.

III.

The momentous evening was drawing to a close.

Rain, in fitful gusts, had been besieging the windows, driven by an ill-tempered wind that blustered around the streets, darting up dark alleys, startling the sparks emerging from chimney-pots, roaring across the parks, slamming doors, and venting itself, every now and then, in an ill-natured howl.

Inside the refuge of No. 8 Chelmsford Gardens a fire threw its merry warmth over the large music-room, and did its best to offset the tearful misery of the November night.

Conversation had dwindled in energy with the closing hour of the affair, and seizing an auspicious moment, Norton Pyford had reached the piano, and for twenty minutes demonstrated the close relation of the chord of C Minor to the colour brown. Modernist music, acting on unusual souls as classical music on ordinary souls, stimulated the flagging conversational powers of the guests, and he was soon surrounded by a gesticulating group of dissenting or condoning critics.

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Selwyn noticed that Elise Durwent had not left her seat by the fire, and absenting himself from the harmonic debate, he took a chair by hers.

'You are pensive, Miss Durwent,' he said.

She smiled, with a slight suggestion of weariness, though her eyes had a softness he had not seen in them before.

'I am very dull company to-night,' she said, 'but ever since I was a child, rain beating against the windows has always made me dreamy. I suppose I am old-fashioned, but it is sweeter music to me than Mr. Pyford's new harmonies.'

He laughed, and leaning towards the fire, rubbed his hands meditatively. 'You must have found our talk wearisome at dinner,' he said.

'No,' she answered, 'it was not so bad as usual. You introduced a note of sincerity that had all the effect of a novelty.'

Her mannerism of swift and disjointed speech, which broke all her sentences into rapidly uttered phrases, again annoyed him. Though her voice was refined, it seemed to be acting at the behest of a whip-like brain, and she spoke as if desirous rather of provoking a retort than of establishing any sense of compatibility. Yet she was feminine—gloriously, delicately feminine. The finely moulded arms and the gracefulness of body, indicated rather than revealed beneath her blue gown, intrigued the eye and the senses, just as the swiftly spoken words challenged the brain and infused exasperation in the very midst of admiration. The complicated elements of the girl offered a peculiar fascination to the eternal instinct of study possessed by the young American author.

'Miss Durwent,' he said, 'if I was sincere to-night, it was because you encouraged me to be so.'

'But I said nothing.'

'Nevertheless, you were the inspiration.'

'I never knew a girl could accomplish so much by holding her tongue.'

A crash of 'Bravos' broke from the group around the piano; Pyford had just scored a point.

'You know,' resumed Selwyn thoughtfully, 'a man doesn't go to a dinner-party conscious of what he is going to say. It is the people he meets that produce ideas in him, many of which he had never thought of before.'

She tapped the ground with her foot, and looked smilingly at his serious face. 'It is the reverse with me,' she said. 'I go out to dinner full of ideas, and the people I meet inspire a silence in me of unsuspected depth.'

'May I smoke?' asked Selwyn, calling a halt in the verbal duel.

'Certainly; I'll join you. Don't smoke your own cigarettes—there are some right in front of you.'

He reached for a silver box, offered her a cigarette, and struck a match. As he leaned over her she raised her face to the light, and the blood mounted angrily to his head.

Though a man accustomed to dissect rather than obey his passions, he possessed that universal quality of man which demands the weakness of the feminine nature in the woman who interests him. He will satirise that failing; if he be a writer, it will serve as an endless theme for light cynicism. He will deplore that a woman's brains are so submerged by her emotions; but let him meet one reversely constituted, and he steers his course in another direction with all possible speed.

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Selwyn had come to her with a comfortable, after-dinner desire for a *tete-a-tete*. He expected flattering questions about his writings, and would have enjoyed talking about them; instead of which this English girl with the crimson colouring and the maddening eyes had coolly kept him at a distance with her rapier brain. He felt a sudden indignation at her sexlessness, and struck a match for his own cigarette with such energy that it broke in two.

'Miss Durwent,' he said suddenly, lighting another match, 'I want to see you again—soon.' He paused, astonished at his own abruptness, and an awkward smile expanded until it crinkled the very pinnacle of his nose.

'I like you when you look like that,' she said. 'It was just like my brother Dick when he fell off a horse. By the way, do you ride?'

'Yes,' he said, watching the cigarette-smoke curl towards the fireplace, 'though I prefer an amiable beast to a spirited one.'

'Good!' she said, so quickly that it seemed like the thrust of a sword in tierce. 'You have the same taste in horses as in women. Most men have.'

'Miss Durwent'—his face flushed angrily and his jaw stiffened—'I'll ride any horse you choose in England, and'——

'And break the heart of the most vixenish maiden in London! You are a real American, after all. What is it you say over there? "Shake!"'

She slapped her hand into his, and he held it in a strong grip.

'But you *will* let me see you again soon?'

'Certainly.' She withdrew her hand from his with a firmness that had neither censure nor coquetry in it, and the heightened colour of her cheeks subsided with the sparkle of her eyes.

'When?' he said.

'To-morrow morning, if you like. I shall have horses here at eleven, and we can ride in the Row, providing you will put up with anything so quiet as our cattle.'

'That is bully of you. I shall be here at eleven.'

'I thought all Americans used slang,' she said.

'You are the first English girl I have met,' he answered with extraordinary venom in his voice, 'who has not said "ripping."'

* * * * *

Twenty minutes later Austin Selwyn, unable to secure a taxi, tramped along Oxford Street towards his hotel. He had just reached the Circus when the malignant wind, hiding in ambush down Regent Street, rushed at him unawares and sent his hat roistering into the doorway of a store. With a frown, Selwyn stopped and stared at the truant.

‘Confound the wretched thing!’ he said.

CHAPTER VI.

A MORNING IN NOVEMBER.

I.

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Austin Selwyn rose from his bed and looked at Berners Street glistening in a sunlight that must have warmed the heart of Madame Carlotti herself. With a lazy pleasure in the process, he recalled the picture of Elise Durwent sitting in the dim shadows of the firelit room; he felt again the fragrance of her person as he leaned over her with the lighted match. On the canvas of his brain was thrown the rich colouring of the English girl, with the copper-hued luxury of hair and the eyes that seemed to steal some magic from the fire; and he saw again those warring lips, the crimson upper one chiding the passionate scarlet of its twin.

Idly, while enjoying the unusual dissipation of a pre-breakfast cigarette, he tried to imagine the course of incident and heredity that had produced her strange personality. That there was a bitterness somewhere in her disposition was obvious; but it certainly could not have come from the mother, who was the soul of contentment. He found himself speculating on the peculiar quality of personality, that strange thing which makes an individual something apart from others of his kind, that gift which singles out a girl of ordinary appearance and leaves one of flawless beauty still wagging her pretty head in the front row of the chorus. From that point he began to speculate on the loneliness of personality, which so often robs its owner of the cheery companionship of commonplace people.

On the whole, he regretted that he was going to see her again so soon. Her pertness, which had seemed fairly clever the previous night, would probably descend to triteness in the morning; he could even see her endeavouring to keep up the same exchange of short sentences. Bah! It was like a duel with toothpicks. The stolid respectability of Berners Street lent its aid to the conviction that the morning would hold nothing but anti-climax.

And he was poet enough to prefer an unfinished sonnet to one with an inartistic ending.

II.

Austin Selwyn was twenty-six—an age which has something in common with almost every one of the seven celebrated by Shakespeare. Like most men in their twenties, he had the character of a chameleon, and adapted himself to his surroundings with almost uncanny facility. At college he had been an ardent member of a dozen cliques, even falling under the egotism of the men who dabbled in Spiritualism, but a clarity of thought and a strain of Dutch ancestry kept his feet on the earth when the rest of him showed signs of soaring.

Some moderate wit had said of him at college that he was himself only twice a day—when he got up in the morning and when he went to bed at night. This Stevensonian theory was not quite true, for a chameleon does not cease to be a chameleon because it changes its colour.

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It was perhaps his susceptibility to the many vintages of existence that had impelled him to write, authors being more or less a natural result of the economic law of intake and output. As is the habit of most young writers, he wrote on various subjects, put enough material for a two-volume novel into a short story, and generally revelled in the prodigality of literary youth. He was prepared to be a social satirist, a chronicler of the Smart Set, a champion of the down-trodden masses, or a commercial essayist, according to the first public that showed appreciation of his work.

Although he had lived in Boston, that city which claims so close an affinity to ancient Athens (as a matter of fact, has it not been said that Athens is the Boston of Europe?), he was drawn to the great vortex of New York, that mighty capital of modernism which sucks the best brains of an entire continent. For some time he wrote beneath his own standard and with considerable success. Following the example of several successful New York authors, he plunged into a hectic portrayal of 'high' society, a set of people that makes one wonder as to the exact meaning of the adjective. For a short space he came under the influence of the studied Bohemianism of 'Greenwich Village,' and wrote deucedly clever things for the applause of the villagers, then sneered at American taste because people in Arkansas did not like his work. Still retaining his love of Greenwichery, he next succumbed to the money lure of the motion-picture industry, which offered to buy the picture-rights of his stories, provided he would introduce into them the elements which go to make up successful American films.

With the prospect of a bank president's income before him, he succeeded in writing his share of that form of American literature which has a certain love interest, almost obscured by a nasty sexual diagnosis, an element of comedy relief, and, above all, a passionate adherence to the craze of the moment—a work that fades from the mind with the closing of the book, as the memory of the author's name vanishes almost before the last sound of the earth dropped upon his coffin.

He knew that there were sincere *literati* writing of the abiding things that do not die with the passing of a season, but the clamour of commercialism drowned their voices. As though they were stocks upon an exchange, he heard the cries: 'Brown's getting five thousand dollars a month writing serials for Hitch's;' 'Smith sold two novels on synopsis for thirty thousand dollars;' 'Green's signed up with Tagwicks for four years at two thousand dollars a month writing problem novels.' Into the maelstrom of 'Dollars, Dollars, Dollars,' the sensitive brains of all America were drifting, throwing overboard ideals and aspirations in order to keep afloat in the swirling foam.

And then—the Fates stooped and touched his destiny with a star.

A New York publisher (one of that little group which has for its motto, 'Art for Art's sake,' not 'Art, for God's sake!') noticed him, and spoke of literature as an expression of the soul, a thing not of a season or a decade, but as ageless as a painting.

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His ear caught the new song of attainment just as readily as it had received the chorus of 'Dollars.' He wrote a novel of New England life, full of faults, but vibrant with promise; and having gathered together quite a nice sum of money, he went to England, at the advice of the before-mentioned publisher, there and elsewhere in Europe to absorb the less oxygenic atmosphere of older civilisations, which still gives birth to the beginnings of things.

Twice he had visited Paris. The first time, with the instinct of the tourist, he had discovered the vileness of the place—a discovery fairly easy of accomplishment. The second time he had ignored the tourist-stimulated aspect of Paris life, and had allowed his senses to absorb the soul of the Capital of all the Latins, the laboratory of civilisation. And he who has done that is never the same man again. Germany had ministered to his reason, and Italy to his emotions; but he found his greatest interest in London, which offered to him an endless inspiration of changing moods, of vagrant smells, and the effect of a stupendous drama of humanity.

Under the spell of Europe's ageless artistry and the rich-hued meadows of England's literary past he had grown humble. The song of 'Dollars' was less clamorous than the echo of the ocean in the heart of a sea-shell. When he wrote, which was seldom, he approached his paper-littered desk as an artist does his canvas. It was the medium by which he might gain a modest niche in the Hall of the Immortals—or, failing that, his soul at least would be enriched by the sincerity of his endeavour.

In that highly artistic frame of mind he suddenly secured the *entree* into London Society. For some reason, as unaccountable as the reverse, a wave of popularity for Americans was breaking against the oak doors, and he was carried in on the crest. The result was not ennobling. The dormant instinct of satire leaped to life and the idealist became the jester.

But then he was twenty-six and most agreeably susceptible to hap-hazard influence. Being a Bostonian, he acquitted himself with creditable *savoir faire*; and being an American, his appreciation of the ridiculous saved him from the quagmire of snobbery, though he made many friends and dined regularly with august people, whose family trees were so rich in growth that they lived in perpetual gloom from the foliage.

Lady Durwent's dinner-party had been an expedition into the artistic fakery of London, and he would have dismissed the whole affair as a stimulating and amusing diversion from the ultra-aristocratic rut if the personality of Elise Durwent had not remained with him like a haunting melody.

He looked at his watch. 'By Jove!' he muttered; 'it's nine o'clock;' and hurriedly completing his ablutions, he dressed and descended to breakfast.

III.

Into the row of splendidly inert houses known as Chelmsford Gardens, Austin Selwyn turned his course. A couple of saddle-horses were standing outside No. 8, held by a groom of expressionless countenance. From No. 3 a butler emerged, looked at the morning, and retired. Elsewhere inaction reigned.

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Ring the bell, Selwyn was admitted into the music-room of the previous night's scene. The portrait of a famous Elizabethan beauty looked at him with plump and saucy arrogance. In place of the crackling fire a new one was laid, all orderly and proper, like a set of new resolutions. The genial disorder of the chairs, moved at the whim of the Olympians, had all been put straight, and the whole room possessed an air of studied correctness, as though it were anxious to forget the previous evening's laxity with the least possible delay.

'Good-morning.'

Elise Durwent swept into the room with an impression of boundless vitality. She was dressed in a black riding-habit with a divided skirt, from beneath which a pair of glistening riding-boots shone with a Cossack touch. Her copper hair, which was arranged to lie rather low at the back, was guarded by a sailor-hat that enhanced to the full the finely formed features and arched eyebrows. There was an extraordinary sense of youthfulness about her—not the youthfulness of immaturity, but the stimulating quality of the spirit.

'I came here this morning,' began Selwyn vaguely, 'expecting'——

'Expecting a frumpy, red-haired girl with a black derby hat down to her nose.'

He bowed solemnly. 'Instead of which, I find—a Russian princess.'

'You are a dear. You can't imagine how much thought I expended on this hat.'

'It was worth it. You look absolutely'——

'Just a minute, Mr. Selwyn. You are not going to tell me I look charming?'

'That was my intention.'

She sighed, with a pretty pretence at disappointment. 'That will cost me half-a-crown,' she said.

'I beg your'——

'Yes; I wagered myself two-and-six to a "bob" that you wouldn't use that word.'

'It is really your fault that I did,' he said seriously.

She curtsied daintily. 'I make money on Englishmen and lose it on Americans,' she said. 'I have a regular scale of bets. I give ten to one that an Englishman will say in the first ten minutes that I look "topping," five to one on "absolutely ripping" in the first thirty, and even money on "stunning" in the first hour.'

His face, which had been portraying an amusing mixture of perplexity and admiration, broke into a smile which encompassed all his features. 'Do all bets cease at the end of the first hour?' he asked.

'Yes, *ra-ther*. An Englishman never pays compliments then, because he is used to you. Isn't it awful seeing people getting used to you?'

'Do they ever?'

'Umph'm. The only chance of bagging one of the nobility as a husband is to limit interviews to half-an-hour and never wear the same clothes twice. Startle him! Keep him startled! Save your most daring gown for the night you're going to make him propose, then wear white until the wedding. An Englishman will fall in love with a woman in scarlet, but he likes to think he's marrying one who wears white. Costume, my dear Americano—costume does it. Hence the close alliance between the nobility and the chorus. But come along; we're snubbing the sunlight.'

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With something like intoxication in his blood, he followed his imperious, high-spirited companion from the house. He hurried forward to help her to mount, but she had her foot in the stirrup and had swung herself into the saddle before he could reach her side. With less ease, but with creditable horse-management, Selwyn mounted the chestnut and drew alongside the bay, who was cavorting airily, as if to taunt the larger horse with the superior charm of the creature that bestrode him.

‘We’ll be back, Smith, at twelve-thirty,’ she called; and with the tossing of the horses’ heads, resentful of the restraining reins, and the clattering of hoofs that struck sparks from the roadway, they made for the Park.

IV.

London is a stage that is always set. The youthful Dickens watching the murky Thames found the setting for his moments of horror, just as surely as cheery coach-houses, many of them but little changed to this day, bespoke the entrance of Wellers senior and junior. London gave to Wilde’s exotic genius the scenes wherein his brilliantly futile characters played their wordy dramas; then, turning on the author, London’s own vileness called to his. Thackeray the satirist needed no further inspiration than the nicely drawn distinction between Belgravia and Mayfair. Generous London refused nothing to the seeking mind. Nor is it more sparing to-day than it was in the past; it yields its inspiration to the gloom of Galsworthy, the pedagogic utterances of Mr. Wells, the brilliant restlessness of Arnold Bennett, and the ever-delightful humour of Punch.

On this morning in November London was in a gracious mood, and Hyde Park, coloured with autumn’s pensive melancholy, sparkled in the sunlight. Snowy bits of cloud raced across the sky, like sails against the blue of the ocean. November leaves, lying thick upon the grass, stirred into life, and for an hour imagined the fickle wind to be a harbinger of spring. Children, with laughter that knew no other cause than the exhilaration of the morning, played and romped, weaving dreams into their lives and their lives into dreams. Invalids in chairs leaned back upon their pillows and smiled. Something in the laughter of the children or the spirit of the wind had recalled their own careless moments of full-lived youth.

Paris, despite your Bois de Boulogne; New York, for all the beauties of your Central Park and Riverside Drive—what have you to compare with London’s parks on a sun-strewn morning in November?

Reaching the tan-bark surface of Rotten Row, Selwyn and the English girl eased the reins and let the horses into a canter. With the motion of the strong-limbed chestnut the American felt a wave of exultation, and chuckled from no better cause than sheer enjoyment in the morning’s mood of emancipation. He glanced at Elise Durwent, and saw that her eyes were sparkling like diamonds, and that the self-conscious bay was



shaking his head and cantering so lightly that he seemed to be borne on the wings of the wind. Selwyn wished that he were a sculptor that he might make her image in bronze: he would call it 'Recalcitrant Autumn.' He even felt that he could burst into poetry. He wished——

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But then he was in the glorious twenties; and, after all, what has the gorged millionaire, rolling along in his beflowered, bewarmed, becushioned limousine, that can give one-tenth the pleasure of the grip on the withers of a spirited horse?

Sometimes they walked their beasts, and chatted on such subjects as young people choose when spirits are high and care is on a vacation. They were experiencing that keenest of pleasures—joy in the *present*.

They watched London Society equestrianising for the admiration of the less washed, who were gazing from chairs and benches, trying to tell from their appearance which was a duke and which merely 'mister'—and usually guessing quite wrongly. Ladies of title, some of them riding so badly that their steeds were goaded into foam by the incessant pull of the curb bit, trotted past young ladies and gentlemen with note-books, who had been sent by an eager Press to record the activities of the truly great. Handsome women rode in the Row with their children mounted on wiry ponies (always a charming sight); and middle-aged, angular females, wearing the customary riding-hat which reduces beauty to plainness and plainness to caricature, rode melancholy quadrupeds, determined to do that which is done by those who are of consequence in the world.

But pleasures born of the passing hour, unlike those of the past or of anticipation, end with the striking of the clock. It seemed to Austin Selwyn that they had been riding only for the space of minutes, when Elise asked him the time.

'It is twenty minutes to one,' he said. 'I had no idea time had passed so quickly.'

'Nor I,' she answered. 'Just one more canter, and then we'll go.'

The eager horses chafed at their bits, and pleaded, after the manner of their kind, to be allowed one mad gallop with heaving flanks and snorting triumph at the end; but decorum forbade, and contenting themselves with the agreeable counterfeit, Selwyn and the girl reluctantly turned from the Park towards home.

The expressionless Smith was waiting for them, and looked at the two horses with that peculiar intolerance towards their riders which the very best groom in the world cannot refrain from showing.

'Won't you come in and take the chance of what there is for lunch?' she said as Selwyn helped her to dismount.

'N-no, thanks,' he said.

She pouted, or pretended to. 'Now, why?' she said as Smith mounted the chestnut, and touching his hat, walked the horses away.



'There is no reason,' he said, smiling, 'except—— Look here; will you come downtown and have dinner with me to-night?'

'You Americans are refreshing,' she said, burrowing the toe of her riding-boot with the point of the crop, 'As a matter of fact, I have to go to dinner to-night at Lady Chisworth's.'

'Then have a headache,' he persisted.

'Please,' as her lips proceeded to form a negative.

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'Some one would see us, and Lady Chisworth would declare war.'

'Then let us dine in some obscure restaurant in Soho.'

'There's no such thing, old dear. Soho is always full of the best people dining incog. Almost the only place where you are free from your friends is Claridge's.'

'Well'—his nose crinkled at her remark—'then let us go to Claridge's. Miss Durwent, I know I'm too persistent, but it would be a wonderful ending to a bully day. You know you'll be bored at Lady Chisworth's, and I shall be if you don't come.'

'Humph!' She stood on the first of the stone steps, her agile gracefulness lending itself to the picture of healthy, roseate youth.

'Where could we meet?'

'Let me call for you.'

'N-no. That wouldn't do.'

'Would your mother object?'

'Heavens, no!—but the servants would. You see, English morality is largely living up to your servants—and we met only last night.'

'But you will come?' He crossed his hands behind his back and swung the crop against his boots.

'Mr. Selwyn,' she said, 'your books should be very interesting.'

'From now on they will be,' he said, 'if'——

'All right,' she interrupted him with something of the staccato mannerism of the evening before. 'I'll motor down in my little car, and we'll go to the Cafe Rouge.'

'Good—wherever that may be.'

'No one has discovered it yet but me,' she said. 'Then I shall have a headache at four, and meet you outside Oxford Circus Tube at seven.'

'You're a real sport, Miss Durwent.'

'Ah, monsieur'—she smiled with a roguishness that completely unsettled him for the remainder of the day—'have you no sympathy for my headache?'

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAFE ROUGE.

I.

Monsieur Anton Beauchamp was the proprietor of the Cafe Rouge in London. Monsieur Anton Beauchamp was once proprietor of the Cafe Bleu in Paris.

For many years he had cast envious eyes on London. Did not always his guests, those strange blonde people with the clothes like blankets, pay his prices without question? Did they not drink bad wine and never add the bill? *Pardi!* if he could have only English as patrons, madame and himself could purchase that wine-shop in the Bou' Mich', and never worry again.

For years the thought of London haunted Anton; and then one day, in a superb moment of decision, he announced his intention of journeying thither. A large entourage followed him to the Gare du Nord, and, with much the same feelings as those of an explorer leaving for the North Pole, he bade a dramatic farewell, and almost missed his train by running back to give a final embrace to Madame Beauchamp.

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With no undue mishap he reached London the same night, and next day he lunched at a famous London restaurant. At night he dined at a fashionable establishment in Shaftesbury Avenue. In both places he received ordinary food served without distinction, reckoned up the bill, and found that in each case *l'addition* was correct—and rushed madly back to Paris, where he sold the Cafe Bleu, packed up his belongings, and explained matters to his wife, doing all three things simultaneously.

'The dinner,' he exclaimed in a fever of excitement, 'is served—so! As a funeral. I order what I like, and the waiter he stands there *comme un gendarme*, as if it is my name I give. "Any vegetables?" demands he. *Mon Dieu!* As if vegetables they are no more to him than so much—so much umbrellas. I say, "*Garcon, la carte des vins!*" and, quite correct, he hands it me with so many wines he has not got, just as in Paris, but—*que penses tu?*—he permits me to order what wine I choose, so—by myself. *C'est terrible!* I give him three pennies and say, "*Garcon*, for such stupidity you should pay the whole bill."

Monsieur Beauchamp was a man of shrewdness. He knew he could not compete with the established solidity of the Trocadero, the Ritz, the Piccadilly, or the garishness of Frascati's, so he purchased and remodelled an unobtrusive building in an unobtrusive street between Shaftesbury Avenue and Oxford Street, but clear of Soho and its adherents. He decorated the place in a rich red, and arranged some *cabinets particuliers* upstairs, where, by the screening of a curtain, Madame the Wife and Monsieur the Lover could dine without molestation of vulgar eyes.

Monsieur Beauchamp felt himself a benefactor, a missionary. He argued that the only reason Londoners were not so flirtatious as Parisians was lack of opportunity. He, the proprietor of the Cafe Rouge, would bring light to the inhabitants of the foggy city. To assist in this philanthropic work he brought with him an excellent cook, who had killed a dyspeptic Cabinet Minister by tempting him with dishes intended only for robust digestions, and three young and ambitious waiters; while madame engaged what unskilled labour was required.

Unobtrusively they opened for business, for he knew that publicity would spoil his chance of success. (Once convince a Londoner that he is one of a select few who know a restaurant, and he will stand an hour waiting for a table.) The first customer to enter received such attention that he brought his family the next night. Monsieur Beauchamp issued orders that he should be snubbed. *Parbleu!* was the Cafe Rouge for *families*?

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Gradually the justification of Monsieur Beauchamp's policy became evident. Ladies of the Chorus brought their admirers there, and to the former Monsieur Beauchamp paid particular courtesy. Long study of feminine psychology had taught him that, whereas a woman may change her lover, she will not change her favourite cafe. Therefore, though the man may pay the bill, the woman is the one to please. Artists from Chelsea would come as well to the Cafe Rouge, celebrating the sale of a picture, and drinking plentifully to the confounding of all art critics. Also, the *cabinets particuliers* were the scene of some exceedingly expensive and recherche dinners—and almost no one added the bill. When any one did, Monsieur Beauchamp was mortified, and invariably dismissed the same waiter on the spot—thereby gaining for himself and France a reputation for sterling integrity.

'*Ma foi!* London may be gray,' thought Monsieur Beauchamp, 'but she pays well.'

II.

One November evening Monsieur Anton Beauchamp's critical eye noted the entrance of a dark-haired young man in well-fitting evening clothes, and with him a young lady whose deep-green cloak and white fur round the shoulders set off to perfection her radiant colouring and well-poised figure. Monsieur Beauchamp did not hesitate. After all, he was an artist, and subject to inspiration like other men of genius; so, hurrying downstairs, he waved the waiter aside, and greeted them with a bow which almost amounted to virtuosity.

'*Bon soir, monsieur et madame.*' He cast an anxious glance about the cafe, which was two-thirds filled. 'This tabil will do?—*Ah, mais non!* He grew indignant at the very thought. '*Pardon, monsieur*, that one is very nice—*par ici—Non, non!* Ah—perhaps you would like a *cabinet particulier?*'

The sirenic tone of voice and the gesture of his hands indicated the seraphic pleasure to be obtained only in one of those secluded spots.

The American turned inquiringly to the girl.

'When I was here before,' she said, 'I was at a table just upstairs to the right. Have you one there, Monsieur Beauchamp?'

Nom d'une pipe! She knew him. And she was beautiful, this English lady. As he personally escorted them upstairs, with the importance of a Lord Chamberlain at a Court function, Monsieur Beauchamp speculated on the flirtatious potentialities of the young woman. If she were only clever enough to be fickle, what a source of profit she might be to the Cafe Rouge! And was she not in appearance much like Mademoiselle

Valerie, for whom a member of the Chamber of Deputies had blown out the brains of Monsieur P—— de l'Academie Francaise?

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With the assistance of a waiter, he ushered them to a table almost hidden by a pillar, where a crimson-shaded light sent a soft glow that was guaranteed to make the most of a woman's eyes. Monsieur Beauchamp with his own hands brought them the menu card, while the waiter stood expectantly, crouched for an immediate start as soon as he received the signal. A small waitress appeared with the butter and rolls, and made her way underneath the arms of the proprietor and the waiter like a tug running round two ocean liners. Monsieur Beauchamp could recommend the *Barquettes Norvegienne*—No? Madame did not so desire? Of course not. He frowned terrifically at the waiter, who glared ferociously at the diminutive waitress. *Morbleu!* What imbecile suggested *Barquettes Norvegienne*? Monsieur Beauchamp mentioned other dishes as an overture to the meal, waxing increasingly wrathful towards the waiter on each veto. Ah! monsieur desired *Consomme Anton*. The proprietor's face beamed and his arms were outstretched towards heaven. That this gentleman should order *Consomme Anton*, the soup of which he alone knew the secret, and which had been named after himself! Truly, the life of a restaurateur was not without compensations. He turned on the waiter—but that worthy had darted away to execute the order.

III.

The soup appeared. Monsieur Beauchamp stood by with the attitude of an artist watching the hanging of his first painting in the Academy.

'You might let me see the wine list,' said Selwyn.

Monsieur Beauchamp struck an attitude of horror. Had it come to this in the Cafe Rouge, that a patron must ask for the wine list? Brandishing his arms, he rushed from the table, almost colliding with the little waitress, flew downstairs to the very farthest table near the door, seized a wine card, and puffing generously, arrived with the trophy at the table, much as Rothschild's messenger must have reached London with the news that the British were winning at Waterloo. Having then succeeded in making the American order a red wine when he wanted white, Monsieur Beauchamp withdrew in a state of histrionic self-satisfaction.

With a smile of relief Selwyn looked across the table at the girl. Even in the soft glow of the lamp, which made for flattery, it seemed to him that the vivacity of the morning had disappeared, and in its place was the petulance of the previous evening. Her eyes, which seemed when they were riding to have caught something of the alchemy of the skies, were steady and lighter in shade. Again he noticed the suggestion of discontent about the mouth, and the upper lip looked thin and lacking in colour.

'It is your turn to-night to be pensive,' she said.

'I was thinking,' he answered, 'that it is hardly twenty-four hours since we met, and yet I have as many impressions of you as an ordinary woman would give in six months. For instance, last night when you entered the room'——

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'But, Mr. Selwyn, any girl knows enough to arrive late when there is no woman within twenty years of her age in the room. The effect is certain.'

There was no humour in her voice, but just a tone of weary, world-wise knowledge. A look of displeasure clouded his face.

'Surely,' he said, 'with your qualities and appearance, you don't need such an elaborate technique.'

'In a world where there is so little that is genuine, why should I debar myself from the pleasure of being a humbug?'

'Come, come,' he said, smiling, 'you are not going to join the ranks of England's detractors?'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'I'm certainly not going to become a professional critic like Stackton Duncleley, who hasn't even the excuse that he's an Irishman; or Lucia Carlotti, who hardly ever leaves London because her dinners cost her nothing. But I reserve the right of personal resentment.'

IV.

They were interrupted by a waiter, who removed the soup-plates with studied dexterity, and substituted *Troncon de turbotin Duglere*; *pommes vapeur*, the dish which had delivered the fatal blow against the Cabinet Minister's digestive armour.

'Perhaps I am too personal,' resumed Selwyn after the completion of this task, 'but last night one of the impressions I took away with me was your critical attitude towards your surroundings. Then this morning you were so completely'——

'Charming?'

'——bewitching,' he said, smiling, 'that I thought myself an idiot for the previous night's opinion. But, then, this evening'——

'Mr. Selwyn, you are not going to tell me I'm disappointing, and we just finished with the soup?'

More than her words, the forced rapidity with which she spoke nettled him. With bad taste perhaps, but still with well-meant sincerity, he was trying to elucidate the personality which had gripped him; while she, though seemingly having no objection to serving as a study for analysis, was constantly thrusting her deflecting sentences in his path. To him words were as clay to the sculptor. When he conversed he liked to choose his theme, then, by adroit use of language, bring his artistry to bear on the

subject, accentuating a line here, introducing a note of subtlety elsewhere, amplifying, smoothing, finishing with the veneer of words the construction of his mind. Another quality in her that troubled him was the apparent rigidity of her thoughts. Not once did she give the impression that she was nursing an idea in the lap of her mentality, but always that she had arrived at a conclusion by an instantaneous process, which would not permit of retraction or expansion. As though by suggestion he could reduce her phrasing to a *tempo* less quick, his own voice slowed to a drawl.

'Miss Durwent,' he said, 'you are unique among the English girls I have met. I should think that contentment, almost reduced to placidity, is one of their outstanding characteristics.'

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'That is because you are a man, and with a stranger we have our company manners on. England is full of bitter, resentful women, but they don't cry about it. That's one result of our playing games like boys. We learn not to whine.'

'I suppose the activities of your suffragettes are a sign of this unrest.'

'Yes—though they don't know what is really the trouble. I do not think women should run the country, but I do feel that we should have something to say about our ordinary day-to-day lives. Man-made laws are stupid enough, but a man-made society is intolerable. Just a very little wine, please.'

For a moment there was silence; then she continued: 'Oh, I suppose if it were all sifted down I should find that it is largely egotism on my part.'

He waited, not wanting to alter her course by any injudicious comment.

'Mr. Selwyn,' she said abruptly, 'do you feel that there is a Higher Purpose working through life?'

'Y-yes,' he said, rather startled, 'I think there is.'

'Sometimes I do,' she went on; 'then, again, I think we're here on this earth for no purpose at all. It often strikes me that Some One up above started humanity with a great idea, but lost interest in us.'

'I think,' he said slowly, 'that every man has an instinctive feeling sometime in his life that he is a small part of a great plan that is working somehow towards the light.'

'Yes. It's a comfortable thought. It's what makes good Christians enjoy their dinner without worrying too much about the poor.'

He made no answer, though he was not one who often let an epigram go by without a counter-thrust; but he could see that the girl was struggling towards a sincerity of expression much as a frightened horse crosses a bridge which spans a roaring waterfall, ready to bolt at the first thing that affrights it.

'Mr. Selwyn,' she said—and for the first time her words had something of a lilt and less incision—'do you think women are living the life intended for them?'

'Why not?' he fenced.

'Well, it seems to me that when any living creature is placed in the world it is given certain powers to use. You saw this morning how our horses wanted to race, and couldn't understand our holding them back. A mosquito bites because that's apparently

its job in the world, and it doesn't know anything else. I was once told that if animals do not use some faculty they possess, in time Nature takes it away from them.'

'You are quite a student of natural history, Miss Durwent.'

'No—but every now and then mother unearths a man who teaches us something, like last night.'

He acknowledged the compliment with a slight inclination of his head. The waiter leant expectantly beside him.

'To descend from the metaphysical to the purely physical,' he said, glancing in some perplexity at the terrific nomenclature of Monsieur Beauchamp's dishes, 'do you think we might take a chance on this *Poulet reine aux primeurs; salade lorette*? I gather that it has something to do with chicken.'

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'It's rather artful of Monsieur Beauchamp to word it so we poor English can get that much, isn't it?'

'Yes. He apparently acts on the principle that a little learning is a common thing.'

V.

As Selwyn gave the necessary order to the waiter, a noisy hubbub of laughter from an adjoining *cabinet particulier* almost drowned his words. There was one woman's voice that was rasping and sustained with an abandon of vulgarity released by the potency of champagne.

Elise Durwent looked across the table at her companion. 'Are you bored with all my talk?' she said. 'You Americans aren't nearly so candid about such things as Englishmen.'

'On the contrary, Miss Durwent, I am deeply interested. Only, I am a little puzzled as to how you connect the usual functions of animals with woman's place in the world.'

With an air of abstraction she drew some pattern on the table-cloth with the prongs of a fork. 'I don't know,' she said dreamily, 'that I can apply the argument correctly, 'but—Mr. Selwyn, when I was a child playing about with my little brother "Boy-blue"—that was a pet name I had for him—I was just as happy to be a girl as he was to be a boy. I think that is true of all children. But ask any woman which she would rather be, a man or a woman, and unless she is trying to make you fall in love with her she will say the former. That is not as it should be, but it's true. Yet, if we are part of your great plan working towards the light, we're entitled to the same share in life as you—more, if anything, because we perpetuate life and have more in common with all that it holds than men have. There, that is a long speech for me.'

'Please don't stop.'

There was a howl in a man's voice from the noisy *cabinet particulier*, followed by a laugh from the same woman as before, which set the teeth on edge.

'That woman in there,' she went on, 'will partly show what I mean. In the beginning we were both given certain qualities. She has lost her modesty through disuse; I'm losing my womanliness and power of sympathy for the same reason. She's more candid about it, that's all. When Dick and I were youngsters I dreamed of life as Casim Baba's cave full of undiscovered treasures that would be endless. Now I look back upon those days as the only really happy ones I shall ever have.'

'You are—how old?'

‘Twenty-three.’

‘You will grow less cynical as you grow older,’ he said, from the altitude of twenty-six.

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'I agree,' she said. 'As, unlike the Japanese, we haven't the moral courage of suicide, I shall get used to the idea of being an Englishman's wife; of living in a calm routine of sport, bridge, week-ends, and small-talk—entertaining people who bore you, and in turn helping to bore those who entertain you. In time I'll forget that I was born, as most women are, with a fine perception of life's subtleties, and settle down to living year in and year out with no change except that each season you're less attractive and more petty. After a while I shall even get to like the calm level of being an Englishman's wife, and if I see any girl thinking as I do now, I'll know what a little fool she is. That's what happens to us—we get used to things. Those of us who don't, either get a divorce, or go to the devil, or just live out our little farce. It is a real tragedy of English life that women are losing through disuse the qualities that were given them. That is why an American like you comes here and says we do not edit ourselves cleverly.'

The rapid succession of sentences came to an end, and the colour which had mounted to her cheeks slowly subsided.

VI.

'I feel,' he said, 'that I can only vaguely understand what you mean. But is it not possible that you are looking at it too much from the standpoint of an individualist?'

'Women are all individualists,' she broke in; 'or they are until society breaks their spirit. This lumping of people into generations and tuning your son's brain to the same pitch as his medieval ancestors' doesn't interest women—that's man's performance. The great thing about a woman is her own life, isn't it? And the great event in a woman's life is when she has a child—because it's *hers*. This class and family stuff comes from men, because their names are perpetuated, not ours. There is no snobbery equal to men's; it is more noticeable with women, because it isn't instinctive with them, and they have to talk to show it.'

'Then,' said Selwyn, 'in addition to an Irish Rebellion, we may look for one from English women?'

'Yes. I don't know when, but it will come.'

He produced a cigarette-case. 'Would you care for a cigarette now?' he asked.

'No, thanks. But you smoke.'

'Poor England!' he said in pretended seriousness, tapping the table with the end of the cigarette, 'with two revolutions on her hands, and neither party knowing what it wants.'

'We may not know what we want,' she said, 'but, as an Irishman said the other day, "we won't be satisfied till we get it." If the rebellion of our women doesn't come, I prophesy

that in a couple of thousand years, when the supermen inhabit the earth, they will find a sort of land mermaid with an expressionless face, perpetually going through the motion of dealing cards or drinking tea. Then some old fogey will spend ten years in research, and pronounce her an excellent example of the extinct race "*Femina Anglica*."

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'As one of the tyrants who wishes you well,' said Selwyn, after a laugh in which she joined, 'may I be permitted to know what women want—or think they want?'

'Mr. Selwyn, revolutions never come from people who think. That is why they are so terrible. The unhappiness of so many Englishwomen comes from the life which does not demand or permit the use of half the powers they possess. Nor does it satisfy half their longings. Such a condition produces either stagnation or revolution. Our ultimatum is—give us a life which demands all our resources and permits women unlimited opportunity for self-development.

'And if the men cannot do this?'

'The women will have to take charge.'

'And when does the ultimatum expire?'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'When will the next great earthquake be?'

VII.

The noise of the party in the *cabinet particulier* had been growing apace with the reinforcement of champagne-bottles. The strident laughter of the women dominated the lower level of men's voices, and there was a constant clinking of glasses, punctuated by the occasional drawing of a cork, which always whipped the gaiety to a feverish pitch. Monsieur Beauchamp rubbed his hands rather anxiously. He would have preferred a little more intrigue and not quite so much noise. But, then, was it not a testimony to his wine?—and certainly there would be an excellent bill.

One of the men in the party called on some one for a song. There was a hammering on the table, a promise of a kiss in a girl's voice that trailed off into a tipsy giggle, the sound of shuffling chairs and accompanying hilarity as the singer was apparently hoisted on to the table. There came a crash of breaking glass as his foot collided with some dinner-things.

Monsieur Beauchamp winced, but consoled himself with the reflection that he could charge what he wished for the damage. The voices were hushed at the order of the singer, who was trying to enunciate the title of his song.

'I shall shing,' he said, with considerable difficulty, "'Moon, Moon, Boo—(hic)—Booful Moon," composhed by myself at the early age of sheven months. It ish very pash—pashesh—it ish very shad, so, if ye have tearsh, pre—(hic)—pare to shed 'em now.'

There was loud applause, which the singer interrupted by commencing to sing in a bass voice that broke into falsetto with such frequency that it was difficult to tell which voice was the natural one. He started off the verse very stoutly, but was growing rather maudlin, when, reaching the chorus, he seemed to take on a new lease of vitality and bellowed quite lustily:

'Moon, Moon, boo-oo-oo-ooful Moon,
Shining reshplendantly, radiant an' tenderly;
Moon, Moon, boo-oo—(hic)—booful Moon—
Tell her I shy for her, tell her I die for her,
Booful, BOO-OO-ooful Moon.

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'Now then, fellow Athenians, chorush, chorush!' With an indescribable medley of discordant howling the party broke into a series of 'Moon, Moon, boo-oo-ooful Moon,' which came to an abrupt ending as the singer fell back, apparently unconscious, in the arms of his friends. There was a murmuring of voices, and a waiter was sent for some water to revive the young man.

Considerably disgusted at the ending to the incident, Selwyn, who had turned to look towards the *cabinet particulier*, once more sought his companion's eyes.

Her face was white; there was not a vestige of colour in the cheeks.

'Miss Durwent,' he gasped, 'you are not well.'

'I am quite well,' she answered quickly, but her voice was weak and quivering. 'I—I thought I recognised the singer's voice. That was all.'

The curtain of the *cabinet particulier* was drawn aside, and two youths in evening-dress emerged, supporting between them the dishevelled singer, who was miserably drunk, and whose hat almost completely obscured his right eye. They were followed by three girls with untidy hair, whose flushed, rouged faces had been made grotesque by clumsy dabs of powder.

The singer's hat fell off, and Monsieur Beauchamp, who was hovering about with the bill, had just stooped to recover it, when Selwyn heard, a suppressed cry of pain from Elise Durwent. Thrusting her chair away from her, she made for the emerging party, and halted them at the top of the stairway.

'Dick!' she said breathlessly. 'Dick!'

The drunken youth raised his heavy eyelids and looked with bewildered eyes at his sister. One of the girls tried to laugh, but there was something in the insane lightness of his eyes and the agony of hers that stifled the ribaldry in its birth. His face was as pale as hers, a pallor that was accentuated by dark hair, matted impotently over his forehead. But there was a careless, debonair charm about the fellow that made him stand out apart from the other revellers.

'Hello, sis!' he muttered, trying to pull himself together. 'My li'l sister Elise—friends of mine here—forget their names, but jolly good fellosh—and ladies too; nice li'l ladies'——

'Bravo, Durwent!' cried one of his friends, emitting a dismal howl of encouragement.

'Dick! Boy-blue!' The breathy intensity of her voice seemed to rouse some latent manhood in her brother. He stiffened his shoulders and threw off his two supporting

friends—a manoeuvre which enabled Monsieur Beauchamp to present his trifling bill to the more sober of the two. 'Why aren't you at Cambridge?'

'Advice of conshul,' he muttered. 'Refushe to answer.' He shook his head solemnly from side to side.

With a swift gesture she turned to the American. 'This is my brother,' she said, 'and I know where his rooms are in town. If you will bring my cloak, I'll get him to my car and take him home.'

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Selwyn nodded his understanding. He hardly knew what words he could speak that might not hurt her.

'Listen, Dick dear,' she said, stepping very close to him and taking his hand in hers. 'Please don't say anything. Just come with me, and I'll take you to your rooms.'

Through the befuddled wits of the young fellow came the sound of the voice that had dominated his childhood. He smelt the freshness of the long grass in the Roselawn meadows; with his disordered imagination he heard again the clattering of horses' hoofs on the country-road, and he saw his sister with her copper-tinted hair flung to the breeze. With a look of mixed wonder and pain in the yellowish blue of his eyes, he allowed her to take his arm, and together they went slowly downstairs and through the throng of diners craning their necks to see, while the party he had left emitted snorts and howls of contempt.

Selwyn reached the door in time to help the drunken youth into the car, and then placed the cloak about Elise's shoulders. She put out her hand.

'Good-night,' she said.

'But you will permit me to come?' he said. 'I could be of assistance.'

'No—no,' she said tensely, 'please—I want to be alone with him. Have no fear, Mr. Selwyn. Poor old Dick would do anything for me.'

He held her hand in his. 'Miss Durwent,' he said, 'I cannot express what I mean. But if this makes any difference at all, it is only that I admire you infinitely more for'——

'No—please—please say nothing more,' she cried with a sound of pain in her voice.

'But may I come and see you again?'

She withdrew her hand and pressed it against her brow.

'Yes. I—I don't know. Good-night. Please don't say any more.' The words ended in a choking, tearless sob. She stepped into the car, and with no further sign to him threw in the clutch and started away.

Huddled in the corner, his pale face glistening in the lamplight of the street, the Honourable Richard Durwent lay in a drunken sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

INTERMEZZO.

It was several months later—May 1914, to be precise—when Austin Selwyn made the determination, common to most men, to remain in for an evening and catch up in his correspondence.

After the manner of his species, he produced a small army of letters from various pockets, and spreading them in a heap on his desk, proceeded to answer the more urgent, and postpone the less important to a further occasion when conscience would again overcome indolence. For an hour he wrote trivial politenesses to hostesses who had extended hospitality or were going to do so; there was a reply to a literary agent, one to a moving-picture concern, an answer to a critic, and a note of thanks to an admirer.

Having disposed of these sundry matters, he sat back in his chair and read a long letter that had been enclosed in an envelope bearing the postage-stamp of the United States of America. At its finish he settled himself comfortably, lit a cigar, and, squaring his shoulders, wrote a reply to the Reverend Edgerton Forbes, Rector of St. Giles' Episcopal Church, Fifth Avenue, New York:

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'LONDON, *May 12, 1914.*

'MY DEAR EDGE,—I've been supplying your friend the Devil with all sorts of cobblestones recently, but, my dear old boy, if I had written you every time I intended to, you would have had no time to prepare those knock-out sermons of yours.

'In your letter you hint at possible heart entanglements for me. Has it not been said that to a writer all women are "copy"? Even when he falls in love, your author is so busy studying the symptoms that he usually fails to inform the lady until she has eloped with some other clown.

'In fairness, however, I must admit that you were partly correct in your surmise. I almost fell in love last November with a girl who invariably angered me when I was with her, but clung to my mind next day like an unfinished plot. I saw her quite frequently up to February, when I went to the Continent, but have not called on her since my return.

'I met her first at her mother's town house, where there were several people who admitted their greatness with an aplomb one was forced to admire. This girl sort of sat there and said nothing, but her silence had a good deal more in it than some of the talk. We had our first chat that night by the fire, next morning went riding in Rotten Row, and had dinner together the same night. Fast travelling, you say? On paper, yes; but actually I don't know the girl any better now than the night I met her. She's a strange creature—self-willed, fiery, sweet, and sometimes as clever as your Ancient Adversary. But friendship with her makes me think of the days when I was a kid. My great hobby was building sky-scrapers with blocks, and very laboriously I would erect the structure up to the point when "feeding-time" or "washing-time" or "being shown to the minister" used always to intervene. When I returned, the blocks had always fallen down. Well, friendship with Elise (pretty name, isn't it?) is not unlike my experience with the blocks. You can leave her, firmly convinced that at last you are on a basis of real understanding; and two or three days later, when you meet her again, you find all the blocks lying around in disorder. Instead of a friend, one is an esteemed acquaintance. The only way to win her, I suppose, would be to call at dawn and stay until midnight. It would be a bit trying, but I get awfully "fed up" (as they say over here) with being constantly recalled to the barrier.

'Of course, you old humbug, I can see you pursing your lips and saying, "Does Austin really love her? If he did, he would be unable to see her faults." It's an exploded theory that love is blind. Good heavens! if a man in love can see in a girl beauty which doesn't exist, is there any reason to suppose he will be unable to see the faults that *do*?

'But, candidly, I don't think I am in love with this young lady. I might be if I were given half a chance; but, then, emotional icebergs were always my specialty. I meet a dozen girls who treat me with a tender cordiality that is touching; then there comes into my

course one who expresses a sort of friendly indifference, and there I stay scorching my wings or freezing my toes—whichever figure of speech you prefer.

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'She makes me think of a painting sometimes, one that changes in appearance with the varying lights and shadows of the sky. But, Edge, given the exact light that her beauty needs, she is a masterpiece. In some strange way her personality has given me a new pleasure in Corot and Diaz. It is difficult to explain, but it is so. I feel my powers of description are inadequate really to picture Elise to you. She is truly feminine, and yet when she is with other women her unique gift of personality makes them *merely* feminine. "Lordy, Lordy," as a nigger of mine used to say, "dis am becomin' abtuse."

'As a matter of fact, the girl is a result of conflicting elements of heredity. I haven't met her father, but I gather that he is a good old Tory of blameless respectability, and has a deep-seated disbelief in evolution. On the other hand, the girl's mother is rather a buxom and florid descendant of a vigorous North of England family, the former members of which, with the exception of her father, were highly esteemed smugglers. The lady's grandfather, Elise tells me, was known as "Gentleman Joe," and was as adventurous a cut-throat as a small boy's imagination could desire.

'Well, Mr. Parson, you can imagine what happened when these conflicting elements of heredity were brought together. In the language of science, there was one negative result and two positive. The first mentioned is a son Malcolm, whom I have not met. He has a commission in the cavalry, is a devil at billiards, can't read a map, and rides like a Centaur.

'Of the positive results it seems to me I may have already mentioned one—Elise. The other is Richard, the tragedy of the family. Poor Dick was practically kicked out of Eton for drunkenness when he was about sixteen. For the past year or so he has been at Cambridge, but he got in with a bad set there, and after several warnings has been "sent down"—or, in ordinary language, expelled. It appears that the old combination of "booze" and women got the better of him, though there's something oddly fine about the fellow too. He was hitting an awful pace at Cambridge, and when he tried to pass off a fourth-rate chorus-girl as the Duchess of Turveydrop, the axe descended. As the masquerading duchess was rather noisy and very "elevated," you can see that there must have been complications.

'Of course, his governor was furious, and, settling a very small allowance on the poor beggar, turned him out of the family home, and forbade him to ever darken, &c., &c. (see, split infinitive and all, any "best seller" of a few years back).

'Does this seem at all incongruous to you? These so-called aristocrats bring a son into existence, and, providing he's a decent-living, rule-abiding chap, he is sheltered from the world and kept for the enriching of their own hot-house of respectability. But—if one of them upsets the ash-can and otherwise messes up the family escutcheon, the father says, "You have disgraced our traditions. Get thee hence into the cold, outside world. After this you belong to it."

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'Damned generous of paterfamilias, isn't it? Only, as one of the cold, outside world, I can't help wondering why, if Milord is going to keep his good apples for himself, we should have to accept the rotten ones.

'Concerning Cambridge—I spent a weekend there recently with Doug Watson of Boston, who is taking Engineering. Cambridge is quite a little community, as separate from the rest of England as the Channel Islands. On the Saturday evening I was there Watson took a punt, and with considerable dexterity piloted me along the Cam, with its green velvet banks and overhanging trees. The river is an exquisite thing, and there was a sensuous drowsiness in the beauty of the hour before dark.

'The lawns from the backs of the colleges slope down to the river, and as we passed along we noticed group after group of students drinking coffee made in percolators in their possession. There was something almost pastoral in the sight of those young Britishers in such complete repose. Perhaps I should have enjoyed it all without question if it had not been that, a week before, I had visited a poor little Nonconformist preacher who labours on an empty stomach to a little congregation in a chain-making district. Edge, the sights I saw there were not good for any man to see and remain quiet. Women work at the fires when pregnant, and fuddle themselves with beer at night; the men are a shiftless lot, who spend their lives hand-in-hand with poverty and think only of beer, "baccy," and loafing. You know I'm no prohibitionist, but I hate to see beer the goal of men's ambitions. In one school there was a class with forty "backward" children. That's the kinder word, Edge, but the real one is "imbecile." Think of it—forty human destinies that must be lived out to a finish! They tell me that conditions are improving there. I hope so, in Heaven's name.

'It was that visit I had in mind when punting along the Cam. A man is a fool to pit his little mind against so vast and wonderful an edifice as a great university like Cambridge, but one thought which occurred more than once to me was whether or not a man can be considered educated if he be ignorant of human misery existing beyond the college gates. In the Scottish universities the Professor of Latin is called Professor of Humanity. I wonder, Edge, if the time is not ripe for a chair of Humanity in a wider sense in all universities.

'On Sunday we went to one of the churches, and, with eleven others, managed to present a formidable congregation of thirteen. The preacher's prayer, which he read, was a superb piece of work. He started off with the King and the Royal Family, passed on to titled and landed gentry, after them the higher orders of the clergy, leaders of the navy, the army, and all those in more or less authority, then the lower orders of the clergy, and after several categories I have forgotten, he reached the commoners, and (in an appropriate tone of voice) hoped we should live in peace, one with another.

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'Think of it, Edge, in this enlightened age! I wanted to go up to him after the service and ask him why he had left out the minor poets, but Doug stopped me—which is perhaps just as well. He might have added a prayer for Americans after the commoners.

'Sometimes I think that the English Church is losing its grip. I don't mean that snobbery of the kind I have described is common, but in the development of Church character it seems to me that the truth of Christ's birth into a humble walk of life is drifting steadily farther from the clerical consciousness. The timid snobbery which permeates so much of English life, and reaches its wretched climax in the terms "working class" and "lower classes," finds condonement in the ranks of the clergy. Even in its humorous aspect, when Mrs. Retired Naval Officer starts to swank it over Mrs. Retired Army Officer (senior service, deah boy, y'know), and so on down the line, the local rector too often takes an active part in seeing that the various grades are punctiliously preserved. Of course, there are glorious exceptions to all this, and they are the men who count.

'I suppose at home we are just as bad, and that even so democratic a preacher as yourself doesn't take supper on Sunday night with the poorest parishioner. Perhaps living in a strange country makes a man see many things he would not notice in his own.

'To finish with Cambridge—we joined a party of two large punts on Sunday afternoon, and with about twelve college chaps and local (approved) girls we went for a picnic up the river. The girls were fairly pretty and terrifically energetic, insisting upon doing an equal share in the punting, and managing to look graceful while they manoeuvred the punts, which were really fair-sized barges. And when we reached the picnic-place, they made all the preparations, and waited on us as if we were royal invalids. Bless their hearts! Edge, to restore a man's natural vanity, commend me to life in England. Coming home we played the gramophone, and, with appropriate flirtation, floated nearly the whole way to the holding of hands and the hearing of music.

'And, theologian as you are, if you deny the charm of that combination, I renounce you utterly.

'Just one more Cambridge thought. (This letter has as many false endings as one of your sermons.) There were quite a number of native students from India in attendance, and I noticed that these men, many of them striking-looking fellows, were left pretty much to themselves. The English answer when spoken to, and offer that well-bred tolerance exerted by them so easily, but the Indian student must feel that he is not admitted on a footing of equality. I'm not certain that the dark races can be admitted as equals; but what effect on India will it have if these fellows are educated, then sent back with resentment fermenting their knowledge into sedition? It may be another case where the Englishman is instinctively right in his racial psychology; or, again, it may be a further example of his dislike to look facts squarely in the face.

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'Of course, we have our own racial problem, and have hardly made such a success of it that we can afford to offer advice.

'Well, Edge, this letter has run on to too great a length to permit of any European treatment. That will have to wait. Of course, I have paid several visits to Paris, and understand as never before the saying: "Every man loves two countries—his own and France."

'Edge, why is it that people who travel always have the worst characteristics of their nationality? On the Continent one sees Englishmen wearing clothes that I swear are never to be seen in England, and their women so often appear angular and semi-masculine, whereas at home—but, then, you know what an admirer I am of English women. And our own people are worse. Tell me: at home, when a gentleman talks to you, does he keep his cigar in his mouth and merely resonate through his nose? Or is that a mannerism acquired through travelling?

'But enough, old boy. This has covered too vast an acreage of thought already. Oh yes—about my writing. I have been doing very little recently, but can feel the tide rising to that point where it will of necessity overflow the confines of my lethargy. I have had the honour of meeting several of the foremost writers here, and there is no question about it, they are doing excellent work. But I wish that I could feel a little more idealism in their work. The whole country here is parched for the lack of Heaven's moisture of idealism. People must have an objective in their lives, and the Arts should combine with the Church in creating it.

'Of course, there is an amazing amount of drivel written over here, most of which, I think, would never get past the office-boy of an American publication. The English short story and the English music-hall are things to be avoided.

'Before I end, have you seen Gerard Van Derwater recently? I heard that he joined the diplomatic service at Washington after leaving college. I often think of him with his strange pallor, but suggestion of brooding strength. Did it ever strike you that every one respected him, and yet he really never had a close friend? It always seemed to me that he carried about with him a sense of impending tragedy. Find out what he is doing, and let me know.

'Well, old boy, in another few months I shall pack up and return to America, and once more woo the elusive editor. I am looking forward to our sitting by your fireside and, through the cloud of tobacco-smoke, weaving again our old romances. I am really proud of you, Edgerton, and know that you must be a tremendous power for good.

'A letter any time addressed c/o The Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall, will find me.—As ever, your old chum,

‘AUSTIN SELWYN.’

* * * * *

The writer addressed an envelope, inserted the letter, sealed and stamped it, then yawned lazily. Gathering his outgoing correspondence and the old letters, he took his hat and sauntered into the street, conscious of having done his duty—also that he had unearthed some thoughts the existence of which he had not suspected beneath the surface shrubbery of everyday existence.

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CHAPTER IX.

A HOUSE-PARTY AT ROSELAWN.

I.

As is the habit of the year, June followed May, and in its turn gave way to the yellow hours of July. Lady Durwent, wearying of London and its triumphs, returned to Roselawn to share the solitary, rural reign of her husband.

As she drove in a sumptuous car through the village and into the wide confines of the estate she purred with contentment. Men doffed their caps, women curtsied, and the country-side mingled its smile with theirs. It was not unlike the return of a conqueror from a campaign abroad, and after the incognito forced by London on all but the most journalised duchesses, it was distinctly pleasant to be acknowledged by every one she passed.

In this most amiable of moods she dined with her husband, and was so vivacious that, looking at her over his glass of port, he thought how little she had changed since, years before, she had first affected his subnormal pulse. Together they wandered over the lawns, and he showed the improvements wrought since her last visit. She gave the head-gardener the benefit of her unrestricted smile, and shed among all the retainers a bountiful largesse of good-humour.

Still noting the beauties of Roselawn, they discussed their children. She learned that Malcolm was on leave from the —th Hussars, and was golfing in, and yachting off, Scotland with scions of the Scottish nobility. The mention of Dick brought a pang to her heart, and a cloud that marred the serenity of her husband's brow. Lord Durwent regretted the necessity of his actions, but the boy had proved himself a 'waster' and a 'rotter.' He had been given every chance, and had persistently disgraced the family name. If he would go to Canada or Australia, he could have money for the passage; otherwise——

After that imperialistic pronouncement, Lord Durwent turned to more congenial topics, and spoke of additions to the stables and improvements to the church. His wife answered mechanically, and it was many minutes before the heart-hunger for the blue-eyed Dick was lulled. She said nothing, for the development of her sons' lives had long since passed from her to a system, but in the seclusion of their country home the domestic tragedy made a deeper inroad on her feelings than it had done in London.

It was perhaps not unnatural that they barely spoke of Elise at all. She was visiting a county family in the north, and would be home in a couple of days. As there was no

immediate suitor on the horizon, what more was there to be said of the daughter of the house?

Next morning Lady Durwent was still amiable, but rather dull. The following day she was frankly bored. On Sunday, during the sermon, she planned a house-party; and so, in due course, invitations were issued, and accepted or regretfully declined. She possessed sufficient sense of the fitness of things to refrain from transplanting any of her *unusual* varieties from their native soil, but asked only those persons whose family connections ensured a proper tone to the affair.

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Perhaps it was just a kindly thought on her part to ask Austin Selwyn. It may have been the desire of having an author to lend an exotic touch to the gathering. Or, being a woman, she may have wanted an American to see her at the head of the table in two widely different settings.

Perhaps it was all three motives.

II.

In preparation for the arrival of guests, 'a certain liveliness' pervaded the tranquil atmosphere of Roselawn. The tennis-court was rolled and marked; fishing-tackle was inspected and repaired; in view of the possibility of dancing, the piano was tuned; bridge deficiencies were made good at the local stationer's; and gardeners and gamekeepers hurried about their tasks, while flapping game-birds signalled to trembling trout that the enemy was mobilising for the yearly campaign.

Roselawn differed little from the hundreds of English country-houses, the seclusion and invulnerability of which have played so great a part in forming the English character. A lodge at the entrance to the estate supplied a medieval sense of challenge to the outside world, and the beautifully kept hedges at the side of the mile-long carriage-drive gave that feeling of retirement and emancipation from the world so much desired by tranquil minds.

It was the setting to produce a poet, or a race of Tories. Once within the embracing solitude of Roselawn, the discordant jangling of common people worrying about their long hours of work or the right to give their offspring a decent chance in the world became a distant murmur, no more unpleasant or menacing than the whang of a wasp outside the window.

Not that the inhabitants of Roselawn were any more callous or selfish than others of their class, for the record of the Durwent family was by no means devoid of kindly and knightly deeds. Tenantry lying ill were always the recipients of studied thoughtfulness from the lord and lady of the place, and servants who had served both long and faithfully could look forward to a decent pension until death sent them to the great equality of the next world.

If one could trace the history of the Durwent family from the beginning, it would be seen that among the victims of a hereditary system there must be numbered many of the aristocracy themselves. Caricaturists and satirists, who smear the many with the weaknesses of the few, would have us believe that the son of a lord is no better than the son of a fool; yet, if the vaults of some of the old families were to unfold their century-hugged secrets, it would be seen that, as Gray's country churchyard might hold some mute inglorious Milton, so might these vaults hold the ashes of many a splendid brain

ruined by the genial absurdity of 'class' wherein it had been placed. A boy with a title suspended over his head like the sword of Damocles may enter life's arena armed with great aspirations and the power to bring a depth of human understanding to earth's problems, but what chance has he against the ring of antagonists who confront him? Flunkeyism, 'swank,' the timid worship of the peerage, the leprosy of social hypocrisy, all sap his strength, as barnacles clinging to the keel of a ship lessen her speed with each recurring voyage.

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It is not that the hereditary system injures directly; its crime lies in what it engenders—the pestilence of snobbery, which poisons nearly all who come into contact with it, titled and untitled, frocked and unfrocked, washed and unwashed. The very servants create a comic-opera set of rules for their below-stairs life, and the man who has butlered for a lord, even if the latter be the greatest fool of his day, looks with scorn upon the valet of some lesser fellow who, perchance, is forced to make a living by his brains.

III.

The house at Roselawn was large, and, with its ivy-covered exterior, presented a spectacle of considerable beauty. The front was in the form of a ‘hollow square,’ creating an imposing courtyard, and giving the windows of the library and the drawing-room ample opportunity for sunshine. From these windows there was a charming vista of well-kept lawns, margined with gardens possessed of a hundred tones of exquisite colour. At the back of the house the windows looked out on receding meadows that melted into the solidarity of woods.

The drawing-room (Lady Durwent tried to designate it ‘the music-room,’ but the older name persisted) had all the conglomeration of contents which is at once the charm and the drawback of English country homes. Furniture of various periods indulged in mute and elegant warfare. Scattered in graceful disorder about the room were relics procured by an ancestor who had been to Japan; there was a Spanish bowl gathered by Lord Dudley Durwent; there was an Italian tapestry, an Indian tomahawk, a Chinese sword that had beheaded real Chinamen, all procured by Lord Dingwall Durwent in the eighteenth century. There was a massive Louis Seize table and a frail Louis Quinze chair; a slice of Chippendale here, and a bit of Sheraton there; portraits of ancestors who fought at Quebec, Waterloo, Sebastopol, and a very military-looking gentleman on a terrific horse, who had done all his fighting in Pall Mall clubs. There were ‘oils’ purchased by Durwents who liked to patronise the arts, and ‘waters’ by Durwents who didn’t like oils.

And year after year, generation after generation, the ancient drawing-room received its additional impedimenta without so much as a creak of protest.

In the impressive seclusion of Roselawn, therefore, the house-party began to gather. They were an admirably assorted group of people who never objected to being bored, providing it was accomplished in an atmosphere of good breeding. The soothing balm of the Roselawn meadows offered its potency of healing to fatigued minds or weary bodies, but, like the fragrance of the unseen flower, it was wasted on the desert air. Lady Durwent’s guests had not been using either their brains or their bodies to a point where honest fatigue would seek healing in the perfume of clover. If a hundred gamins from Whitechapel’s crowded misery had been brought from London and let loose in summer’s sweet-scented prodigality, the incense of fields and flowers might have

brought sparkle to young eyes dull with the wretchedness of poverty, and colour to pale, unnourished cheeks. But Lord and Lady Durwent, denying themselves the luxury of such a treat, asked people who lived in the country to come and enjoy the country.

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The pleasure of their guests was about as keen as would be that of a party of bricklayers invited by a fellow-labourer to spend a Saturday with him laying bricks.

IV.

To the insatiable curiosity of Austin Selwyn the party presented an infinite chance for study, as well as an unlooked-for opportunity to meet Elise Durwent under circumstances which should either cement their friendship or else demonstrate its utter impracticability.

He listened to the chat of men who did the same things all the year round with the same people, and he wondered a little at their persistency in conversing at all. They rarely disagreed on anything, partly because they were all of the same political faith, and it seemed an understood thing that, so far as it was humanly possible, no one would introduce any subject which would entail controversy. When Selwyn, who was almost too thorough a believer in the productive powers of fiction, used to drop conversational depth-bombs, they treated him with easy tolerance as one who was entitled to his racial peculiarities. Sometimes they would even put to sea clinging to the raft of one of his ideas, but one by one would grow numb and drop off into the waters of mental indifference. They had a nice sense of satire, and it was a delight for the American to indulge in an easy, inconsequential banter which was full of humour without being labelled funny; but it used to fill him with sorrow to see many of his best controversial subjects punctured by a lazily conceived play of words. He felt that, coming from the New World, he was in a position to give knowledge for knowledge, but his fellow-guests were impervious to his geographical qualifications, and persisted in their pleasant task of rolling vocabulary along the straight grooved channels of their well-bred thoughts.

The women were less of a type, but their little lives were so lacking in horizon that they seemed to live in a perpetual atmosphere of personalities. As pretty much the same topics of conversation did them for a whole season, they were not unlike a travelling theatrical company producing the one show wherever they went. One woman occasioned some mirth to Selwyn by her familiarity with the obscure royalties of Europe, whom she thrust forward on every possible occasion. On dowager-duchesses and retired empresses she was without parallel, and she went through life expressing perpetual regret that she had not known you were going to Ruritania, because she would have insisted upon your calling on her friend the Empress Lizajania.

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It was perhaps an unfortunate circumstance that had brought together a group of women none of whom was artistically accomplished, although they were by no means lacking in social charm. Music for them was not a refreshing stream which ran by the road of everyday life, but something which was to be heard at the Opera, and which enjoyed a close alliance with sables and diamond tiaras. Pictures were of the Academy, and, like all the best people, they invariably said, 'Have you seen this year's show at Burlington House? My dear, it's frightful.' Nor did they neglect literature in their curriculum. Though literature lacks a yearly exhibition, such as is possessed by music and painting, they made it a subject for gossip, and denounced H. G. Wells as a 'bounder.' 'I never read him, Mr. Selwyn,' said the obscure-royalist person. 'My cousin the Duchess of Atwater met him, and says—well, really, she says he's quite impossible.'

With a mixture of wonder and amusement Selwyn watched the spectacle of these people of more than average education and intelligence contenting themselves with a perpetual routine of small-talk and genteel insularity, and he wondered how it was that a race so gifted with the blessed quality of humour could evolve a state of society offering such a butt to the shafts of ridicule.

He liked Lord Durwent, whose unfailing gentleness and courtesy would have stamped him as a gentleman in any walk of life. Although his mind was comparatively unimpressible to new ideas, it was saturated with the qualities of integrity and fairness, and in his attitude towards every one of his guests there was an old-world dignity, born of the respect in which he held both himself and them. The study of this man moving contentedly about his daily tasks, never making any one's day harder by reason of his passing that way, was the first jolt Selwyn had received in his gathering arraignment against English social life. By way of contrast he pictured certain successful gentlemen of his acquaintance in America, and the vision was not flattering to his national self-esteem.

He also enjoyed the refreshing vitality of Lady Durwent, who never quite lost her optimism no matter how tight was the grip of good form; and he admired without stint the devotion of every one, regardless of sex, to sport. Throughout the day there were constant expeditions that necessitated long, invigorating hours in the open air; and it seemed to the American that they were never so free from affectation, that the comradeship between the men and the women was never so marked, as when they were indulging their wise instinct for out-of-door sports.

He had been at Roselawn a couple of days before he had a chance to do more than observe Elise Durwent as one of the party. She had been his partner at tennis and bridge, and a dozen times he had exchanged light talk with her, but there was always about her the defensive shield of impersonal cordiality. When he spoke to her it was almost in a drawl, but no matter to what a lackadaisical level he reduced his voice, her replies were always punctuated by a retort that had in it the sense of sting, as Alfio in *Cavalleria Rusticana* accompanies his song with the crack of a driving-whip.

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He watched her with the men of the party, and wondered at their good-natured endurance of her sharpness, as reckless as it was disturbing; and he saw that her inclusion among the women made them less at ease and disinclined to chatter. No matter what group she joined, she was never of it; and even when it was obvious that she was doing everything in her power to reduce her personality to the pitch of the others, her individuality branded her as something apart.

Studying her, partly subconsciously and partly with the keen observation prompted by the attraction she held for him, Selwyn began to feel the loneliness of the girl. Not once did he see the melting of eyes which comes when one person finds close affinity in the understanding of a friend. When she spoke at the table her suddenness always left a silence in its wake. At bridge her moves were so spasmodic that, when opposite dummy, she seemed to play the two cards with a simultaneous movement. The same mannerisms were in her outdoor games, a second service at tennis often following a faulty first so rapidly that her opponent would sometimes be almost unaware that more than one ball had been played.

Selwyn's original feeling of exasperation mellowed to one of genuine pity in contemplation of her solitary life—a life directed by a restless energy that only grew in intensity with the deepening realisation of her purposelessness. Yet she was so confident in her bearing, and so capable of foiling with repartee any approach of his, that he contented himself with a studied politeness that was no more personal than the grief of an undertaker at a funeral.

V.

One evening, after dressing for dinner, Selwyn found that he had half-an-hour to fill in, and as the smell of grass was scenting the air, he sauntered from the house and strolled across the lawn to a path which led to the trout-stream.

His mind was drowsy with a thousand half-formed ideas that lazily lay in the pan of his brain waiting the reveille of thought. A skylark twitted earth's creatures from its aerial height. A cow, munching in endless meditation on its unfretful existence, emitted a philosophic moo.

Selwyn smiled, and let his mind wander listlessly through the fields of his impressions. He thought of Britain, and wondered what there is in the magic of that little island that fastens on one's heart-strings even while the brain is pounding insistent criticism. For the first time the insidious beauty of Roselawn's tranquillity was cloying the energy of his mind—a mind that never gave him rest, but was always questioning and seeking the truth in every phase of human endeavour. The peacefulness of the twilight hour was lulling his mental faculties, and the perfumes of summer's zenith were stirring his senses like music of the Nile.

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As though he were picturing inhabitants of another world, he conjured to his vision the feverish traffic of New York, deluged with human beings belched from their million occupations into the glare of lunch-hour. It gave him a strange sensation of being among the gods to be able to look at the lowering sun and know that at the same moment it held New York in the pitiless heat of midday. . . . And he wondered dreamily why people lived such a mockery of existence as in its towering streets. The pastoral atmosphere was so perfect, so completely soothing in its cool fragrance of evening, that he thought if he could only remain there, away from the conflict of the world, he could write of such things as only poets dream and painters see.

He had readied the stream, and was about to retrace his steps, when he heard the rustle of a dress, and coming round a bend in the path he saw Elise Durwent. She was in an evening gown that looked oddly exotic in those surroundings, and, still in a haze of reverie, he stood in perplexed silence until she stopped opposite him.

'Have I interrupted the muse?' she said.

'On the contrary, you have awakened it. I was just thinking how vivid you looked with that setting of overhanging bushes and the background of fields. I—I think it must have been your gown that gave such a quaintly incongruous effect.'

'And, of course, there is nothing incongruous in a dinner-jacket near a trout-stream? If I were an artist I should paint you, and call the picture "Despondency."'

'Well,' he smiled, 'that would be an improvement on most Academy titles. An ordinary artist would simply name it "Young Gentleman by Trout-Stream." Haven't you often gone through a gallery picturing all sorts of dramatic meanings in paintings, only to have your illusions shattered by the catalogue?'

She nodded. 'You have expressed no surprise at my coming,' she said abruptly. 'Are women in the habit of tracking you in this way?'

'I'm sorry,' he answered, lazily thrusting his hands into his pockets. 'As a matter of fact you are never very far from my thoughts. Perhaps that is why I felt no surprise.'

'How are you enjoying your visit?'

'Tremendously.'

'How do you like the guests?'

'Is this a catechism, Miss Durwent?'

She shrugged her shoulders and pulled a leaf from a bush. 'I was wondering,' she said, 'whether they bored you as much as me.'

'Why,' he said with a slight laugh, 'to be frank, people never bore me. The moment they become tedious they are of interest to me as a study in tediousness.'

'Just the same,' she said quickly, 'as when a woman interests you she becomes an object of analysis. I wish I could detach myself like that.'

'And yet,' he said gently, wondering at the intensity of her eyes, 'I should have thought you possessed the gift of detachment to a greater degree than I. You always seem separate and distinct from your associates.'

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She said nothing in reply, and as if by tacit agreement they started back along the path. He did not break the silence, feeling that words might be provocative of a retort that would dispel the growing feeling of mutual confidence.

'No,' she said, after a long pause, 'I do not possess the power of detachment. It's just that I don't mix well. Have you read Robert Service's poem about the men that don't fit in?'

'Yes.'

'Well, it's far worse for the women who don't. A man can go out and try to find some place for himself. We have simply to stay and endure things.'

Half in compassion he watched her from the corner of his eye, but again refrained from saying anything. He felt intuitively that she was trying to break down the barrier of impersonality, but he knew that she must do it in her own way of timid starts and quick withdrawals.

Although her movements were more restricted by her gown than when she wore ordinary walking-garments, her vitality and limitless energy lent a lilt to her step, and even touched the shoulders with a suggestion of restless virility. When she walked there was an imperious tilt to her head; but no matter how carefully planned her toilette, or how cleverly her coiffure might have been arranged by her maid, there was nearly always some stray bit of colour or carelessly chosen flower that combined with her nature in a suggestion of outlawry: the same instinct of rebellion that had dominated her brother Dick during their childhood. Inside the house she would sometimes look, in her quickly changing moods, as if she were some creature of Nature imprisoned within the walls.

Selwyn wondered if heredity, in one of its strange jests, had recalled the spirit of the smuggler ancestor and recast it into the soul of the girl.

They were nearing the house, when, emerging upon a clearing, they came to a rustic bench looking across a short field lined with shrubbery.

'Let us sit down a minute,' she said. 'We can hear the dinner-gong from here.'

He took his seat beside her, and dreamily watched the yellow rays of the sun casting their receding tints along the bushes opposite them. It was strangely quiet, and the hum of insects seemed like a soft orchestral accompaniment to the crickets' song.

'It is not very sporting of me, Mr. Selwyn,' she said softly, but with her old staccato mannerism, 'to force my mood on you like this. I did it once before—that dreadful night at the Cafe Rouge—and I know that you must think it is just selfishness on my part that makes me so unhappy. But—you know I never had a real friend—except little Dick—'

and I felt to-night as if I had lost all my courage about life. That's why I followed you. I knew you would be patient and kind.'

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'My dear girl,' said Selwyn gently, speaking almost listlessly for fear the smouldering power of retort should be fanned into being, 'for months I have been hoping that some day we should be able to talk like this, as friends. Perhaps it was my fault, but there always seemed a sort of third-person-singular attitude in our talk, as if we were speaking at each other, which served to block our friendship from becoming anything of value to each other. Naturally I have seen that you are not happy, though there have been moments when you were the very personification of light-hearted ness, and I have known for a long time that the motif of your whole nature is resentment. Believe me, Miss Durwent, if I could be a friend—and I mean that to the last ditch—I should be deeply grateful for the privilege.'

'Thanks,' she said simply, and placing her hand in his, let it remain there.

The hot blood of his impressionable nature mounted to his cheeks, and his heart was aflame with a sudden intoxication of desire. But chivalry told him how much it had cost this girl, whose whole being rebelled at the thought of being physically conquered, to show such a mark of confidence. And reason warned him that any triumph he might obtain would be only for the moment. He watched the flight of a hawk in the sky—and his lips were parched and hot.

'For a long time,' she said, 'I have had a growing sensation of suffocation in life. It's stifling me. When I look ahead and see nothing but this kind of life—visiting, visiting, entertaining, entertaining, listening to that endless talk in London—well, I think I understand why some women go to the devil. At least there's something genuine about sin.'

A rabbit leaped from a bush opposite as though it had seen something terrifying, and scampered madly across the field to some burrowed refuge by a great oak. Selwyn felt the hand in his tighten convulsively.

'Look!' she cried. 'Austin—look!'

Her face blanched with sudden alarm. He sprang to his feet.

'What is it?' he cried.

'The bush—there—where the rabbit darted out.'

He looked at the spot indicated by her trembling hand, but the dwindling sunlight had just passed it, and he could see nothing but a clump of shrubbery.

'It was a man,' she said, her voice shaking querulously. 'I saw his face. He was crouching there and watching us.'

Selwyn frowned. 'Some poacher fellow,' he said, 'that's all. At any rate, I'll make sure.'

He started for the bush, when, with a tearful laugh, she stopped him, her hands clinging to his arm.

'No—no,' she said swiftly, 'it's nothing. It was just my nerves. There is no one there. The rabbit startled me.'

He hesitated momentarily, then, turning to her, gripped her arms with his hands. A great feeling of pity for the high-strung girl welled up in him, and he wished that it were possible to impart some of his own strength to her. 'Elise,' he began hoarsely, his whole being in a cloud of passion through which his brain slashed its lightning shafts of warning—'Elise'——

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The hall gong, growing in a clamant intensity, rang out on the quiet air. With the lightness of a fawn she released herself from his grip, and gathering her skirts in her hand, moved towards the path. 'Come along,' she cried; 'we shall be late for dinner.'

He followed her slowly, his hands in his pockets and his mind besieged with countless thoughts. As he crossed the lawn he looked up.

From a window in the tower of Roselawn there was shining an angry, blood-red reflection of the sun's dying moments.

VI.

It was a few minutes after midnight when the party at Roselawn retired to their rooms. There had been an impromptu dance, following some spirited bridge, and there was more than the usual chaffing and laughter as the guests dispersed to the various wings of the house.

Tired with the many events of the day, the American quickly undressed, and soothed by the comfort of cool sheets, lay in that relaxation of mind and body which prefaces the panacea of sleep. With half-closed eyes and drowsy semi-consciousness he heard the sounds of life growing less and less in the roomy passages of Roselawn, as his mind lingered over the burning memory of Elise's proximity a few hours before. He felt again the perfume of her hair and the radiant freshness of her womanhood, with its inexplicable sense of spring-time. And memory, with its power of exquisite torture, recalled to his mind the questioning eyes and the trembling, beckoning lips.

The soft chime of a clock downstairs sounded the passing of another hour. Its murmuring echo died to a silence unbroken by any sound save that of the summer breeze playing about the eaves and towers of the house.

Minutes passed. His thoughts blurred into the gathering shadows of sleep.

Of a sudden he was awake, his eyes staring into the dark, his whole body nervously, acutely, on the alert. He had heard a cry—of a nightjar—but so strange and eerie that it made him hold his breath.

The call was repeated. An owl answered with a creepy cry of alarm. Selwyn muttered impatiently at the trick played upon him by his nerves, and turning over, was about to settle again to slumber, when he heard a door softly opening. Light footsteps passed in the hall, stopping at each creaking board as though suspicious that some one might hear; then their sound was lost in the thick carpet of the stairway.

For a minute there was complete silence. He heard from below the cautious opening of the side-door leading to the lawn.

Wondering what mischief was on foot, he rose from his bed, and peering through the window, tried to penetrate the gloom. A sullen sky kept the stars imprisoned behind deep banks of clouds, and only the trees, by reason of their solid blackness, were discernible in the darkness of the night. Slipping on a dressing-gown, he stealthily left his room, and creeping downstairs, found the open door. Emerging on the lawn, he looked quickly about.

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Beneath a near-by tree he saw a woman in white, and the figure of a man pleading for something. Suddenly Selwyn saw the woman take some article from around her neck and hand it to the man. The fellow took it, and seemed to be turning away, when, with a suppressed sob, she caught him in her arms, murmuring incoherent endearments through her tears.

The black scudding clouds left the sky-clear for a moment overhead—and Selwyn felt a contraction of pain in his heart.

The woman was Elise, and the man—her brother Dick.

CHAPTER X.

GATHERING SHADOWS.

I.

Breakfast at Roselawn was a studiously inconsequential meal. Places were set as usual by the servants, but the viands and the paraphernalia necessary for their preparation were placed on a separate table in the alcove by the great window overlooking the lawn. Having performed this duty, the servants did nothing more; but one could not help feeling that they were just outside the door, like a group of prompters, ready to render instantaneous assistance should the amateurs falter.

Lord Durwent made a kindly and efficient supervisor of the commissariat table, and—there was no question of it—could boil an egg with any one in the county. And the guests plying between the source of supply and the breakfast-table proper created a vagabondish camping-out air of geniality that did much to dispel the natural stiffness of the morning intercourse. As the meal had no formal opening, every one arrived at any time during the breakfast period, and though constant apologies were offered for the frequent interruptions to Lord Durwent's own meal, it could be seen that his enjoyment of buffet proprietorship was almost a professional one.

Lady Durwent's part in the function was to supervise the coffee, and ask each guest how he or she had slept, expressing regret that the night had not been cooler, warmer, calmer, or fresher, according to the polite customs of social dialogue at breakfast.

At nine-fifteen the papers used to arrive from the village, always causing a flutter of excitement. The sense of solitude at Roselawn made the outside world something so remote and apart that there was genuine curiosity to discover what the deuce it had been doing with itself during the house-party's retreat.

Lord Durwent read the *Morning Post* as a sort of ‘prairie oyster’ or ‘bromo-seltzer.’ It settled him. There was something about that journal’s editorial page and its dignified treatment of events that made Roselawn seem the embodiment of British principle. Being a man who prided himself on a catholicity of view-point, he also subscribed to the *Daily Mail*—that frivolous young thing that has as many editions as a *debutante* has frocks, and by its super-delicate apparatus at Carmelite House can detect a popular clamour before it is louder than a kitten’s miaow.

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As a concession to the ladies of the household, he took, in addition, the *Daily Sketch* and the *Daily Mirror*, those two energetic illustrated papers, which, benefiting from the remarkable geographical fact that every place of consequence in England is exactly two hours from London, are able to offer photos of riders in Rotten How, bathers at Brighton, rowers at Oxford, and foreign monarchs walking at Windsor, the very morning after all these remarkable persons have astonished the world by riding, bathing, rowing, or walking.

But to Lord Durwent these papers and the *Daily Mail* were but interludes. The *Morning Post* was the real business of life, and after reading through its solid columns of type, he enjoyed the sensation of somehow having done something for his country.

II.

It was just before the arrival of the morning papers that Selwyn descended to the dining-room. Helping himself to porridge, he answered Lady Durwent's polite conventional questions.

'And *how* did you sleep?' asked his hostess, putting into the inquiry that artistic personal touch which made it seem as if this were the first time she had asked the question, and he the first guest to whom it had been propounded.

'Lady Durwent,' he answered, smiling, 'I haven't the faintest idea.'

'Then,' said his hostess, triumphantly explaining the obvious, 'you must have slept well.'

Selwyn thought that when he answered Lady Durwent's query a quick look of relief had passed across the face of Elise. It was for her peace of mind he had lied, as into the hours of dawn he had lain awake, trying to unravel the meaning of the nocturnal scene. He knew that her prodigal brother had been forbidden the ancestral home, but it was hardly necessary that he should lie in hiding like a negro slave dreading the hounds upon his track. And yet, as he recalled the sudden glimpse of Dick's face, Selwyn remembered that there had been a hunted look in the dark-shadowed, luminous eyes. Vaguely he felt that this new development would hinder the understanding reached by Elise and himself during the evening. If only he could go to her and offer his help or solace; or if she would come to him frankly and let him share the unhappy secret, whatever it was, it might prove a bond of comradeship instead of another element to deepen her consciousness of aloofness.

Still churning these various thoughts, he smiled his greetings to her, and affecting an easy unconcern, took his part in the fashionable agricultural conversation which marks the morning intercourse of country-living gentle-folk. If it had not been that the pigs mentioned were Lord Fitz-Guff's, and the cabbages Lady Dingworthy's—and the

accents of the speakers beyond question—Selwyn could have imagined that he was sitting around Hank Myer's stove in Doanville, N.Y., listening to the gossip of the local Doanvillians on earth's produce.

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'Ah,' said Lord Durwent, sighting a messenger from over the egg-timer, 'here are the papers.'

Directly afterwards the butler entered with the four morning journals, solemnly presented them to his master (with a little more dignity than a Foreign Minister displays in handing the ambassador of an enemy country his passports), then made his exit with his eyes sedately raised, to avoid noting more than was necessary of the 'behind-stage' aspect of his domain.

'Hello!' said Lord Durwent, perusing the *Morning Post*; 'what's this? Austria has delivered an ultimatum to Servia.'

'What!' cried one of the ladies; 'over that unpronounceable assassination?'

'Dear me!' said the woman who kept record of retired royalties, 'that will upset my dear friend Empress——'

But her voice was lost in the clamour, as every one, deserting breakfast, crowded about Lord Durwent, and half in jest demanded to know what the ramshackle empire had to say for itself.

In a voice that grew tremulous with anger, the host read the details, point by point, and as the seriousness of the thing broke upon the hearers, even the very lightest tongues were for the moment stilled.

With a frown the nobleman looked up as he reached the end of the ultimatum, in which one nation, for its pride, demanded that another should hand over its honour, debased and shackled.

'It is infamous,' said Lord Durwent.

'I tell you what,' said a bland youth named Maynard, who was always in high spirits at breakfast, bored at lunch, 'frightfully bucked' by a cup of tea at four, and invariably sentimental after dinner; 'it would do these nasty little Balkans a lot of good to hold 'em all under water for about three minutes—what?'

'But this is more than a Balkan quarrel,' said Lord Durwent.

'Balkan quarrels always are,' said the youth amiably.

In a chorus of quick questions and answers, in which surmise and conjecture played ducks and drakes with fact, the party divided into two camps, the majority taking the stand that it was a local affair and would lead to nothing; the minority, led by a retired army captain called Fensome, reading a dark augury for the future. In the midst of all the chaffing Selwyn noticed, however, that the placidity of decorum had been dropped,

and both men and women were leaning forward in the unaccustomed stimulus of their brains rallying to meet a new and powerful situation.

The men did not lose that note of easy banter which seemed the rule when women were present, but in the faces of the little group who contended that danger was ahead he could detect the stiffening of the jaw and the steadying of the eye which come to those who see events riding towards them with the threat of a prairie fire driven by a wind.

'But, good heavens!' said Selwyn, in answer to some one's prophecy that war would result, 'surely the big nations can stop it. Germany and you and America—we three won't let Austria cut Serbia's throat in full daylight.'

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The retired army captain turned a monocle on him. 'You have been in Germany, Mr. Selwyn?'

'Yes, just recently.'

'Did you ever hear them toasting *Der Tag*? My friend, it has arrived.—Durwent, old boy, if you will excuse me, I think I shall go to town at noon. If my old bones aren't lying, the thing which a few of us fossils have been preaching to deaf ears has come to pass, and there may be a job for a belivered old devil like me yet.'

'But,' cried Lady Durwent, whose easily roused theatrical instinct gave her the delightful sensation of presiding at a meeting of the Cabinet, 'what have we to do with Austria and Servia?'

'Hear, hear,' said the bland youth. 'Let 'em hop aboard each other if they like. I think it would be deucedly splendid for us to have another war; we're all fed up—aren't we?—with just enjoying ourselves. But I don't see how we can intrude into those blighters' little show.'

'Exactly,' said Selwyn; 'it's an isolated incident in European affairs. In what possible way can it lead to a rupture between Britain and Germany, as Captain Fensome here predicts?'

The officer referred to shrugged his shoulders. 'It's fairly simple,' he said. 'If, as I think, Germany is behind all this, Servia will appeal to Russia; and remember that the Great Bear is mother to all the Slavs. There will, of course, be jockeying for position, bluff, bravado, and all the rest of it; but France is bound to act with Russia, and with all that explosive hanging around it will be strange if some spark doesn't fall among it.'

'But what has that to do with England?'

'Nothing and everything. The greatest hope of maintaining peace lies with Great Britain. If we had the army we should have, I don't think there would be a war; but, thanks to our ostrich temperament, we are reduced to a handful of men and our action is robbed of everything but merely moral strength.'

'But that is a tremendous factor,' said Selwyn.

'Yes,' admitted the other dryly; 'but I prefer guns.'

'Then you don't think Britain powerful enough to steady the situation if it comes?'

'N-no. Not unless'—— The monocle dropped from the speaker's eye, and with annoying coolness he paused to replace it. 'Do you think America will swallow her doctrine and throw in her lot with us?'

Selwyn bit his lip to keep himself from too impetuous an answer. For the first time he felt an envy for the cool imperturbability of the Island Race.

'If you ask me,' he said, 'whether America will plunge into war at the bidding of a group of diplomats who shuffle the nations like a pack of cards, then I say no. If you older nations over here allow this thing to come to a crisis with a rattling of swords and "*Hock der Kaiser!*" and "Britannia Rules the Waves," count us out. But should the occasion arise when palpable injustice is being done, and the soul of Britain calls to the soul of America that Right must be maintained, then the Republic that was born—if you will permit me to say so—born out of its resentment against injustice will act instantly.'

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'Supposing,' said the other, 'that Germany invades Belgium?'

'But—I understand that Germany has guaranteed Belgium's neutrality.'

The ex-officer showed no signs of having heard him, but shook his head impatiently as one does when annoyed by a fly. 'Supposing,' he repeated, 'that Germany invades Belgium.'

'In that case,' said Selwyn sternly, 'America will be the first to protest.'

'To protest?'

'And fight,' said the American, swallowing a desire to hurl a plate at the monocle.

'You will pardon me,' said Lord Durwent, 'but I do not think we can expect America to become mixed up in this thing. She has her own problems of the New World, and it is too much to hope that she is going to come over here and become embroiled in a European conflict.'

'But, dad,' said Elise Durwent, speaking for the first time, 'if, as Mr. Selwyn says, it is clear that a wrong is being committed, America will insist upon acting.'

'Oh, I don't know,' broke in the youth who was always lively at breakfast, but who was beginning to be bored; 'it's one thing to get waxy about your own corns, and quite another when they're on some other blighter's foot—what? I mean, you chaps over there got awfully hot under the collar when dear old Georgius Rex—Heaven rest his soul!—tried to jump down your throat with both spurs on and gallop your little tum-tums out. But the question is, does it hurt in the same place if old Frankie-Joseph of Austria pinks Thingmabob of Servia underneath the fifth rib—what, what?'

'Is Britain great enough for such a situation?' asked Selwyn, repressing a smile. 'Would she accept Belgium's crisis as her own?'

'Oh, that's another thing,' said the young man a little uncomfortably. 'We've signed the bally thing, and of course we'll play the game, and'——

'As Maynard says,' interrupted the former army man, 'it's a bigger thing for America than for us. Mind you, I don't say we need America to help us to make war, but we do need her help if war is to be averted; and any move of such a nature on her part demands what you author fellows would call "a high degree of altruism." How's that, Durwent, for a chap who never reads anything but the *Pink Un*?'

'Oh, well,' said Lady Durwent complacently, 'it's probably all a storm in a teacup, anyway. Some Austrian diplomat has been jilted for a Servian, I suppose. Isn't that the

way wars always happen?’ and she sighed heavily, recalling to her mind the classic features of H. Stackton Dunckley.

‘That’s what I say,’ said the bright youth of the morning splendour. ‘Why make a horse cross a bridge if it won’t drink? Here goes—heads, a European war; tails, another thousand years of peace.—Ah, tough luck, Fensome, old son; it’s tails.’

‘Then let’s begin the thousand years with some tennis,’ cried Elise, whose eyes were sparkling, ‘immediately after breakfast.’

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'Shall us? Let's,' cried the talkative Maynard. 'So lay on, comrades—the victuals are waiting—and “damned be he that first cries, ‘Hold, enough!’”

III.

With an animated burst of chatter the house-party had given itself over to a thorough enjoyment of the remainder of breakfast. Ultimatums and the alarums of war vanished into thin air, like mists dispelled by the sun. The serious face of the ex-officer and the unwonted air of distraction on Lord Durwent's countenance were the only indications that the morning was different from any other. Tongues and hearts were light, and airy bubbles of badinage were blown into space for the delectation of all who cared to look.

It was during a fashionable monologue of the Court-Circular lady that Maynard, the man of moods, who was sitting next to Selwyn, leaned over and whispered, 'Get hold of the *Sketch*. It's on your right. Pretend you're looking at the pictures. I've got the *Mirror*.'

Wondering what asinine prank was in the young man's mind, but not wanting to disturb the monologist by untimely controversy, Selwyn reached for the *Sketch*, and assumed a deep interest in the very latest picture of London's very latest stage favourite who could neither sing, dance, nor act, and was tremendously popular.

'Excuse me, Lady Durwent,' said the gilded youth when a lull permitted him to speak, 'but would you pass the *Daily Mail*, please?'

'My dear Horace,' said Elise, 'you haven't taken to reading the *Mail*?'

'No, dear one. Heaven forbid! I merely write for it.'

'What!' There was an *ensemble* of astonishment.

'Ra-ther. I sent their contributed page a scholarly little thing from my pen entitled “Should One Kiss in the Park?” If it's in I get three guineas, and I'm going to start for Fiji to escape old Fensome's war.'

'Mr. Selwyn,' said Lady Durwent, passing the journal along, 'you have a rival.'

With an air of considerable embarrassment the fair-haired contributor to newspapers opened the pages of the *Daily Mail*, but protesting that he was too bashful to endure the gaze of the curious, he begged permission to retire to the library, there to search in privacy for his literary child.

'I say, Selwyn,' he said, 'you come along too if you're through pecking. Nothing like having the opinion of an expert, even if he is jealous.'

With a promise to return immediately and read the effort aloud, the two men left the table and adjourned to the adjoining room. With a frown of impatience Selwyn was about to demand the reason for his inclusion in the silly affair, when the other stopped him with a gesture and closed the door.

'Quick!' he said. 'Grab that knife—here's the *Sketch*. Look through it for anything about Dick Durwent.'

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Seeing that the other was serious, Selwyn spread the paper before him and hurriedly searched its columns.

'Great Scott!' he cried. 'Here it'——

'Sh-sh! Hurry up and cut it out. Right. I'll fix up the *Mirror* in the same way. Now skim through the *Mail*. Got it? By Jove! damn near a whole column. Here'—Maynard ran the knife down the side of the column. 'Now then, old Fensome has promised to get the thing out of the *Post*, and to tell Lord Durwent before he goes to town. But he mustn't hear of it this way, and those women are not to know a word about it while they're in the house.'

Selwyn nodded and looked at the ragged clippings in his hand:

'ATTEMPTED MURDER IN WEST END.'

'WELL-KNOWN NOBLEMAN ATTACKED BY PEER'S SON.'

'QUARREL OVER DEMI-MONDAINE.'

'Gad, those are juicy lines, aren't they?' said Maynard. 'Won't some of our worthy citizens lick their chops over them, and point to the depravity of the upper classes? Do you know Dick Durwent?'

'I have seen him a couple of times.'

'Awfully decent chap. Screw loose, you know, and punishes his Scotch no end, but a topping fellow underneath. I don't know who the bit of fluff is that they're fighting about, but you can wager a quid to a bob that Dick thought he was doing her a good turn.'

'I wonder who the nobleman is.'

'Can't say, I'm sure. Probably he can't either just now, seeing what Durwent did to him. Of course, it's a rotten thing to say, but if the blighter's really going to die, I hope he's one of the seventeen who stand between me and the Earldom of Forth.'

There was a knock at the door, and an inquiry regarding the newly discovered author.

'Coming,' called Maynard, reaching for the *Daily Mail*. 'Shove those clippings in your pocket, Selwyn, and for the love of Allah help me to select something here that I can pretend to have written. Fortunately I can play the blithering idiot without much trouble.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE RENDING OF THE VEIL.

I.

The house-party at Roselawn had hurriedly broken up, and only Selwyn remained. In view of the scandal about Dick Durwent, although it was not spoken of by any one, he felt that it would have been more delicate to leave with the other guests. But it seemed as if the Durwents dreaded to be alone. His presence gave an impersonal shield behind which they could seek shelter from each other, and they urged him so earnestly to remain that it would have been ungracious to refuse.

It was the evening of August 4th, and the family circle, reduced to four, had just finished dinner. There had been only one topic of conversation—there could be but one. Britain had given Germany until midnight (Central European time) to guarantee withdrawal from Belgium.

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After dinner the family adjourned for coffee to the living-room, and, as was his custom, Lord Durwent proffered his guest a cigar.

'No, thanks,' said Selwyn. 'If you will excuse me, I think I will do without a smoke just now.—Lady Durwent, do you mind if I go to my room for half-an-hour? There are one or two matters I must attend to.'

Half-way up the stairs he changed his mind, and went out on the lawn instead. Darkness was setting in with swiftly gathering shadows, and he found the cool evening air a slight solace to a brow that was weary with conflicting thoughts.

America had not acted. There towards the west his great country lay wrapped in ocean's aloofness. The pointed doubts of the ex-army captain had been confirmed—America had stood aside. Well, why shouldn't she! It was all very well, he argued, for Britain to pose as a protector of Belgium, but she could not afford to do otherwise. It was simply European politics all over again, and the very existence of America depended on her complete isolation from the Old World.

Yet Germany had sworn to observe Belgium's neutrality, and at that very moment her guns were battering the little nation to bits. Was that just a European affair, or did it amount to a world issue?

If only Roosevelt were in power! . . . Who was this man Wilson, anyway? Could anything good come out of Princeton? . . . In spite of himself, Selwyn laughed to find how much of the Harvard tradition remained.

If America had only spoken. If she had at least recorded her protest. Supposing Germany won. . . .

Supposing——

He kicked at a twig that lay in his path, and recalled the wonderful regiments that he had seen march past the Kaiser only three months ago. Who was going to stop that mighty empire? Effeminate France? Insular, ease-loving England?

Passing the stables, he started nervously at hearing his name spoken.

'Good-evening, Mr. Selwyn. It's pleasant out o' doors, sir.'

It was Mathews, the head-groom of the Durwents.

'Yes,' said the American, pausing, 'very pleasant.'

'It looks sort of as if we was going to 'ave some ditherin's wi' Germany, Mr. Selwyn.'

'It does. I don't see how war can be averted now.'

'It's funny Mister Malcolm ain't 'ome yet, sir. Has 'is moberlizin' orders came?'

'There's a War Office telegram in the house. I suppose his instructions are in it.'

The groom shook his head and swung philosophically on his heels. He was a broad-faced man of nearly fifty, with an honest simplicity of countenance and manner engendered of long service where master and man live in a relation of mutual confidence. He sucked meditatively at a corn-cob pipe, and Selwyn, changing his mind about a cigar, produced a case from his pocket.

'Have one, Mathews?' he asked.

'No, thank 'ee, sir. I'm a man o' easy-goin' 'abits, and likes me old pipe and me old woman likewise, both being sim'lar and the same.'

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With which profound thought he drew a long breath of smoke and sent it on the air, to follow his philosophy to whatever place words go to.

'If Germany and us puts on the gloves,' ruminated Mathews, 'I'll be real sorry Mas'r Dick ain't 'ere. He's a rare lad, 'e is—one o' the right breed, and no argifyin' can prove contrariwise. I always was fond o' Mas'r Dick, I was, since 'e was so high, and used to come in 'ere and ask me to learn 'im how to swear proper like a groom. Ah, a fine lad 'e was; and—criky!—'e were a lovely sight on a hoss. Mister Malcolm 'e's a fine rider hisself, but just a little stiff to my fancy, conseckens o' sittin' up on parade with them there Hussars o' hisn. But Mas'r Dick—he were part o' the hoss, he were, likewise and sim'lar.'

Selwyn nodded and smoked in silence. He was rather glad to have run into the garrulous groom. The steady stream of inelegant English helped to ease the torture of his mind.

'Has milord said anything about the hosses, Mr. Selwyn?'

'No. What do you mean?'

'Nothing much, sir, excep' that it's just what you can expeck from a gen'l'man like him. He comes in 'ere this arternoon and says to me, "Mathews," he says, "if this 'ere war comes about it'll be a long one, and make no mistake, so I estermate we'd better give the Government our hosses right away, in course keepin' old Ned for to drive." Never twigged an eyelash, he didn't. No, sir. Just up and tells it to me like I'm a-doin' to you. "Then," I says, "you won't be wanting me no longer, milord?" And he says, "Mathews, as long as there's a home for me, there's one for you," and he clapped me on my shoulder likewise as if him and me were ekals. It kind o' done me in, it did, what with the prospick o' losin' my hosses—them as I'd raised since they was runnin' around arter their mothers like young galathumpians—and what with his speakin' so fair and kindly like. Well—criky!—I could ha' swore; I felt so bad.'

'It will be a great loss for Lord Durwent to lose his stable.'

'Ah, that it will. But this arternoon, arter what I'm a-tellin' you, he just goes through with me and says, "Nell's lookin' pretty fit," or "How's Prince's bad knee?" just as if nothink had happened at all. I says to myself, "Milord, you're a thoroughbred, you are," for he makes me think o' Mister Malcolm's bull-terrier, he do. Breed? That there dog has a ancestry as would do credit to a Egyptian mummy. I've seen Mister Malcolm take a whip arter the dog had got among the chickens or took a bite out o' the game-keeper's leg, him never liking the game-keeper, conseckens o' his being bow-legged and having a contrary dispersion, and do you think that there dog would let a whimper out o' him? No, sir. He would just turn his eye on Mister Malcolm and sorter say, "All right, thrash

away. I may hev my little weaknesses, but, thank Gord! I come of a distinkished fam'ly."

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They smoked in silence for a few minutes.

'No, sir,' resumed the groom, pushing his hat back in order to scratch his head, 'he never whimpered, did milord; but I saw when he got opposite Mas'r Dick's old mare Princess that he felt kind o' bad, and he didn't say much for the better part o' a minute. Mr. Selwyn, I'm a bit creaky in my jints and ain't as frisky as I were, but I'd be werry much obliged to be sent over to this 'ere war and see if I couldn't put a bullet or two in some o' them there sausage-eaters.'

'Well,' said the American moodily, 'you may get your chance.'

'Thank 'ee, sir. I hope so, sir.'

'Good-night, Mathews.'

'Good-night, sir. Thank 'ee, sir.'

Selwyn moved off into the network of shadows. Looking back once, he saw the weather-beaten groom with hands on his hips, tilting himself to and fro in benicotined enjoyment of some odd strain of philosophy. Good heavens! was that the way men went to war,—as if it were a hunt with an equal chance of being the hound or the hare? 'Sausage-eaters'—what a phrase to describe those eagle-helmeted supermen of Prussia's cavalry! And this little island of pipe-smoking, country-side philosophers and pampered, sport-loving youth—this was the country, heart of a crumbling empire, that had ordered the gray torrent of Germany to alter its course and flow back to its own confines. It was absurd. It was grotesque. It was a sporting thing to do, but would it mean the collapse of the sprawling, disjointed British Empire, linked together by a flimsy tradition of loyalty to the Crown?

Scotland would be faithful, not so much to England as to her own instincts. Even if England were the heart of things, Scotland was the brain, and more than any other part supplied the driving-power for the wheels of empire. But what of rebellious Ireland and the distant Dominions isolated by the seas? Would they seize this moment of Britain's mad impetuosity and declare for their own independence? It was the history of nations—and did not history repeat itself?

Canada, of course, would be governed in her actions by the mighty neighbouring Republic. That was inevitable when the young Dominion's life was so dominated by that of the United States. But what of the others? . . .

Thus for half-an-hour queried the man from America. He was about to turn into the house, when he glanced once more in the direction of the stables. It was too dark to distinguish anything, but there was the glow from Mathews's pipe as it faintly lit the surrounding darkness.

II.

Eleven o'clock.

'Austin.'

He had been sitting in the library talking to Lord Durwent, but the latter had just left the room to answer a phone-call from London. Elise, who had been playing the gramophone in the music-room, shut the instrument off and hurried to the American's side.

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'Yes, Elise?' He tried to rise, but she pressed him back and sat on the arm of the huge chair, looking down at him with a face that was glowing with excitement. Her eyes were like jewels of fate lit from within by some magic flame, and a mutinous lock of hair fell on the side of her face, almost touching the crimson lips. There was so much magnetism in her beauty, such a heaven in the unconquered warmth of her impetuous being, that Selwyn gripped the arms of his chair to help to restrain the mad impulse to grasp her in his arms and smother those lips and the flushed, satin cheeks in a tempest of kisses.

'Yes, Elise?' he repeated, clearing his throat.

'Listen, Austin. I can't stay inside any longer. I think my blood is on fire. Will you come with me to the village?'

'At eleven o'clock?'

'Yes. The news from London will reach the village first, and I want to be there when it comes. We shall have to hurry if we are to make it in time.'

'I'm at your service, Elise.'

'Right-o. I'll let the mater know. I'll just run upstairs and put something easy on, and I'll meet you at the front of the house. You had better change too.'

A few minutes later she joined him on the lawn. They had just reached the road which led to the porter's lodge, when, without a word of warning, she grasped his hand, and, half-running, half-dancing, pulled him forward at a rapid pace. With a laugh he joined in her mood, and, running side by side, they sped along the drive, while startled rabbits leaped across their path, and melancholy owls hooted disapprobation. As if the fumes of madness had mounted even to the skies, dark flecks of cloud raced headlong across the starry heavens.

They were mad. The world was mad. He wondered whether his brain might be playing some prank, and this absurd thing of two young people laughing and running to discover whether or not a nation was at war would prove a pointless jest of unsound imagination.

'Come along,' she cried. 'You're dragging.'

Then it wasn't a dream. The sound of her voice whipped the wandering fantasies of his brain into coherency. With a shout he jumped forward, and ran as he had not done since that one great game when, as a 'scrub,' he had his chance against Yale.

'Oh-oh-oh,' she laughed, 'I'm—winded.'

He caught her up in his arms as if her weight were no more than a child's, and carried her forward a hundred paces. His strength was limitless. He felt as if his body would never again know the lassitude of fatigue.

His pulses were throbbing with double fever: that of the world and his own hot love for her. Yes, it was love. What a fool he had been ever to doubt it! His last thoughts at night were of her; the last word whispered was her name; the last picture shrouded by the approaching mists of sleep was of her face. What was morning but a sunlit moment that meant Elise? What was the day, what were the years, what was life, but one great moment to be lived for Elise—Elise?

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'Put me down, Austin. There! you'll be tired.'

'Tired!'

But her feet had touched the ground, and she was away again by herself, like a tantalising sprite of the woods. The errant lock had been joined in its mutiny by a wealth of dark-hued, auburn hair, blowing free in the reckless summer breeze.

Out of the estate and along the highway, shadowed by tall bushes; past cottages hiding in snug retreat of vines and flowers; past the cross-roads, with their sign-post standing like a gibbet waiting its prize; past the inn on the outskirts of the village, with its creaking sign, and its neighing horses in the stable; past the church on the rise of the hill, with its graveyard and its ivy-covered steeple—and then the village.

Gathered in the square they could see a group of people listening to a man who was reading something aloud.

'It's the rector,' said Elise. 'Let us wait a minute. Can you hear what he is saying?'

The voice had stopped, and the crowd broke into a cheer that echoed strangely on the night-air. It had hardly died away when a quavering, high-pitched voice started 'God Save the King,' and with a sturdy indifference to pitch the rest followed, the octogenarian who had begun it sounding clear above the others as he half-whistled and half-sang the anthem through his two remaining teeth.

'That's old Hills!' cried Elise, laughing hysterically. 'He was at Sebastopol.'

The crowd was coming away.

Some were boisterous, others silent. A girl was laughing, but there was a strange look in her eyes. Bounding ahead in high appreciation of the village's nocturnal behaviour, a nondescript hound was preceding an elderly widow who was weeping quietly as with faltering step she clung to the arm of her son, who was carrying himself with a new erectness.

Behind them walked Mathews the groom, corn-cob pipe and all, shaking his head argumentatively and squaring his shoulders.

An Empire had declared war.

III.

Elise entered the post-office to telephone the news to Roselawn, and Selwyn was left alone. It was only for a few minutes, but in that brief space of time his whole being

underwent a vital crisis, which was not only to change the course of his own life, but was to affect thousands who would never meet him.

The creative mind is ever elusive and unexpected in its workings. In it the masculine and feminine temperaments are fused. It leaps to conclusions—erroneous maybe, but sustained by the feminine conviction that what is instinctive must be true. Selwyn's was essentially a creative mind, prone to emotionalism and to inspiration. With men of his type logic is largely retrogressive: the conclusion is reached first; the reasons follow.

A few days before his imagination had been strangely stirred by the swiftness of thought which at twilight in England could visualise New York at noon. Simple though the scientific explanation might be, it had left him with a sense of detachment, almost as if he were on Olympus and the world spread out below for him to gaze upon.

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That feeling now returned with redoubled force.

The group of villagers had parted into many human fragments. He could hear the hearty invitation of the innkeeper for all boon spirits to join him, free of expense—and regardless of the liquor laws—in a pint of bitter, to drink confusion to the enemy. But to Selwyn they seemed creatures of another planet—or, rather, that he was the visitor in a world of strange inhabitants.

All the resentfulness of an idealist whose ancestry was steeped in liberty of action rose to a fury at this unwarrantable interference of war with the lives of men—a fury maddened by his feeling of utter impotence. Was it possible, he argued, that a group of men drunk with pomp and lust of conquest could wreck the whole fabric of civilisation? What of science and education? Had they risen only to be the playthings of madmen? What kind of a world was it that allowed such things?

Was it possible, however, that this war was different from any other? Granted that Austria had willed the crushing of Servia, and that Germany was instigator of the crime—had not the rest of the world proved false to their creeds by allowing the war-hunger of the Central Powers to achieve its aim? Supposing France, Britain, America, and Italy had joined in an immediate warning to Germany and Austria that if they did not desist from their malpractices the area of their countries would be declared a plague-spot, commercial intercourse with the outside world would be brought to an end, and their citizens treated as lepers. If that had been done, men could have gone on leading the lives to which they had been called, and by sheer cumulative effect could have exerted a moral pressure on the war-lust of Germany that would have been irresistible.

Yet, like a bull that sees red, the nations had rushed madly at each other, thirsting to gore each other's vitals with their horns. Men of peaceful vocations were at that very moment slaughtering their brother-men. It was wrong—hideously wrong!

And the charge of responsibility could not be laid at the door of those idiots of Emperors. Their crime was evil enough, but the responsibility for war was with the people who allowed themselves to be led to murder by a mad, jingoistic patriotism. Supposing that when Europe was mobilising, the people of Great Britain had sent a message to the Germans: 'Brothers, justice must be done and malefactors punished. Fearing nothing but the universal conscience, we refuse to fight with you, but demand in humanity's name that you join with us in establishing the permanent supremacy of Right.' Some such message as that coming from a Power steeped in a great past would have been ashes to smother the smouldering flames of world-war.

But there was no machinery for such a thing. There was no method by which the great heart of one country could speak with that of another. Our obsolete diplomatic envoys, the errand-boys of international politics, were mere artifices, tending to cement rather than to dispel the mutual distrust of nations. What, then, stood in the way of world-

understanding? What was the cause of the blindness which permitted men to be led like dumb cattle to the slaughter?

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Ignorance.

That was the answer to it all. It was ignorance that kept a nation unaware of its own highest destiny; it was ignorance that fomented trouble among the peoples of the earth. Suffering, sickness, crime, tyranny, war, were all growths whose roots were buried in ignorance and sucked its vile nourishment.

An impetuous wave of loyalty towards his own country swept over Austin Selwyn at the thought. Other peoples had declared war on each other: America by her silence had declared war on Ignorance. He felt a sudden shame for his previous doubts. He saw clearly that his great continent-country was a rock to which the other baffled, despairing nations might cling when disaster overtook them.

And as he was joined by Elise Durwent, the American swore an eternal oath of vengeance against Ignorance.

IV.

With her arm in his, their subdued voices trembling with the repression of emotion, they retraced their steps. Back past the church with its white gravestones so curiously peaceful in the midst of it all; past the inn, jovial with light and the clamour of village oracles; past the forge, with its lifeless fires a presage of things to come; past the cross-roads, where the sign-post, silhouetted against the sky, seemed no longer a gibbet, but a crucifix; past cottages stirring with unaccustomed life, unconscious of the unbidden guest that was soon to knock with ghostly fingers at almost every door.

Along the quiet English lane they walked, but though the closeness of the girl beside him was ministering to the senses, his mind remained so clutched in the grip of thought that his head throbbed with pain with each step of his foot jarring upon the road.

They had reached the entrance to the estate and were nearing the house, when his reverie was broken by the sound of a quivering breath and a trembling of the hand on his arm. Like a conflagration that is already out of control, his brain flared into further revolt with the stimulus of a new resentment—he had not thought of woman's part in the thing.

'Elise,' he cried, 'this is monstrous. It is only the vile selfishness of men that makes it possible. They are not giving a thought to the women, yet you are the real sufferers. Now I know what you meant when you said that women don't have their place in the world. If they did, this never could have happened; for their hearts would never permit the men that are born of women to slaughter each other like bestial savages. Now is the time for you to speak. This is the hour for your rebellion. Let the whole world of

women rise in a body and denounce this inhuman, insufferable wrong. If your rebellion is ever to come, let it come now.'

The hand on his arm was wrenched free, and Elise stood facing him with fury in her eyes.

'Are you mad, Mr. Selwyn? Or is this your idea of a joke?'

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He stared at her, dumbfounded. Her eyes were glowing, and her lips were parched with the fever of the breath passing through them.

'A joke?' he said. 'Great heavens! Do you think I would jest on such a subject?'

'But—— You mean that we women should organise, rise up, to hinder our men from going to war?'

'Doesn't your heart tell you how infamous war is?'

'What does that matter?'

'But, Elise,' he pleaded desperately, 'some one must be great enough to rise to the new citizenship of the world even if martyrdom be the condition of enrolment. It is far, far harder than snatching a musket and sweeping on with the mob, but it is for people like you and me to have the courage to try to stem this flood of ignorance, to stop this butchery of women's hearts.'

'Women's hearts!' She laughed hysterically. 'And you believe that you understand women! Do you think war appals us? Do you think because we may shed tears that it is from self-pity? Rubbish! There are thousands of us to-night who could almost shout for joy.'

'Elise!'

'I mean it. Don't you see that to-night our whole life has been changed? Men are going to die—horribly, cruelly—but they're going to play the parts of men. Don't you understand what that means to us? *We're part of it all.* It was the women who gave them birth. It was the women who reared them, then lost them in ordinary life—and now it's all justified. They can't go to war without us. We're partners at last. Do you think women are afraid of war? Why, the glory of it is in our very blood.'

'But,' cried Selwyn, 'you can't think what you are saying.'

'I don't want to. All I know is that I could sing and dance and go mad for the wonder of it all.'

He took a step forward and grasped both her wrists in his hands.

'Listen to me,' he said, his jaw stiffening as he spoke; 'some of us have got to keep our sanity in this crisis. You know better than I, for you have described it to me, that this country has been darkened with ignorance just as Germany and the rest have been. This is the climax of it all—and you're going to help it on, instead of having the courage to take your stand. Elise, to-night I pledged my whole life to a crusade against the darkness that men are forced to endure. It is going to be a long fight, and perhaps a



hopeless one, although some day, somehow, the cause must win. And I need your inspiration. Oh, my dear, my dear, you must know how much I love you. Every minute that you're away I'm hungry for you. When we were together that evening by the stream I longed so to take you in my arms that my heart ached with the repression I forced on myself. I have known that there were a thousand difficulties in the way, and I was not going to speak, but the other night when you met your brother by the oak'——

'Oh! you were spying.'

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'It was an accident. I said nothing to you about it, but I thought that perhaps you needed me a little, that it might be my privilege to share your sorrow. And to-night, dear, I know that together we could work and live, and be a tremendous power for good.'

Her face, which had gone strangely pale, was darkened by a return of the crimson flush.

'Do you think I'd marry you,' she exclaimed scornfully—'a man who counsels treason?'

'I counsel loyalty to the higher citizenship.'

'H'mm!' Her shoulders contracted, and forcing her wrists free of his hands, she looked haughtily into his burning eyes. 'You had better go back to America and tell them there of this ignorant little island whose men are so crude and stupid that when the King calls they go to war.'

'Elise'——

'I would rather marry the poorest groom in our stables than you. He would at least be a man.'

'I have not deserved this, Elise. God knows I am no more a coward than other men, but I feel that I have seen a great truth which demands my loyalty.'

'It is easier to be loyal to a truth than to a country.'

'You know you are wrong when you say that. Come—we are both unnerved to-night. Perhaps I was injudicious to speak at a time when I should have known that you would be overwrought, but I could not keep back the love which you must have read'——

'Please, Mr. Selwyn, you must never mention that again. I don't want to marry you. I don't want to marry any one. I always said that a women's rebellion would come, and I feel in my blood that it has started to-night. I don't know how, or when, or where, but I am going to join it and'——

'Then you agree with me?' he cried eagerly. 'You feel that the women of this country should rise, and try to prevent this catastrophe?'

'You fool,' she said, half in pity, but with a sneer; 'you poor blind American! Yes, there's going to be a revolution against conventions, Society, customs, morality, for all I know. They're all going overboard. We've hoisted the black flag to-night, but with one, and only one, object—to help Britain and the men of Britain to fight!'

* * * * *

And the British Fleet, at the King's command, was steaming out into the night.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HONOURABLE MALCOLM DURWENT STARTS ON A JOURNEY.

I.

An early morning mist hung over the fields of Roselawn. From his nest in the branches of a tree, a bird chirruped dubiously, as though to assure himself even against his better judgment that the rain was only a threat. The woods which bordered the meadows were blurred into a foreboding, formless black, like a fringe of mourning, and the distant hills stood sentinels at the sepulchre of nature.

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Flowers, rearing their lovely necks for the first caress of the sun, drooped disconsolately, their petals like the lips of a maid who has waited in vain for the coming of her lover. Cattle in the fields moved restlessly from one spot to another, finding the grass sour and unpalatable. Through the damp-charged air the melancholy plaint of a single cow sounded like the warning of rocks on a foggy coast.

In the air which was unstirred by a breath of wind the very buildings of Roselawn seemed strangely motionless, with their roofs glistening in their covering of moisture. And through an archway of trees the distant spire of the church on the hill rose above the mist as a symbol held aloft by some smoke-shrouded martyr of the past.

A hound with apologetic tail came stealthily from the house and made for the cover of the stables. A horse rattled its headstall and pawed the flooring with a restless hoof.

With a feeling of chill in the air, Selwyn rose at seven, and dressing himself quickly, left the house for a walk before breakfast. His body was fatigued from the long vigil of the mind which had kept at bay all but a short hour of sleep, but he felt the necessity of exercise, as though in the striding of limbs his torturing thoughts might lessen their thumbscrew grip.

His feet grew heavy in the thick dew of the grass, as he plunged across the fields to a path which led through the woods, where squirrels, coquetting with the intruder, dared him to follow to the summit of the oaks.

Heedless of the morning's melancholy, yet unconsciously soothed by its calm solace, he went briskly forward, and his blood, sluggish from inaction, leaped through his veins and coloured the shadowed pallor of his face with a glow of warmth.

He had lost her.

That was the dominant note of his thoughts. What a jest the Fates had prepared for him that the very moment when the incoherencies of his life were crystallised by a great flash of truth—the very moment when he had felt the overwhelming impulse to consecrate his life in a crusade against Ignorance—that same instant should witness the snapping of the silk threads of his love!

How scornful she had been—as if he were something unclean, too low a thing for her to touch! This girl, whom he had pitied for her loneliness—this woman who had ridiculed the life of England and declared that it was stifling her—had said that the glory of war was in her blood. She had called him a fool because he dared to say that carnage was wrong. He had thought her an advanced thinker; she was a reactionary of the most pronounced type.

A feeling of fury whipped his pulses. Confound her and her unbridled tongue! What a fool he had been to woo her! One might as well try to coax a wild horse into submission. She would have to be conquered; she should be brought into subjugation by the stronger will of a man, for only through surrender would she achieve her own happiness. At present she resented equally the conquering of herself physically and mentally. For her own sake she must be taught the perversion of her outlook on life.

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And Austin Selwyn, the idealist, little thought that he was applying to Elise Durwent the same philosophy as Prussia was applying to Europe.

But of one thing he was certain—much as he loved her (and at the thought his heart grew heavy with longing), his words on war had not been the idle declaimings of a sophist. There was a higher citizenship; the world was wrong to allow this war; and ignorance was the foe of mankind.

He would not withdraw from that platform. Duty was not something from which a man could step lightly aside. All his writings, all his thoughts, all his half-worked-out philosophies had been but training for this great moment. And now that it had come he would not prove renegade.

He would write with the language of inspiration. The agony of Man would be his spur, so that neither fatigue nor indifference could impede his labours. With the tears of the world he would pen such works that people everywhere would see the beacon-light of truth, and by it steer their troubled course.

Five miles he covered in little more than an hour, and with the returning sense of strength his purpose grew in firmness.

The call of the Universal Mind had penetrated through the labyrinth of life as the sound of the hunting-horn through leafy woods. There must be millions, he knew, who were of that great unison, kept from *ensemble* by the absence of co-ordination, by the lack of self-expression. It might not be for him to do more than help to light the torch, but, once lit, it would burst into flame, and the man to carry it would then come forward, as he had always done since ages immemorial when a world-crisis called for a world-man.

A sudden weakness crept into his blood. He was nearing home, and in a few minutes would see her again. If only he could have left the previous night on some pretext—but now he would have to wait until the afternoon at least. How strange it was to think of losing her! How wedded his subconscious thoughts had been to living out the future with her as his revelation of Heaven's poetry! Would he have the courage to maintain his purpose, or, at the sight of her, would he throw himself at her feet, and, admitting failure, plead for mercy to the vanquished?

No. A thousand times no. Anything but that.

Reaching the clearing in the woods, he paused as the ivy-covered towers of Roselawn were presented to his gaze. With a characteristic working of his shoulders he drew himself to his full height, and his jaws and lips were set in implacable determination.

The mist still clung to the earth, but over the north-east tower of Roselawn he could see the sun, monstrous and red, looming with its sullen threat of heat.

II.

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It was nearing the end of a breakfast that had been trying for every one. Lord Durwent's usual kindly affability was overcast by a fresh worry—the non-appearance of his son Malcolm. Four telegrams had been despatched to Scotland, but no answer had come. Elise had been gay and talkative with a forced vivacity; and Lady Durwent had been bordering on hysteria. Not that the dear lady was of sufficient depth to be profoundly moved by the world's tragedy, but her unsatisfied sense of the dramatic gave her a new thrill every time she said, 'WE ARE AT WAR—THINK OF IT!' as if she were afraid that without her reminder they might forget the fact.

Selwyn sat in almost complete silence, merely acknowledging Lady Durwent's proclamations of a state of war by appropriate acquiescence, but his eyes remained fixed on the table. He could not trust them to look at Elise for fear they should prove traitor and sue for an ignoble peace. As for her, she met the situation with a smile, using woman's instinct of protection to assume a cloak behind which her real feelings were concealed.

They had just risen from the table, when the sound of a motor-car was heard in the courtyard, and Elise hurried to the window.

'It's Malcolm, dad,' she said.

More in hysteria than ever, Lady Durwent hurried from the room, followed more slowly by her husband and her daughter, and greeting the Honourable Malcolm at the door, smothered him in a melodramatic embrace.

'My dear, brave Malcolm,' she cried.

With as good grace as possible the young man submitted to the maternal endearments, disengaging her arms as soon as he decently could.

'Where's the governor?' he asked. 'Ah, there you are.—Hello, Elise!—I'm frightfully sorry, pater,' he went on, shaking hands with Lord Durwent and patting his sister on the shoulder, 'about those telegrams of yours, but we were on M'Gregor's yacht miles from nowhere, and didn't even know the dear old war was on until a fishing-johnny told us. Are my orders here?'

'Yes,' answered Lord Durwent; 'there are two telegrams for you. One came last night, and one this morning. I will just go into the library and fetch them.'

'But, Malcolm,' said Lady Durwent, 'let me introduce our guest, Mr. Selwyn of New York.

The young Englishman smiled with rather an attractive air of embarrassment. 'I'm frightfully sorry,' he said amiably, proffering his hand, 'I didn't see you there. Have you had any kind of a time? It's rather a bore being inland in the summer, don't you think?'

'I have enjoyed myself very much,' said the American, 'in spite of the tragic end to my visit.'

'Eh,' said the Honourable Malcolm, startled by the seriousness of the other's voice, 'what's that? Ah yes—you mean the war. Excuse me if I look at these, won't you?—Thanks, pater.'

'WE ARE AT WAR——THINK OF IT!' cried Lady Durwent in a gust of emotion, assuming the duties of a Greek chorus while her son examined the telegrams brought by her husband.

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'Well, well!' said the cavalry lieutenant, reading the first message, which was signed by the adjutant of his regiment; 'dear old Agitato. How he does love sending out those sweet little things: "Leave cancelled; return at once"! Ah, my word! "Secret and Confidential"—good old War Office. What a rag they'll have now running their pet little regiments all over the world! Humph! By Jove! we're to move to-morrow. Good work! Let me see, pater. What train can I catch to town? I must throw a few things together'—he looked at his watch—'but I'll be in heaps of time for the 11.50. The Agitato always has a late lunch and never drinks less than three glasses of port, so I'll throw myself on his full stomach and squeal for mercy for being late. I say, pater, do come up while I toss a few unnecessaries into my case.—That's right, Brown; put my bag in my room. And, Brown, you might put some vaseline on those golf-clubs. I sha'n't be wanting them for some little time.—Come along, pater.—Excuse me, Mr.—Mr.'——

'SELWYN,' cried Lady Durwent.

'Mr. Selwyn, I'll see you later, eh?'

'The old nobleman ascended the stairs with his son, and the agreeable chatter of the younger man, with its references to 'topping sport' and 'absolutely ripping weather,' came to an end as they disappeared along the western wing of the house. Lady Durwent, wiping her eyes, went into the library, and Selwyn, who was not particularly enamoured of solitude and its attending tyranny of thoughts, followed her.

Elise, who had stood in mute contemplation of her brother, neither addressing a remark nor being addressed, hesitated momentarily, then went into the drawing-room by herself and closed the door.

'Oh, Mr. Selwyn,' said Lady Durwent, breathing heavily, 'you have no idea what a mother's feelings are at a time like this.'

'I can only sympathise most sincerely,' said the American gravely.

'He has been such a good boy,' she said vaguely, 'and so devoted to his mother.'

'I can see that, Lady Durwent.'

'I shall never forget,' she went on, her own words creating a deliciously dramatic trembling in her bosom, 'how he wept when his father insisted upon his leaving home for school. It was all I could do to console the child; and when he came home for the holidays he was just my shadow.'

At that satisfactory thought (though Selwyn was a little puzzled at the picture of the diminutive Malcolm serving as a shadow for Lady Durwent's bulk) she expanded into a smile, but immediately corrected the error with a burst of unrestrained grief.

‘THINK OF IT, MR. SELWYN,’ she cried, reversing the formula—‘WE ARE AT WAR!’

He murmured assent. ‘I am afraid, Lady Durwent,’ he said, ‘that I must return to London this afternoon.’

‘Oh, Mr. Selwyn!’

‘Yes, I must. I have a great deal of work before me, and only the cordiality of your welcome and the pleasure I have felt in being here would have allowed me to stay so long. You have been wonderfully kind, and perhaps the fact that I was here when war broke out will lend a special significance to our friendship for the future.’

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'Oh, I shall never forget you,' murmured his hostess, whose emotions were so near the surface that almost any remark was sufficient to tap them. 'You have been the truest of friends, and Elise is so fond of you.'

'I am very fond of Elise,' blurted Selwyn, feeling his cheeks grow red. 'Her companionship and inspiration were something'——

'Ye-es.' An instinct of caution plugged the emotional channel. Lady Durwent saw that she had been indiscreet. It was not in her plan of things that her daughter should become enamoured of a commoner. Selwyn was all very well for company, and no doubt his books were very good, but Elise Durwent would have to marry in her own station of life.

'You feel that you must go this afternoon?' said the Ironmonger's daughter dismally, but with an inflection that made it more a reminder than a question.

'Yes, Lady Durwent,' he answered, with a cynical smile creeping into his lips, which seemed thin and almost cruel. 'I shall catch the 3.50.'

'Then you must come again and see us sometime, Mr. Selwyn,' she said, with that vagueness of date used by polite persons when they don't mean a thing. Lady Durwent rose with great dignity. 'Will you excuse me, Mr. Selwyn? I always meet my housekeeper at ten to discuss domestic matters. Elise is somewhere around. Is it too damp for tennis?'

She paused at the door. She had to. It is one of the traditions of the stage that a player must stop at the exit and utter one compelling, terrific sentence.

'WE ARE AT WAR,' she cried—'TH'——

'Think of it!' he said maliciously, bowing and closing the door after her.

III.

Going to his room, Selwyn packed his own bags, dispensing with the services of the valet, and with more than one sigh of regret glanced about at the luxury which he was soon to quit. The great bed with its snowy billows of comfort; the reading-lamp on the little table with the motley collection of books borrowed from the library with the very best intentions—books which had hardly been opened before sleep would obliterate everything from his sight; that merry picture of the two medieval enthusiasts playing chess, and those jolly Dickensian paintings of huntsmen at luncheon with grinning waiters and ubiquitous dogs. What a charm they all had! What a merry little spot England had been in those good old days!

A ray of sunshine stole through the curtains as if it were not quite sure of its welcome, and shyly rested against the farthest wall of the room. With an exclamation of pleasure Selwyn threw open the window and looked out upon the lawns.

The sun had won its battle, and the countryside was cleared of the invading mist, which was ingloriously retreating to its own territory behind the distant hills. There was a sparkle in the air, and the rich colourings of the flowers vied with each other in Beauty's quarrel. The birds flew from tree to tree, singing their paeon of the sun's victory, and a light summer breeze was scattering perfume over the earth.

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As a sick man emerging from a fever, Selwyn let the refreshing vigour of the morning lave his temples with its potency. Looking towards the stables, he saw Mathews, the groom, come out of his domain to cast an approving glance on Nature's performance. Selwyn decided that he would go and say good-bye to the fellow. There was something both sturdy and picturesque about him, and the American presumed that even the head-groom of the Durwents would not be averse to a ten-shilling gratuity. He therefore left his room, and reaching the lawn, strolled over to the stables.

'Good-morning, Mr. Selwyn,' said the groom cheerily, touching his forehead in a semi-nautical greeting.

'Good-day, Mathews. How are all your family this morning?'

'Meaning the hosses, sir, or opposite-like, my old mare and her colt? Likewise and sim'lar, and no disrespect meant, meaning my old woman and little Wellington.'

'Well,' Selwyn smiled at the worthy man's ramifications, 'I did mean the horses, but I am even more anxious to know how Mrs. Mathews is.'

'She's a-bloomin', Mr. Selwyn, she is. When I sees 'er t' other night dancin' at the village, I says to myself, "Criky! If she hain't got a action like a young filly!" Real proud I was of 'er, and 'er being no two-year-old neither, but opposite-wise free of the rheumatiz, as is getting into my withers like.'

'And how is—did you say his name was Wellington?'

'That's 'is 'andle, Mr. Selwyn, conseckens o' 'is being born with the largest nose I ever sees on a hoffspring o' his age. He's only four year and a little better, but—criky!—if 'e ain't the knowingest little colt as ever I raised! When my old woman gives 'im 'is bath 'e goes "Hiss-ss, hiss-ss," just like a proper groom rubbin' down a hoss. But 'e's a hunfeeling wretch, 'e is, for when I goes 'ome arter feedin'-time o' nights, and thinks I'll just smoke a quiet pipe, 'e ups and says, "Lincoln Steeplechase, guv'nor, and I'm a-riding you." And there he has everything around the room—'is little table and chairs and toy pianner, and I've got to jump over 'em on my 'ands and knees with that there wicious scoundrel a-sitting on my neck and yelling, "Come on, you d—d old slow-coach! Wot did I give you them oats for?" Now I puts it to you, Mr. Selwyn, if a himp as makes 'is fayther jump over a toy pianner is the kind o' child as is like to be a comfort to a feller in 'is old age.'

With which harrowing query the groom slapped his pipe on his heel and blew violently through it to try to disguise his gratification at the paternal reminiscence.

'I don't think I've seen all the horses,' said Selwyn. 'Can you spare a few minutes to show them to me?'

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'Wi' all the pleasure in life, sir. Come in, sir. I know it ain't becomin' o' me for to boast,' said the groom as they entered the building, 'but if there's a better stable o' hosses than them there, then my name ain't Mathews, nor is my Christian names William John neither. There ain't many in England as knows a hoss quicker 'an me, Mr. Selwyn, though I says it that shouldn't ought to, but I knows a hoss just as soon as I sets eyes on 'im. Milord, 'e's just a small bit better, though likewise and sim'lar we usually thinks exac'ly the same. Only once we disergreed on a hoss. I says it were wicious, and 'e said as 'ow it weren't. So we bought it.'

'And who was right?'

'Well, sir, I sort of estermate as 'ow 'e was, for just arter we got 'im Mas'r Dick, who ain't afraid o' any beast as walks on four legs, took 'im out for a airing. Well, sir, that hoss—powerful brute 'e were, with a eye like Sin—goes along like as if 'e 'adn't a evil thought in 'is 'ead; but all on a sudden 'e comes to a ditch, and sort o' rolls Mas'r Dick into it, and bungs 'is 'ead against a stone.'

'Then he was vicious, after all?'

'No, sir—that's the extr'ord'nary part of it. He comes right back to the stables to me and pulls up short. I goes up and looks into that there sinful eye. "You hulk o' misery," I says; "you willainous son of a abandoned sire!" You know, sir, I always likes to make a hoss feel real bad by telling him what's what, for they got intelligence. Mr. Selwyn, I should say, by Criky! a 'uman being ain't in the same stall as a hoss for intelligence.'

'I think you may be right,' said Selwyn decisively.

'May be? There ain't no doubt about it nowise.'

'And what happened to your horse?'

'Ah yes, sir. Well, sir, I gets on 'im, and pullin' 'is face around by 'is ear, I give 'im another look in 'is sinful eye. "Where's Mas'r Dick?" I says. And—criky!—off 'e goes, lickerty-split, like as if we was entered for the Derby, and, sure enough, 'e stops right at the ditch where Mas'r Dick was a-lying all peaceful and muddy like a stiff un. Well, sir, I gets off and lifts 'im up, and then mounts be'ind 'im, and that there hoss 'e never moved until I tells 'im, and then 'e goes home so smooth-like that a old lady could 'ave rid 'im and done 'er knitting sim'lar. And arter that 'e were as gentle as a lamb, 'e were—and there 'e is right afore your eyes, Mr. Selwyn. He's a old hoss now, and ain't much to look on, but every morning when I comes in 'e takes a look with that there bad eye o' hisn and says, just like I says to 'im that day, "Where's Mas'r Dick?" I sometimes feels so sorry for the old feller that I swears something horrible just to cheer 'im up.'

With considerable interest, though with a certain doubt as to the strict authenticity of the narrative, the American looked at the horse, which, after a melancholy survey of the visitors, vented its grief in an attempt to bite a large-sized slice from the neck of a neighbour.

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'Nah, then, you —— —— ——,' remarked Mathews unfeelingly, catching the old beast a resounding thump on the rump with a stick he carried. 'That'll learn you, you old hulk o' misery.'

'There's a beautiful mare, said the American, pausing at the stall of a superb charger whose graceful limbs and shapely neck spoke of speed and spirit.

'Ah! Now that there is a beauty and no mistake. She's got the spirit of a young pup, but is as amiable and sweet-tempered as an angel. She's Mister Malcolm's hunter, she is, and 'is favourite in the whole stables. He never rides anything but 'er to hounds; leastways, 'e never did but once, and then Nell—that's 'er name—Nell was took so sick with frettin' that she kicked a groom as 'ad come to feed 'er clean across the floor agin' that there far wall. Never I see a feller so put out as that there groom—never. Well, sir, she wouldn't let no one come nigh 'er, and just as we was thinkin' as 'ow we'd 'ave to forcible-feed 'er, in comes Mister Malcolm. She 'ears 'im, but don't make no sign, and just as 'e comes up close she lets fling 'er 'eels at 'is 'ead. But 'e was watchin' for it, and just says "Nellie" kind o' sorrowful and reproachful, sim'lar to the prodigal son returnin' to 'is aged fayther. Well, sir, the mare she just gives in at the knees and rubbed 'er nose agin' 'im, and says just as plain as Scriptor that she was real sorry, and 'oped 'e 'd forget it as one gen'l'man to a lady.'

With sundry anecdotes of a like nature, Mathews guided the visitor past the long line of stalls, whose inhabitants kept their stately heads turned to gratify the insatiable curiosity of the equine. To the weary mind of the American there was an agreeable balm in the groom's fund of anecdote, and even in the odoriferousness of the stable itself.

Reaching the end of that line, Mathews proposed that before they went any farther they should go to an adjoining shed and inspect a litter of little hounds that were blinking in amazement at their second day's view of the world. From a near-by kennel there was the discordant yelping of a dozen hounds, and between the two places a kitten was performing its toilet with arrogant indifference to the canine threat.

They were just about to retrace their steps, when Selwyn felt Mathews's hand on his arm.

'Sh-sh!' the groom whispered. 'There's Mister Malcolm a-come to say good-bye to Nellie. I knew 'e would, sir. She'd ha' fretted 'er heart out if 'e hadn't.'

IV.

Selwyn looked down the stable, and in the dull light he saw the Hussar officer standing in the stall by the mare, crooning some endearing words, while the beast, in her delight,

rubbed her face against his clothes and whinnied her plea to be taken for a gallop over the fields.

Not wanting to disturb him, or give the impression that he had been watching, Selwyn softly withdrew by a door near the dogs, and after giving Mathews a half-sovereign, made a circuit of the lawns and approached the house as if he were coming from the woods. As he did so young Durwent emerged from the stables, followed by a collie-dog that jumped and frolicked about him as he walked. Noticing the American, Malcolm crossed over to where he stood, proffering a cigarette.

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'Have a gasper, Selwyn?' he asked.

'Thanks very much. I suppose it will be some time before the British Army will get into action?'

'I don't know, I'm sure,' answered Durwent, holding a match for the other, 'but three weeks at the outside ought to see us over there and ready.'

'The Germans have a tremendous start.'

'Yes, haven't they? Damned plucky of Belgium to try to hold them up, isn't it? Though, of course, you can't expect the Belgian johnnies to keep them back more than a few days.'

'You think, then, that she will be conquered?'

'Ra-ther. That's a cert. But I don't think it will be for long.'

'You mean that the British will drive the Germans back?'

'Not all at once, but sooner or later. Of course, I'm an awful muff on strategy—always was—but the general idea seems to be that we go over now and stop the bounders, and then our dear old citizens gird up their loins, train themselves as soldiers, and chase the Germans back to Berlin.'

'But—isn't it an open secret that your regular army is very small? Can you seriously expect to stop that huge force once it sweeps through Belgium?'

The Englishman picked up a stone and sent it hurtling across the lawn for the collie to chase.

'Ever play "Rugger"?' he asked.

'Rugby? Yes.'

'Then you've often seen a little chap bring a big one an awful cropper.'

'That is true, but the cases are hardly parallel.'

'Perhaps not,' said the other, rather relieved at not having to maintain the analogy any further; 'but, then, the beauty of being a junior officer is that one doesn't have to worry. I wouldn't be in old man French's shoes for a million quid, but for us subaltern johnnies it looks as if we'll have some great sport.'

As the two young men, almost of an age, stood on the rich carpet of the lawn with their figures outlined against the open background of the fields, they presented a strange contrast. The Englishman was dressed in a rough, brown tweed, and though there was a looseness about his shoulders that almost amounted to slouchiness, they gave a suggestion of latent strength that could be instantly galvanised into great power. When he moved, either to throw something for his dog or just to break the monotony of standing, his movements were slow and deliberate, and he took a long pace with a slight inclination towards the side, as is the habit of cavalrymen and sailors. His eyes were a clear, unsubtle blue, and though his skin was tanned from exposure to the elements, its texture was unspoiled. His hair was light brown, and, while closely cropped, in keeping with military tradition, was naturally of thick growth; in the centre where it was parted there was more than a tendency towards curls. From his lip a slight moustache was trained to point upwards at the ends, and beneath the tan of his face could be seen the glow of health, token of a decent mode of living and a life spent out of doors.

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There was a frankness of countenance, a certain humour which one felt would rarely rise above banter, and the whole bearing was manly and attractive. But search the features as he would, Selwyn could not discover any lurking traces of undiscovered personality. Malcolm's very frankness seemed to rob him of possession of any hidden, unexpected vein of individuality. He was essentially a type, and of as clear Anglo-Saxon origin as if he were living in the days before his breed was modified by inter-association with other tribes.

Selwyn recalled the words of Mathews: 'Milord, you're a thoroughbred, you are.' This youth was of a race of thoroughbreds. Maternal heredity had skipped him altogether; he was a Durwent of Durwents, and heir to all the distinction and lack of distinction which marked the long line of that family.

And opposite him was an American whose two generations of Republican ancestry led to the paths of Dutch and Irish parentage. Selwyn had never tried to discover the cause why his paternal ancestor had left the Green Island, or his maternal ancestor the land of dikes and windmills; it was sufficient that, out of resentment against conditions either avoidable or unavoidable, each had resolved to endure the ordeal of making his way in a land of strangers. Austin Selwyn bore the marks of that inheritance no less clearly than Malcolm Durwent bore the marks of his. In his features there was a certain repose, as became the part-son of a race that had produced the art of Rembrandt, but there was a roving Celtic strain as well that hid itself by turn in his eyes, in his lips, in his smile, in the lines of his frown. In contrast to the clear Saxon steadiness of Malcolm Durwent, his own face was constantly touched by lights and shadows of his mind, lit by the incessant prompting of his thoughts that demanded their answer to the riddle of life.

Although his build was fairly powerful, Selwyn's well-knit shoulders and alert movements of body spoke of a physique that was always tuned to pitch, but one missed the impression of limitless endurance which lay behind the easy carelessness of Malcolm Durwent's pose.

'I want to ask you, Durwent,' said the American, 'more from the stand-point of a writer than anything else, if these men of yours who are going out to fight are actuated by a great sense of patriotism, or a feeling that the liberty of the world depends on them or—well, in other words, I am trying to discover what it is that makes you men face death as if it were a game.'

'My dear chap,' said the Englishman, with a slightly embarrassed smile, 'there again we leave it to the fellows higher up. Naturally, if Britain goes to war, it isn't up to her army to question it one way or another. Of course, back in our heads we like to feel that she is in the right—but, then, I don't think Britain would ever do the rotten thing; do you?'

'N—no, I suppose not.'

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'You see, a chap can't help looking at it a bit like a game, for there's Belgium doing an absolutely sporting thing, and there isn't one of us that isn't straining at the bit to get over and give them a hand.'

With a slight blush at this admission of fervour, the Englishman grasped his collie-dog by the forepaws and rolled him on his back.

'But,' said Selwyn, unwilling to let the bone of discussion drop while there was one shred of knowledge clinging to it, 'supposing that Britain were in the wrong and you fellows knew it, yet you were ordered to war—what then?'

His companion laughed and thrust his hands in his pockets.

'Oh, we'd fight anyway; and after we had knocked the other chap out we'd tell him how sorry we were, then go back and hang the bounders who had brought the thing on. But then, you see, you're riding the wrong horse, because soldiering's my job, and I was always an awful muff when it came to jawing on matters I don't know anything about. You had better get hold of some of our politician johnnies; they've always got ideas on things.'

V.

A little later the Honourable Malcolm Durwent left Roselawn in a motor-car.

As it rounded the curve in the drive he turned and waved at the little group who were standing in the courtyard, and then he was lost to sight. And in the hearts of each of the three there was a poignant grief. Lord Durwent's head was bowed with regret that at Britain's call he had been able to give one only of his two sons. Dry-eyed, but with aching heart, Elise stood with an overwhelming remorse that she had never really known her elder brother. And Lady Durwent, free of all theatricalism, was dumb with the mother's pain of losing her first-born.

And as the heir to Roselawn went to war, so did the sons of every old family in the Island Kingdom. In something of the spirit of sport, yet carrying beneath their cheeriness the high purpose of ageless chivalry, the blue-eyed youth of Britain went out with a smile upon their lips to play their little parts in the great jest of the gods.

Not with the cry of 'Liberty!' or 'Freedom!' but merely as heirs to British traditions, they took the field. Of a race that acts more on instinct than on reason, they were true to their vision of Britain, and asking no better fate than to die in her service, they helped to stem the Prussian flood while home after home, in its ivy-covered seclusion, learned that the last son, like his brothers, had 'played the game' to a finish.

Let the men who cry for the remodelling of Britain—and progress must have an unimpeded channel—let them try to bring to their minds the Britain that men saw in August 1914, when catastrophe yawned in her path. That picture holds the secret for the Great Britain of the future.

VI.

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It was almost the last day in August, when the little British Army was fighting desperately against unthinkable odds, that a brigade of cavalry made a brave but futile charge to try to break the German grip. The —th Hussars was one of the regiments that took part, and only a remnant returned.

Staring with fixed, unseeing eyes at the blue of the sky, which was not unlike the colour of his eyes, the Honourable Malcolm Durwent lay on the field of battle, with a bullet through his heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN OF SOLITUDE.

I.

In a large room overlooking St. James's Square a man sat writing. In the shaded light his face showed haggard, and his eyes gleamed with the brilliancy of one whose blood is lit with a fever.

The clocks had just struck nine when he paused in his work, and crossing to the French windows, which opened on a little terrace, looked out at the darkened square. The restless music of London's life played on his tired pulses. He heard the purring of limousines gliding into Pall Mall, and the vibrato of taxi-cabs whipped into action by the piercing blast of club-porters' whistles. The noise of horses' hoofs on the pavement echoed among the roof-tops of the houses, and beneath those outstanding sounds was the quiet staccato of endless passing feet, losing itself in the murmur of the November wind as it searched among the dead leaves lying in the little park.

He had remained there only a few minutes, when, as though he had lost too much time already, the writer returned to the table and resumed his pen.

There was a knock at the door, and he looked up with a start. 'Come in,' he said; and a man-servant entered.

'Will you be wanting anything, Mr. Selwyn?'

'No, Smith.'

'You haven't been out to dinner, sir.'

'I am not hungry.'

'Better let me make you a cup of tea with some toast, and perhaps boil an egg.'

'N—no, thanks, Smith. Well, perhaps you might make some coffee, with a little buttered toast, and just leave them here.'

'Very good, sir.'

Although less than a year had elapsed since Austin Selwyn had first dined at Lady Durwent's home, experience, which is more cruel than time, had marked him as a decade of ordinary life could not have done. His mind had been subjected to a burning ordeal since summer, and his drawn features and shadowed eyes showed the signs of inward conflict.

As he had said of himself, all his previous experiences and education were but a novitiate in preparation for the great moment when truth challenged his consciousness and illuminated a path for him to follow. From an intellectual dilettante, a connoisseur of the many fruits which grace life's highway, he had become a single-purposed man aflame with burning idealism. From the sources of heredity the spirit of the Netherlands fighting against the yoke of Spain, and the instinct of revolt which lies in every Celtic breast, flowed and mingled with his own newly awakened passion for world-freedom.

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He had left Roselawn with a formal good-bye taken of the whole family together. He had avoided the eyes of Elise, and she had made no attempt to alter the impersonal nature of the parting. Reaching London, he had been offered these rooms in St. James's Square by an American, resident in London, whose business compelled him to go to New York for an indefinite period. As Selwyn felt the need for absolute aloofness, he had gladly accepted.

Hardly waiting to unpack his 'grips,' he at once began his battle of the written word, his crusade against the origin and the fruits of Ignorance as shown by the war.

Always a writer of sure technique and facile vocabulary, he let the intensity of his spirit focus on the subject. He knew that to make his voice heard above the clamour of war his language must have the transcendent quality of inspiration. No composer searching for the *motif* of a great moving theme ever approached his instrument with deeper emotional artistry than Selwyn brought to bear on the language which was to ring out his message.

He felt that words were potential jewels which, when once the rays of his mind had played upon them, would be lit with the fire of magic. Words of destiny like blood-hued rubies; words fraught with ominous opal warning; words that glittered with the biting brilliance of diamonds—they were his to link together with thought: he was their master. The necromancy of language was his to conjure with.

Day after day, and into the long hours of the night, he wrote, destroying pages as he read them, refining, changing, rewriting, always striving for results which would show no signs of construction, but only breathe with life. When fatigue sounded its warnings he disregarded them, and spurred himself on with the thought of the thousands dying daily at the front. He saw no one. His former London acquaintances were engrossed in affairs of war, and made no attempt to seek him out. It was his custom to have breakfast and luncheon in his rooms; at dinner-time he would traverse the streets until he found some little-used restaurant, and then, selecting a deserted corner, would eat his meal alone. The walk there and back to his rooms was the only exercise he permitted himself, except occasionally, when, late at night, cramped fingers and bloodshot eyes would no longer obey the lashing of the will, and he would venture out for an hour's stroll through night-shrouded London.

Prowling about from square to square, through deserted alleys, and by slumbering parks, he would feel the cumulative destinies of the millions of sleeping souls bearing on his consciousness. Solitude in a metropolis, unlike that of the country, which merely lulls or tends to the purifying of thought, intensifies the moods of a man like strong liquor. He who lives alone among millions courts all the mad fancies that his brain is heir to. Insanity, perversion, incoherent idealism, fanaticism—these are the offspring of unnatural detachment from one's fellows, and in turn give birth to the black moods of revolt against each and every thing that is.

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Living as he did in a sort of ecstasy by reason of his suddenly realised world-citizenship, Selwyn's incipient feeling of godlikeness developed still further under the spell of isolation. The fact that he trod the realm of thought, while all around him men and women grappled with the problems of war, only accentuated this condition of mind.

He suffered—that was true. He missed the companionship of kindred spirits, and sometimes his memory would play truant, recalling the pleasant glitter of sterling silver and conversational electroplate which accompanied his former London dinner-parties. He did not dare to think of Elise at all. She was the intoxicating climax of his past life. She was the blending of his life's melodies into a brief, tender nocturne of love that his heart would never hear again.

In place of all that, he had the spiritual vanity of martyrdom. Few voyagers but have felt the exultation of mid-ocean: that desire of the soul to leap the distance to the skies and claim its kinship to the stars. It comes to men on the Canadian prairies; it throbs in one's blood when the summit of a mountain is reached; it is borne on the wings of the twilight harmonies in a lonely forest.

Unknown to himself, perhaps, that was Selwyn's compensation. From his hermit's seclusion in the great metropolis he felt the thrill of one who challenges the gods.

II.

His man-servant had hardly left the room when the bell in the front hall rang, and Smith reappeared to announce a visitor.

'Who is it?' asked Selwyn.

'A Mr. Watson, sir.'

'I wonder if it can be Doug Watson of Cambridge. Bring him right up.'

A moment later a young man entered the cosily shaded room, and they met with the hearty hand-clasp and the sincere good-feeling which come when a man who is abroad meets a friend who is a fellow-countryman. The new-comer was younger than Selwyn, and though of lighter complexion and hair, was unmistakably American in appearance. Like the author, he was clean-shaven, but there was more repose in the features. His face was broad, and in the poise of his head and thick neck there was the clear impression of great physical and mental driving-power. Although still a student, the mark of the engineer was strongly stamped on him. He was of the type that spans a great river with a bridge; that glories in the overcoming of obstacles by sheer domination of will.

'Well, Doug,' said Selwyn as they drew their chairs up to the fire, 'when did you leave Cambridge?'

'Last week,' said the other. 'I couldn't stand it any longer with every one gone. I don't think that one of the bunch I played around with is there now.'

'That was a bully week-end I had with you at the university.'

'We sure had a good time, didn't we?'

'But how did you know I was here?'

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'Jarvis sent me a note that he and his wife were running hack to New York, and that you were taking his rooms. Damn fine place, isn't it? There's a woman's touch all over here. But you're looking precious seedy.'

'I feel all right.'

'You don't look it.'

'I have been very busy, Doug.'

'Glad to hear it. Putting over a killing in the literature game?'

'The biggest thing yet,' said Selwyn, opening a drawer and searching for the cigars. 'I am making a sincere attempt to write something which will sway people. Have one of these?'

'Thanks. I guess I'd better smoke one while I have the chance. It might get the sergeant-major's goat if he found a buck private smoking half-crown cigars.'

'You haven't joined the army?'

'Not yet; but I shall to-morrow. You can do it by graft, old boy. For three weeks I've courted a colonel's daughter so as to get next to the old man, and to-morrow I receive my reward. I am to become a full-fledged Tommy Atkins.'

'And the daughter?'

The younger man grinned and cut off the end of his cigar with a pocket-knife. 'Can you see the colonel's daughter "walking out" with a Tommy? My dear Austin, patriotism excuses much, but the social code must be maintained. I'd render that in Latin if I wasn't so rusty on languages. What are the chances of your coming along with me tomorrow?'

Selwyn reached for an ash-tray and matches.

'America is neutral,' he said quietly.

'America is not neutral,' replied Watson with a decisiveness that one would hardly have suspected to lie beneath the calm exterior and the veneer of good-breeding polished by Cambridge associations—a veneer that made his occasional lapses into crudity of language seem oddly out of place. 'The German-Americans, the Irish-Americans, the Jewish-Americans, the God-knows-who-else-Americans may be neutral, but the America of Washington and Lincoln, the America of Lee and Grant, isn't neutral. Not by a long sight.'

'Doug,' said Selwyn reproachfully, 'you are the last man I thought would be caught by this flag-waving, drum-beating stuff.'

The younger man's brows puckered as he looked through the haze of tobacco-smoke at his host. 'Austin,' he said abruptly, 'you've changed.'

'Yes,' said Selwyn thoughtfully. He was going to say more, but, changing his mind, remained silent.

'I thought you looked different,' went on Watson. 'What's up?'

Selwyn's eyes narrowed and his lips and jaw stiffened resolutely. 'I am writing,' he said, enunciating each word distinctly, 'in the hope of arousing the slumbering conscience of the world against this war.'

'Canute the Second,' commented Watson dryly.

'Doug,' said the other, frowning, 'I deserve better than sarcasm from you.'

'I'm sorry,' said Watson with a laugh, 'but I can't just get this new Austin Selwyn right off the bat. Of course war is wrong—any boob knows that—but what can you hope to do with writing about it?'

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Selwyn rose to his feet, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, strode up and down the room. 'What can I hope to do?' he said. 'Remove the scales from the eyes of the blind; recall to life the spirit of universal brotherhood; destroy ignorance instead of destroying life.'

'Some platform!' said Watson, making rings of tobacco-smoke.

'Take yourself, for example,' said Selwyn vehemently, pausing in his walk and pointing towards the younger man. 'You are a man of international experience and university education. On the surface you have the attributes of a man of thought. You are one that the world has a right to expect will take the correct stand on great human questions. Yet the moment the barriers are down and jingoism floods the earth you give up without a struggle and join the great mass of the world's driftwood.'

'H'm,' mused Watson, 'so that's your tack, eh?'

'I tell you, Doug, you have no right to fight in this war.'

'Thanks.'

'You should have the courage to keep out of it. Even assuming that Germany is wholly in the wrong and Britain completely in the right, can't you see that when the Kaiser and his advisers said, "Let there be war," you and I and the millions of men in every country who believe in justice and Christianity should have risen up and answered, "*You shall not have war*"?'

Watson rose to his feet, and crossing to the fireplace, flicked the ash from his cigar, and leaned lazily against the stone shelf. 'You're a member of the Royal Automobile Club, aren't you?' he drawled.

Selwyn nodded and resumed his nervous walk.

'Take my advice, Austin. Every time you feel that kind of dope mounting to your head, trot across the road to the club and have a swim in their tank. You'd be surprised how it would bring you down to earth.'

'You talk like a child,' said Selwyn angrily.

'Well,' retorted the other, 'that's better than talking like an old woman.'

With an impatient movement of his shoulders the younger man left the fireplace, and walking over to the piano, picked up a Hawaiian ukulele which had been left there by Mrs. Jarvis. Getting the pitch from the piano, while Selwyn continued his restless march up and down the room, he studiously occupied himself with tuning the instrument, then strummed a few chords with his fingers.

‘Sorry not to fit in with your peace-brother-peace stuff,’ said Watson amiably, strumming a recent rag-time melody with a certain amount of dexterity, ‘but I always played you for a real white man at college.’

‘Doug,’ said Selwyn, stopping his walk and sitting on the arm of a big easy-chair, ‘if there is a coward in this room, it’s you.’

The haunting music of the ukulele was the only response.

‘Here you are at Cambridge—an American,’ went on Selwyn. ‘Just because the set you know enlists with an accompaniment of tub-thumping’——

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'That isn't the way the English do things,' said Watson without pausing in his playing.

'My dear fellow,' said Selwyn, 'don't let the pose of modesty fool you over here. They profess to hold up their hands in horror when we get hold of megaphones and roar about "The Star-Spangled Banner," but what of the phrases, "The Empire on which the sun never sets," "What we have we'll hold," "Mistress of the Seas"? Is there so much difference between the Kaiser's "*Ich und Gott*" and the Englishman's "God of our far-flung battle-line"? Jingoism! We're amateurs in America compared with the British—and you're caught by it all.'

'Nothing of the sort,' said Watson, putting down the ukulele. 'All I know is that Germany runs amuck and gives a mighty good imitation of hell let loose. I am not discounting the wonderful bravery of France and Belgium, but you know that the hope of everything lies right in this country here. Well, that's good enough for me. I'm a hundred per cent. American, but right now I'm willing to throw over my citizenship in the United States and join this Empire that's got the guts to go to war.'

'Listen, Doug,' said Selwyn, moving over to the younger man and placing his hands on his shoulders; 'can't you see that Germany is not the menace? She is only a symptom of it. War, not Germany, is the real enemy. I admire your pluck: my regret is that you are so blind. The whole world is turning murder loose; it is prostituting Christian civilisation to the war-lust—and you imagine that by slaughter Right may prevail. The tragic fallacy of the ages has been that men, instead of destroying evil, have destroyed each other. If every criminal in the world were executed, would crime end? Then, do you think the annihilation of this or that army will abolish war?'

'I haven't your gift of plausible argument,' said Watson, 'and I suppose that theoretically you are sound in everything you say. Yet, instinctively, I know that I am doing the right thing.'

'A woman's reasoning, Doug.' Selwyn relit his cigar, which had gone out. 'For a few days after the outbreak of war I will admit that I doubted, myself, and wondered if, after all, there was a universal heart-beat. Then came the news of the silent march of those thousands of women down Fifth Avenue, marching to the beat of muffled drums as a protest against war—not against Germany—higher than that. It was a symbol that the cry of Rachel for her children still rings through the centuries. It was the heart of America's women calling to the mothers of France, Germany, and Britain against this butchery of their sons.'

Selwyn sank into a chair, and a look of weariness succeeded the momentary flush of excitement.

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'That ended my last doubt,' he went on quietly. 'I knew then that if I could summon the necessary language to express the vision I saw, my message would sound clear above the guns. I completed three articles—"A Fool There Was," "When Hell Laughed," and "Gods of Jingoism." I gave them to my London agent, but you would have thought they held germs of disease. He brought them back to me, and said that no one would dare to publish them in England. In other words, the English couldn't stand the truth. I sent them on to New York. This is my agent's reply.'

He took a letter from a file on the table and handed it to his guest. 'Read it,' he said.

With an inscrutable smile the Cambridge-American looked at the paper and read:

'NEW YORK, *10th October 1914.*

DEAR MR. SELWYN,—You will be pleased to know that I have succeeded in placing your articles "When Hell Laughed," "A Fool There Was," and "Gods of Jingoism" with a prominent newspaper syndicate. The price paid was \$800 each, and I herewith remit my cheque for \$2160, having deducted the usual commission. I have every reason to believe that any further articles you send will meet with a ready market, especially if they follow along the same lines of exposing the utter futility of war. As a matter of fact, this syndicate is prepared to pay even a higher price if these articles, which will be published all over the United States, meet with the approval they confidently expect.

'Assuring you of my desire to be of service to you, I remain, yours very sincerely,

'S. T. LYONS.'

'Very nice, too,' murmured Watson at the conclusion of the letter. 'Who says that high ideals don't pay?'

'What do you mean?' said Selwyn sternly. The younger man got up from his chair and looked at his watch. 'Don't get shirty,' he said. 'I was only thinking that 800 per is a fairly healthy figure for that dope.'

'I don't give a damn for the money,' said Selwyn hotly, 'except that it shows there is a demand in America for the truth. Britain has always been afraid to face facts. Thank God, America isn't.'

'Well,' said Watson with a slight yawn, 'it's quite obvious that we're as far apart as the poles on that question, so I think I'll cut along.'

'Stay and have a cup of coffee. There's some being made; it will be here in a minute.'

'No, thanks. To be brutally frank, Austin, the ozone around here is a little too rarefied for me. I'm going out to a cab-stand somewhere to have a sandwich and a cup of tea with any Cockney who hasn't joined the Citizenship of the World.'

With the shadows under his eyes more pronounced than before, but with the unchanging look of determination, Selwyn helped the younger man on with his coat, and handed him his hat and stick. 'I am sorry you won't stay,' he said calmly, 'for your abuse and sarcasm are nothing to me. When I took this step I foresaw the consequences, and, believe me, I have suffered so much already that the loss of another friend means very little.'

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The powerfully built young American twirled his hat uncomfortably between his fingers. 'Look here, Austin,' he said vehemently, 'why in blazes can't you get all that hot air out of your system? Come on—meet me to-morrow, and we'll join up together. It'll be all kinds of experience, you'll get wagon-loads of copy, and when it's all over you'll feel like a man instead of a sissy.'

With a tired, patient smile Selwyn put out his hand. 'Good-night, Doug,' he said. 'I hope you come through all right.'

When he heard the door close downstairs as Watson went out, Selwyn re-entered the room. The light of the electric lamp glaring on his manuscript pained his eyes, and he turned it out, leaving the room in the dim light of the fire. The man-servant entered with a tray.

'Will you have the light on, sir?'

'No, thanks, Smith. Just leave the things on the table.'

'Thank you, sir. Good-night, sir.'

'Good-night, Smith.'

The room was strangely, awesomely quiet. There was no sound from the deserted square; only the windows shook a little in the breeze. He reached for the ukulele, and staring dreamily into the fire, picked softly at the strings until he found four notes that blended harmoniously.

The fire slowly faded from his gaze, and in its place, by memory's alchemy, came the vision of *her* face—a changing vision, one moment mocking as when he first met her, turning to a look of pain as when she spoke of Dick, and then resolving into the wistful tenderness that had crept into her eyes that evening by the trout-stream—a tenderness that vanished before the expression of scorn she had shown that fateful August night.

The night stole wearily on, but still Selwyn sat in the shadowy darkness, occasionally strumming the one chord on the strings, like a worshipper keeping vigil at some heathen shrine and offering the incense of soft music.

CHAPTER XIV.

STRANGE CRAFT.

I.

One slushy night in December Selwyn was returning from a solitary dinner at a modest Holborn restaurant, when a damp sleet began to fall, making the sickly street-lamps darker still, and defying the protection of mufflers and heavy coats. With hat pulled over his eyes and hands immersed in the pockets of his coat, he made his way through the throng, while the raucous voices of news-venders cried out the latest tidings from the front.

To escape the proximity of the crowds and the nerve-shaking noises of traffic, he turned down a wide thoroughfare, and eventually emerged on Fleet Street. Again the seething discontent of rumbling omnibuses and hurrying crowds irritated him, and crossing to Bouverie Street, where Mr. Punch looks out on England with his genial satire, he followed its quiet channel until he reached the Thames.

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In contrast to the throbbing arteries of Holborn and Fleet Street, the river soothed his nerves and lent tranquillity to his mind. Following the Embankment, which was shrouded in heavy darkness, he reached the spot where Cleopatra's Needle, which once looked on the majesty of ancient Egypt, stands, a sentinel of incongruity, on the edge of London's river. Giving way to a momentary whim, Selwyn paused, and finding a spot that was sheltered from the sleet, sat down and leaned against the monument.

In the masque of night he could just make out the sketchy forms of a river-barge and two steamers anchored a few yards out. From their masts he could see the dull glow of red where a meagre lamp was hung, and he heard the hoarse voice of a man calling out to some one across the river. As if in answer, the rattle of a chain came from the deck of some unseen craft, like a lonely felon in a floating prison.

The river's mood was so in keeping with his own that Selwyn's senses experienced a numbing pleasure; the ghostly mariners of the night, the motionless ships at their moorings, the eerie hissing of the sleet upon the water, combined to form a drug that left his eyelids heavy with drowsy contentment.

How long he had remained there he could not have stated, when from the steps beneath him, leading towards the water, he heard a man's slovenly voice.

'Are you going to stay the night here?'

As apparently the remark was intended for him, Selwyn leaned forward and peered in the direction from which the voice had come. At the foot of the dripping steps he could just make out a huddled figure.

'If you're putting up here,' went on the speaker, 'we had better pool resources. I've got a cape, and if you have a coat we can make a decent shift of it. Two sleep warmer than one on a night like this.'

In spite of the sluggish manner of speech, Selwyn could detect a faint intonation which bespoke a man of breeding. He tried to discern the features, but they were completely hidden beneath the pall of night.

'Well,' said the voice, 'are you deaf?'

'I am not staying here for the night,' answered Selwyn.

'Then why the devil didn't you say that before?' For a moment the fellow's voice was energised by a touch of brusqueness, but before the last words were finished it had lapsed into the dull heaviness of physical lethargy. 'Tell me,' said the stranger, after a silence of several minutes, 'how is the war going on?'

'You probably know as much as I.'

'Not likely. I've been beating back from China for three months in a more or less derelict tramp. Chased into every blessed little port, losing our way, and cruising for days without water—we were a fine family of blackguards, and no mistake. Grog could be had for the asking, and a scrap for less than that; but I'd as lief not ship on the *Nancy Hawkins* again.'

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Selwyn leaned back against the obelisk and speculated idly on the strange personality hidden in the dark recess of the descending stairs. It was not difficult to tell that, though he spoke of himself as a sailor, sailing was not his calling. There was a subtle cadence of refinement in his voice, an arresting lilt on certain words, that remained on the air after the words had ended.

‘Did the Germans get to Paris?’

‘No,’ said Selwyn; ‘though they were very near it.’

‘Good! How did our chaps do?’

‘I believe they fought very bravely, but were pretty well wiped out.’

‘I suppose so,’ said the other quietly—‘wiped out, eh? Tell me—did the Colonies throw in their lot with us?’

‘All of them,’ said Selwyn, ‘even including South Africa.’

‘What about Canada?’

‘She has over thirty thousand men in England now, ready to cross.’

‘Splendid!’ muttered the fellow. ‘So they’re British after all, in spite of the Yankees beside them. . . . The cubs didn’t leave the old mother to fight alone, eh? Jove! but it’s something to be an Englishman today, isn’t it?’

Selwyn made no response, but his brow contracted with the thought that even the flotsam, the dregs thrown up on the river’s bank, were imbued with the overwhelming instinct of jingoism. He glanced up from the steps, and saw on either side of the obelisk a sphinx, woman-headed, with the body of a lioness, monuments to the memory of Cleopatra. How little had been accomplished by humanity since the first sphinx had gazed upon the sands of Egypt! It had seen the treachery and the lust of Antony, the slaughter of men by men led blindly to the carnage. . . . Was not the smile, perhaps, its hoarded knowledge of the futility of the ages?

‘Can you give me a match?’ asked the man from the steps. ‘Everything on me is soaked. I’ll come up if you have one, but I don’t want to shift otherwise.’

‘Don’t bother,’ said Selwyn, getting up and stamping his feet to restore their warmth. ‘I’ll bring you one, and then I’ll have to move along.’

He produced a silver match-box, and feeling his way carefully down the slippery steps, handed it to the stranger. Acknowledging the action with a murmur of thanks, the fellow

took it, and making a protection with his cape, struck a match to light his pipe. It flickered for a moment and flared up, illuminating his features grotesquely.

Selwyn uttered a sharp ejaculation of surprise and stepped back a pace. 'Durwent!' he cried.

'Eh?' snapped the other, dropping the match on the wet stone, where it went out with a faint splutter. 'What's your game?'

'I could not see you before,' said the American quickly; 'but though I heard your voice only once, there was something about it I remembered.'

The Englishman struck a second match, and with a casual air of indifference lit his pipe.

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'Thanks,' he said, handing the box to the American. Selwyn reached forward to take it, when suddenly his wrists were caught in a grip of steel.

'Damn you!' said Dick Durwent hotly, springing to his feet. 'Are you tracking me? I didn't come back to be caught like a rat. Are you a detective? If you are, by George! I'll drown you in the river.'

'Don't be a fool,' said Selwyn, writhing in pain with the other's torture.

'Who are you?'

'My name is Selwyn. I am an American; a friend of your mother and your sister.'

'Where have you seen me before?'

'At the Cafe Rouge—a year ago.' Beads of perspiration stood out on Selwyn's head, and his body was faint with the pain of his twisted wrists.

'You're not lying?' said Dick Durwent, slowly relaxing his grip, and peering into the American's eyes. 'No. I seem to remember you somewhere with Elise. I'm sorry.' He released the clutch completely, and resumed his seat on the steps. 'I hope I didn't hurt you.'

'No,' said Selwyn, rubbing each wrist in turn to help to restore the circulation.

Durwent laughed grimly. 'It's a wonder I didn't break something,' he said. 'Once more—I'm sorry. But you can understand the risk I am running in returning here with the police wanting me. They're not going to get me if I can help it.'

'Why didn't you stay away?'

'With the Old Country at war! Not likely. Do you think I should ever have gone if I had known what was going to happen?'

'What are your plans?'

'Fight,' said the other briefly. 'Somewhere—somehow. I'll get into a recruiting line about dawn to-morrow. . . . But—what can you tell me about Elise?'

'I have neither seen nor heard of her since August,' said Selwyn, wondering at the calm level of his own voice in spite of tumultuous heart-beats.

'Too bad. Then you don't know anything about the rest?'

'No. I—— He paused awkwardly. 'I suppose you haven't heard about your brother?'

There was no response, but Selwyn could feel the Englishman's eyes steeled on his face. 'He was killed,' he went on slowly, 'last August.'

Still there was no sound from the younger son, now heir to his father's title and estates. For the first time Selwyn caught the ripple of the river's current eddying about the steps at the bottom. From the great bridges spanning the river there was the distant thunder of lumbering traffic.

'I understand that he died very bravely,' said the American in an attempt to ease the intensity of the silence.

'Yes,' muttered Durwent dreamily, 'he would. . . . So old Malcolm is dead. . . . Somehow, I always looked on his soldiering as a joke. I never thought that those fellows in the Regulars would ever really go to war. . . . Yet, when the time came, he was ready, and I was skulking off to China like a thief in the night.'

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The Englishman's voice was so low that it seemed as if he were talking more to himself than to his listener.

'What happened to that swine?' he ejaculated suddenly. 'I mean the one I almost killed. By any chance, did he die?'

'I saw in a paragraph last week,' said Selwyn, 'that he was out on crutches for the first time. The paper also commented on your complete disappearance.'

'I wish I had killed him,' said the young man grimly. 'If I ever get a chance I'll tell you about him. I was drunk at the time—that's what saved his life. If I had been sober I should have finished him. Well, it's a damp night, my friend, and I won't keep you any longer from a decent billet.'

'Look here, Durwent,' said Selwyn; 'come along to my rooms. You're soaked to the skin, and I could give you a change and a shakedown for the night.'

'Thanks very much; but I'm accustomed to this kind of thing.'

'You won't be seen,' urged Selwyn. 'I have accepted so much from your family that you would do me a kindness in coming.'

'Well, I must say I'm not married to this place. If you don't mind taking in a disreputable wharf-rat'——

'That's the idea,' said Selwyn, helping him to his feet. The Englishman shivered slightly.

'You haven't a flask, have you?' he queried. 'I didn't know how cold I was.'

'I haven't anything with me,' said the American; 'but I can give you a whisky and something to eat at my rooms.'

'Right! Thanks very much.'

Tucking the cape under his arm, and shaking his waterproof cap to clear it of water, Dick Durwent followed the American on to the Embankment, where the two sphinxes of Egypt squatted, silent sentinels.

II.

To avoid the crowds as much as possible, the two men followed the Embankment, and had reached the Houses of Parliament, intending to make a detour into St. James's Square, when Selwyn felt a hand upon his shoulder. He turned quickly about, and Durwent moved off to one side to be out of the light of a lamp.

'Sweet son of liberty,' said the new-comer, 'how fares it?'

It was Johnston Smyth, more airily shabby than ever. Over his head he held an umbrella in such disrepair that the material hung from the ribs in shreds. A profuse black tie hid any sign of shirt, and both the legs of his trousers and the sleeves of his coat seemed to have shrunk considerably with the damp.

'How are you?' said Selwyn, shaking hands.

'Temperamentally on tap; artistically beyond question; gastronomically unsatisfied.' At this concise statement of his condition, Smyth took off his hat, gazed at it as if he had been previously unaware of its existence, and replaced it on the very back of his head.

'Things are not going too well, then?' said Selwyn, glancing anxiously towards Durwent, and wondering how he could get rid of the garrulous artist.

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'Not going well?' Smyth straightened his right leg and relaxed the left one. 'In the last three weeks a pair of pyjamas, my other coat, two borrowed umbrellas, and a set of cuff-links have gone. If things go much better I shall have to live in a tub like Diogenes. But—do the honours, Selwyn.'

'I beg your pardon,' said the American. 'Mr—Mr. Sherwood,' he went on, taking the first name that came to his lips, 'allow me to introduce Mr. Johnston Smyth.'

'How are you?' said the artist, making an elaborate bow and seizing the other's hand.

'As you may have gathered from my costume and the ventilated condition of my umbrella, I am not in that state of funds which lends tranquillity to the mind and a glow of contentment to the bosom. Yet you see before you a man—if I may be permitted a sporting expression—who has set the pace to the artists of England. I am glad to know you. Our mutual friend from Old Glory has done himself proud.'

With which flourish Smyth left off shaking hands and closed his umbrella, immediately opening it and putting it up again. Dick Durwent replaced his hands in his pockets, and Selwyn heard his quivering breath as he shivered with cold.

'However,' went on the loquacious artist, 'though my art has been heralded as a triumph, though it has filled columns of the press, though my admirers can be found on every page of the directory, I can only say, like our ancient enemy across the Channel after Austerlitz, "Another such victory and I am ruined!" . . . Selwyn, shall we indulge in the erstwhile drop?'

'Have you a flask?' broke in Durwent, his dull eyes lighting greedily.

'I think not,' said Smyth, handing the umbrella to Selwyn, and carefully searching all his pockets. 'I am afraid my valet has neglected that essential part of a gentleman's wardrobe. But what do you say, gentlemen, to a short pilgrimage to Archibald's?'

'No, Smyth,' said the American, putting his hand in Durwent's arm. 'For certain reasons, Mr. Sherwood'——

'Ha!' said Smyth, with a dramatic pose of his legs, 'Archibald is the soul of discretion. Compared to him, an Egyptian mummy is a pithy paragrapher. *Mes amis*, Archibald's is just across the bridge, and I can assure you that the Twilight Tinkle, in which I have the honour to have collaborated, is guaranteed to change the most elongated countenance of glum into a globular surface of blithesome joy.'

'No,' began Selwyn impatiently.

'Let us try it,' said Durwent eagerly. 'I think this chill has got into my blood. I'd give a lot for a shot of rum or brandy.'

'We can have anything in my rooms,' protested the American. 'You want to get your wet things off—and, besides, it's a risk going in there.'

'No risk—no risk,' said Durwent, laughing foolishly and rubbing his hands together.—
'Where is this hole, Smyth?'

'Gentlemen,' said the artist, 'after the custom of these military days, I urge you "fall in."'

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Getting in the centre and adjusting his hat at a precipitate angle on the extreme left of his head, Smyth took Dick Durwent's arm, and extending the other to Selwyn, marched the pair across the bridge, holding the absurd umbrella over each in turn as if it offered some real resistance to the scurvy downpour.

III.

'This way, gentlemen,' said Smyth, leading them up an alley, across a court, and into a lane. 'Permit me to welcome you to Archibald's.'

They entered a dimly lit tavern, where a dozen or so men sat about the room at little tables. Instead of the usual pictures one sees in such places, pictures of dancers with expressive legs, and race-horses with expressive faces, the walls were hung with dusty signed portraits of authors, artists, and actors, most of whom had attained distinction during the previous half-century. Sir Henry Irving as Othello held the place of honour over the bar, with Garrick as his *vis-a-vis* on the opposite wall. The divine Sarah cast the spell of her eternal youth on all who gathered there; and Lewis Waller, with eyes intent on his sword-handle, seemed oblivious to the close proximity of Lily Langtry and Ellen Terry, those empresses of the dual realms of Beauty and Intelligence. Without any companion portrait, the puffy sensuality of Oscar Wilde held a prominent place. And between the spectacled face of Rudyard Kipling on one side and the author of *Peter Pan* on the other, Forbes-Robertson in the garb of the Melancholy Dane looked out with his fine nobility of countenance. The room was heavy with tobacco-smoke, which seemed to have been accumulating for years, and to have darkened the very beams of the ceiling. Over the floor a liberal coating of sawdust was sprinkled.

'Strange place, this,' whispered Johnston Smyth as they took a table in an unfrequented corner. 'It's an understood thing that the habitués of Archibald's are trailers in the race of life. If you have a fancy for human nature, gentlemen, this is the shop to come to. We've got some queer goods on the shelves—newspaper men with no newspapers to write for; authors that think out new plots every night and forget 'em by morning; playwrights that couldn't afford the pit in the Old Vic.—Do you see that old chap over there?'

'The little man,' said Selwyn, 'with the strange smile?'

'That's right. He's been writing a play now for twenty years, but hasn't had time to finish the last act. "There's no hurry," he says; "true art will not permit of haste"—and the joke of it is that he has a cough that'll give him his own curtain long before he ever writes it on his play. There he goes now.'

The old playwright had been seized with a paroxysm of coughing that took his meagre storehouse of breath. Weakly striking at his breast, he shook and quivered in the clutch

of the thing, leaning back exhausted when it had passed, but never once losing the odd, whimsical smile.

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'What about something to drink?' broke in Dick Durwent hurriedly, his eyes narrowing.

'Directly,' said Smyth, beckoning to the proprietor, a small man, who, in spite of his years and an oblong head undecorated by a single hair, appeared strangely fresh and unworried, as if he had been sleeping for fifty years in a cellar, and had just come up to view the attending changes.

'Archibald,' said Smyth, 'these are my friends the Duke of Arkansas and Sir Plumtree Crabapple.'

The extraordinary little man smiled toothlessly and fingered his tray.

'Gentlemen,' said Smyth, 'name your brands.'

'Give me a double brandy,' said Durwent, blowing on his chilled fingers. 'Better make it two doubles in a large glass.'

'Soda, sir?' queried the proprietor in a high-pitched, tranquil voice.

'No,' said Durwent. 'You can bring a little water in a separate glass.'

'What is your pleasure, your Grace?' said Smyth, addressing the American. 'If you will do Archibald and myself the honour of trying the Twilight Tinkle, it would be an event of importance to us both.'

'Anything at all,' said Selwyn, sick at heart as he saw the nervous interlocked fingers of Dick Durwent pressed together with such intensity that they were left white and bloodless.

'This is a little slice of London's life,' said Smyth after he had given the order, crossing his left leg over the right, 'that you visitors would never find. You hear about the chaps who succeed and those who come a cropper, but these are the poor beggars who never had a chance to do either. There's genius in this room, gentlemen, but it's genius that started swimming up-stream with a millstone round its neck.'

With a profound shaking of the head, Smyth straightened his left leg, and after carefully taking in its shape with partially closed eyes, he replaced it on its fellow.

'How do they live?' queried Selwyn.

'Scavengers,' said Smyth laconically. 'Scavengers to success. Do you see that fellow there with the poached eyes and a four-days' beard?'

Selwyn looked to the spot indicated by Smyth, and saw a heavily built man with a pale, dissipated face, who was fingering an empty glass and leering cynically with some odd

trend of thought. It was a face that gripped the attention, for written on it was talent—immense talent. It was a face that openly told its tale of massive, misdirected power of mentality, fuddled but not destroyed by alcohol.

‘That’s Laurence De Foe,’ said Smyth; ‘a queer case altogether. Barnardo boy—doesn’t know who his parents were, but claims direct descent from Charlemagne. He’s never really drunk, but no one ever saw him sober. If he wanted to, he could write better than any man in London. Last year, when the critics scored Welland’s play *Salvage* for its rotten climax, the author himself came to De Foe. All night they sat in

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his stuffy room, and when Welland went away he had a play that made his name for ever. I could tell you of two of the heavy artillery among the London leader-writers who always bring their big stuff to De Foe before they fire it. Last July, when the war was making its preliminary bow, and Hemphill was thundering those editorials of his that warned the Old Lion he would have to wake up and clean the jungle, Hemphill was simply the errand urchin. There's the man who wrote "To Arms, England!" one day after the Austrian note to Serbia. Hemphill got the credit and the money—but Laurence De Foe did it.'

Smyth's stream of narrative, which carried considerably less impedimenta of caricature and persiflage than was usual with him, came to an end with the arrival of two Twilight Tinkles and a generous-sized tumbler, more than half-full of brandy. After an elaborate search of his coat and trousers pockets to locate a five-pound note, Smyth was forced to allow Selwyn to pay for the refreshment, promising to knock him up before six next morning and repay him.

'Well, gentlemen,' said the conscientious artist, 'here's success to crime!'

Not waiting to honour the misanthropic toast, Dick Durwent had reached greedily for his glass, and poured its contents down his throat. With a heavy sigh of gratification, he leaned back in his chair, and the pallor of his cheeks showing beneath the weather-beaten surface of tan was flecked with patches of colour. For an instant only his eyes went yellow, as on the night at the Cafe Rouge; but the horrible glare died out, and was succeeded by the calm, blue tranquillity that had reigned before.

'By St. George!' said Smyth admiringly, 'but we have no amateur with us, Selwyn.'

The solitary figure of De Foe, who had been watching them, left his table, and lurching over to them, stood swaying unevenly.

'*Bon soir*, gentlemen,' he said, speaking with the deep sonorousness which comes of long saturation of the vocal cords with undiluted spirits, 'I think one or two of these faces are new to Archibald's. Am I right?'

'Yes, sir,' said Smyth, rising. 'Permit me, Mr. De Foe, to introduce'——

The writer stopped him with a slow, majestic movement of the hand. 'What care I who they are?' he said heavily. 'Names mean nothing—pretty labels on empty vessels. By what right do these gentlemen invade the sanctity of Archibald's?' He drew a chair near them and sat down sullenly, hanging his arm over the back. 'Do I see aright?' he queried thickly, opening his eyes with difficulty, and revealing their lustreless shade.

'There are three of you? Humph! The one I know—a clumsy dauber in a smudgy world.'

Smyth nodded delightedly to his companions to indicate that the compliment was intended for him.

'Or your friends,' went on the heavy resonant voice, 'one has the face of a dreamer. Come, sir, tell me of these dreams that are keeping you awake of nights. I am descended from Joseph by the line of Charlemagne, and I have it in my power to interpret them. Are you a writer?'

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'I am,' said Selwyn calmly.

'You are not English. You haven't the leathery composure of our race.'

'I am an American.'

'I thought as much. You show the smug complacency of your nation. How dare you write, sir? What do you know of life?'

'We have learned something on that subject,' said Selwyn with a slight smile, 'even over there. You see, we have the mistakes of your older countries by which we can profit.'

'Bah!' said the other contemptuously. 'Cant—platitudes—words! Since when have either nations or individuals learned from the mistakes of others? Take you three. Which of you lies closest to life? Which of you has drunk experience to the dregs? The dauber?—You, author-dreamer, fired by the passion of a robin for a cherry?—No, neither of you. . . . That boy there—that youngster with the blue eyes of a girl; he is the one to teach—not you. He has the stamp of failure on him. Welcome, sir—the Prince of Failures welcomes you to Archibald's.'

He lurched forward and extended an unsteady hand to Dick Durwent, who rose slowly from his chair to take it. As Selwyn watched the two men standing with clasped hands over the table, he felt his heart-strings contract with pain.

Although separated by more than thirty years, there was a cruel similarity in the pair—in the half-bravado, half-timorous poise of the head; in the droop of sensuous lips; in the dark hair of each, matted over pallid foreheads. It was as if De Foe had summoned some black art to show the future held in the lap of the gods for the youngest Durwent.

'My boy,' said De Foe drunkenly, but with a moving tenderness, 'life has refused me much, but it has left me the power to read a man's soul in his eyes. The world brands you as a beaten man—and by men's standards it is right. But Laurence De Foe can read beyond those sea-blue eyes of yours; he it is who knows that behind them lies the gallant soul of a gallant gentleman. End your days in a gutter or on the gibbet—what matters it where the actor sleeps when the drama is done?—but to-night you have done great honour to the Prince of Failures by letting him grasp your hand.'

He slowly released the young man's hand, and turned wearily away as Durwent sank into his chair, his eyes staring into filmy space. Moving clumsily across the room, De Foe reached the bar and ordered a drink. When it had been poured out for him he turned about, and, leaning back lazily, looked around the room, with his eyes almost hidden by the close contraction of thick, black eyelashes. Such was the unique power of his personality that the disjointed threads of conversation at the various tables wound to a single end as if by a signal.

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'*Mes amis*,' said De Foe—and his voice was low and sonorous—'I see before me many, like myself, who have left behind them futures where other men left only pasts. I see before me many, like myself, who had the gift of creating exquisite, soul-stirring works of art and literature. But because we were not content to be mere mouthy clowns, with pen or brush, jabbering about the play of life, we have paid the penalty for thinking we could be both subject and painter, author and actor. Because we chose to live, we have failed. The world goes on applauding its successful charlatans, its puny-visioned authors pouring their thoughts of sawdust in the reeking trough of popularity; while we, who know the taste of every bitter herb in all experience—we are thrust aside as failures. . . . But the gift of prophecy is on me to-night. There is a youth here who has a soul capable of scaling heights where none of us could follow—and a soul that could sink to depths that few of us have known. He is one of us, and he has chosen to fight for England. I can see the glory of his death written in his eyes. Gentlemen—you who are adrift with uncharted destinies—drink to the boy of the sea-blue eyes. May he die worthy of himself and of us.'

Throughout the dimly lit room every one rose to his feet, incoherently echoing the last words of the speaker. . . . Still with the filmy wistfulness about his eyes and a tired, weary smile, Dick Durwent sat in his chair beating a listless tattoo on the table with his hand.

From across the room came the sound of the old playwright's hacking cough.

CHAPTER XV.

DICK DURWENT.

I.

Late that night Selwyn lay in his bed and listened to the softened tones of his two guests conversing in the living-room, Johnston Smyth having conceived such an attachment to his newly found friend that it was quite impossible to persuade him to leave. At his own request, blankets had been spread for Durwent on the floor, and after a hot bath he had rolled up for the night close to the fire. Johnston Smyth had also disdained the offer of a bed and ensconced himself on the couch, where he lay on his back and uttered vagrant philosophies on a vast number of subjects.

Wishing his strangely assorted guests a good night's repose, Selwyn had retired to his own room shortly after midnight, but, tired as he was, sleep refused to come. Like an etcher planning a series of scenes to be depicted, his mind summoned the various incidents of the night in a tedious cycle. The huddled figure at the foot of Cleopatra's steps; the fantastic airiness of Smyth with his shredded umbrella; the smoky

atmosphere of Archibald's, with its strange gathering of derelicts; the two chance acquaintances spending the night in the adjoining room—what vivid, disjointed cameos they were! If there was such a thing as Fate, what meaning could there be in their having met? Or was their meeting as purposeless as that of which some poet had once written—two pieces of plank-wood touching in mid-ocean and drifting eternally?

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It seemed that the low voices of the others had been going on for more than an hour when the sense of absolute stillness told Selwyn that he must have fallen asleep for an interval. He listened for their voices, but nothing could be heard except the sleet driven against the windows, and a far-away clock striking the hour of two.

Wondering if his visitors were comfortable, he rose from his bed, and creeping softly to the living-room door, opened it enough to look in.

Smyth's heavy breathing, not made any lighter by his having his head completely covered by bed-clothes, indicated that the futurist was in the realm of Morpheus. Durwent was curled up cosily by the fire, the blankets over him rising and subsiding slightly, conforming to his deep, tranquil breaths.

In the light of the fire, and with the warm glow of the skin caused by its heat and the refreshing bath, the pallor of dissipation had left the boy's face. In the musing curve of his full-blooded lips and in the corners of his closed eyes there was just the suggestion of a smile—the smile of a child tired from play. There was such refinement in the delicate nostrils dilating almost imperceptibly with the intake of each breath, and such spiritual smoothness in his brow contrasting with the glowing tincture of his face, that to the man looking down on him he seemed like a youth of some idyl, who could never have known the invasion of one sordid thought.

A feeling of infinite compassion came over Selwyn. He rebelled against the cruelty of vice that could fasten its claws on anything so fine, when there was so much human decay to feed upon.

The eyelids parted a little, and Selwyn stepped back towards the door.

'Hullo, Selwyn, old boy!' murmured Durwent dreamily. 'Is it time to get up?'

'No,' whispered Selwyn. 'I didn't mean to wake you.'

Durwent smiled deprecatingly and reached sleepily for the other's hand. 'It's awfully decent of you to take me in like this,' he said.

There was a simplicity in his gesture, a child-like sincerity in his voice, that made Selwyn accept the hand-clasp, unable to utter the words which came to his lips.

'Selwyn,' said Dick, keeping his face turned towards the fire, 'are you likely to see Elise soon?'

'I hardly think so,' said the American, kneeling down and stirring the coals with the poker.

'If you do, please don't tell her I've come back. She thinks I'm in the Orient somewhere, and if she knew I was joining up she would worry. I suppose I shall always be "Boy-blue" to her, and never anything older.'

Selwyn replaced the poker and sat down on a cushion that was on the floor.

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'It may be a rotten thing to say,' resumed the younger man, speaking slowly, 'but she was more of a mother to me than my mother was. As far back as I can remember she was the one person who believed in me. The rest never did. When I was a kid at prep. school and brought home bad reports, every one seemed to think me an outsider—that I wasn't conforming—and I began to believe it. Only Elise never changed. She was the one of the whole family who didn't want me to be somebody or something else. You can hardly believe what that meant to me in those days. It was a little world I lived in, but to my youngster's eyes it looked as if everything and every person were on one side, doubting me, and Elise was on the other, believing in me. . . . I'm not whining, Selwyn, or saying that any one's to blame for my life except myself, but I do believe that if Elise and I had been kept together I might not have turned out such a rotter. Sometimes, too, I wonder if it wouldn't have been better for her. She never made many friends—and looking back, I think the poor little girl has had a lonely time of it.'

He relapsed into silence and shifted his head wearily on the pillow. Johnston Smyth murmured something muffled and unintelligible in his sleep. Selwyn placed some new lumps of coal on the fire, the flames licking them eagerly as the sharp crackle of escaping gases punctured the sleep-laden air.

'It does sound rather like whining to say it,' said Durwent without opening his eyes, 'but after I was rusticated at Cambridge I tried to travel straight. If I had gone then to the Colonies I might have made a man of myself, but I hung around too long, and got mixed up with one of the rottenest sets in London. I went awfully low, Selwyn, but booze had me by the neck, and my conscience wasn't working very hard either. And then another woman helped me. She was one of those who aren't admitted among decent people. She came of poor family, and had made a fairly good name for herself on the stage, and was absolutely straight until she met that blackguard Moorewell about three years ago.'

'The man you nearly killed?'

'Yes. At any rate, she and I fell in love with each other. I know it's all damned sordid, but we were both outcasts, and, as that chap said to-night, it's the people who have failed who lie closest to life. Once more a woman believed in me, and I believed in a woman. We planned to get married. We were going away under another name, to make a new world for ourselves. For weeks I never touched a drop, and it seemed at last that I could see—just a little light ahead. You don't know what that means, Selwyn, when a man is absolutely down.'

The smile had died out in the speaker's face and given way to a cold, gray mist of pain.

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'Moorewell heard about it,' went on Durwent, 'and though the blackguard had discarded her, he grew jealous, and began his devilry again. She did not tell me, but I know for a long time she was as true to me as I was to her. Then they went to Paris—I believe he promised to marry her there. A week later I got a letter from her, begging forgiveness. He had left her, she said, and she was going away where I should never find her again. My first impulse was to follow her—and then I started to drink. God! what nights those were! I waited my time. I watched Moorewell until one night I knew he was alone. I forced an entrance, and caught him in his library. . . . As I said before, I was drunk; and that's what saved his life. I thought at the time he was dead; and having no money, I caught a late train, and hid all night and next day in the woods at Roselawn. Three times I saw Elise, but she was never alone; but that night I called her with a cry of the night-jar which she had taught me. She came out, and I told her as much as I could; and with her necklace I raised some money and got away.'

Again the murmured words came to a close. Selwyn searched his mind for some comment to make, but none would come. He could not offer sympathy or condolence—Durwent wasn't seeking that. It was impossible to condemn, or to suggest a new start in life, because the young fellow was not trying to justify his actions. Yet it seemed such a tragedy to look helplessly on without one effort to change the floating course of the driftwood.

'Durwent,' he said haltingly, 'it's not too late for you to start over again. If you will go to America, I have friends there who would give you every opening and'——

'You're an awfully decent chap,' said Durwent, once more touching Selwyn's hand with his; 'but I shall not come back from the war. I felt *that* the moment I stepped on shore yesterday. I felt it again when that fellow spoke to me in the tavern. It may come soon, or it may be a long time, but this is the end.'

'No, no,' said Selwyn earnestly; 'all that's the effect of your chill. It has left you depressed.'

'You don't understand,' said the lad, smiling with closed eyes, 'or you wouldn't say that. I said before that it means a lot, when a man's down, to be able to see a little light ahead. . . . I can see that now again. . . . It doesn't matter what I've been or done—I can go out there now, and die like a gentleman. War gives us poor devils that chance. . . . You know what I mean. My life has been no damned use to any one, Selwyn, but they won't care about that in France. To die in the trenches—that's my last chance to do something . . . to do something that counts.'

Selwyn leaned over and patted the lad on his shoulder. 'Dick,' he said, 'wait until the morning, and all these fancies will clear from your mind. We'll discuss everything then together.'

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The musing smile lingered again about the boy's lips.

'You're tired out, old man,' went on the American. 'I shouldn't have waked you. Good-night.'

The other stopped him from rising by catching his arm with his hand. 'Do you mind,' said Dick, his eyes opening wide, 'just staying here until I go to sleep? . . . There are all sorts of wild things going through my head to-night . . . waves pounding, pounding, pounding. It never stops, Selwyn. . . . And I seem to hear shouts a long way off—like smugglers landing their stuff in the dark. I'm an awful idiot to talk like this, old boy, but I've lost my courage a bit.'

And so for nearly half-an-hour the American remained watching by the lad as sleep hovered about and gradually settled on him.

As Selwyn quietly stole from the room the City's clocks were striking three.

II.

It was after nine o'clock when Selwyn woke from a deep, refreshing sleep. Hurrying into the other room, he found no sign of his guests.

'When did these gentlemen leave?' he asked of his servant, who had answered his ring.

'It must have been about six o'clock, sir. I heard the door open and shut then.'

'Why didn't you call me?'

'I wasn't wanting to disturb you, sir. It's the first good sleep you've had for a long time.'

It was true. The sinking of himself into the personality of another man had released the fetters of his intensive egotism. For a whole night he had forgotten, or at least neglected, his world-mission in simple solicitude for one who had fallen by the wayside.

After the stimulus of a cold shower and a hearty breakfast, he resumed his crusade against the entrenched forces of Ignorance, but in spite of the utmost effort in concentration, the memory of the lonely figure by the Thames intruded constantly on his mind. It was not only that Dick was the brother of Elise—although Selwyn's longing for her had become a dull pain that was never completely buried beneath his thoughts; nor was it merely the unconscious charm possessed by the boy, a charm that seized on the very heart-strings. To the American the real cruelty of the thing lay in the existence of a Society that could first debase so fine a creature, and then make no effort to retrieve or to atone for its crime.

Putting aside the day's work he had planned, he flung his mind into the arena of England's social conditions. Exerting to the full his gift of mental discipline, he rejected the promptings of prejudice and of sentiment, and brought his sense of analysis to bear on his subject with the cold, callous detachment of a scientist studying some cosmic phenomenon.

For more than an hour his brain skirmished for an opening, until, spreading the blank sheets of paper before him, he wrote: 'THE ISLAND OF DARKNESS.' Tilting his chair back, he surveyed the title critically.

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'Yes,' he said aloud, squaring his shoulders resolutely, 'I have generalised long enough. Without malice, but without restraint, I will trace the contribution of Britain towards the world's debacle.'

With gathering rapidity and intensity he covered page after page with finely worded paragraphs. He summoned the facts of history, and churning them with his conceptions of humanity's duty to humanity, poured out a flood of ideas, from which he chose the best. Infatuated by the richness of the stream, he created such a powerful sequence of facts that the British began to loom up as a reactionary tribe fighting a rearguard action throughout the ages against the advancing hosts of enlightenment. The Island of Britain, the 'Old Country,' as its people called it, began to shape in his eyes like a hundred-taloned monster sprawling over the whole earth. This was the nation which had forced opium on China, ruled India by tyranny, blustered and bullied America into rebellion, conquered South Africa at the behest of business interests. . . . Those and endless others were the counts against Britain in the open court of history.

And if those had been her crimes in the international sphere, what better record could she show in the management of human affairs at home? She had clung to the feudal idea of class distinction, only surrendering a few outposts reluctantly to the imperious onslaught of time; she had maintained a system of public schools which produced first-class snobs and third-rate scholars; she had ignored the rights of women until in very desperation they had resorted to the crudities of violence in order to achieve some outlet for the pent-up uselessness and directionlessness of their sex; she had tolerated vile living conditions for the poor, and had forced men and women to work under conditions which were degrading and an insult to their Maker. . . . One by one these dragons reared their heads and fell to the gleaming Excalibur of the author.

Selwyn made one vital error—he mistook facts for truth. He forgot that a sequence of facts, each one absolutely accurate in itself, may, when pieced together, create a fabric of falsehood.

There were many contributing influences to Austin Selwyn's denunciation of Britain that morning. Although he had ordered sentiment and prejudice to leave his mind unclogged, these two passions cannot be dismissed by mere will-power.

He was keenly moved by the meeting with Dick Durwent, and, almost unknown to himself, his love for Elise was a smouldering fever whose fumes mounted to his head. Love is so overpowering that it overlaps the confines of hate, and his hunger for her was mixed with an almost savage desire to conquer her, force homage from her. And she was English!

In addition to these undercurrents affecting his thoughts, there was the dislike towards England which lies dormant in so many American breasts. Gloss it over as they will, no political *entente* can do away with the mutual dislike of Americans and Englishmen. It is

a thing which cannot be eradicated in a day, but will die the sooner for exposure to the light, being an ugly growth of swampy prejudice and evil-smelling provincialism that needs the darkness and the damp for life.

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Mingling these subconscious elements with those of logic and reason, Selwyn wrote for two days, almost without an hour's rest, and when it was finished 'The Island of Darkness' was a powerful, vivid, passionate arraignment of England, the heart of the British Empire. It was clever, full of big thoughts, and glowed with the genius of a man who had made language his slave.

It lacked only one ingredient, a simple thing at best—*Truth*.

But that is the tragedy of idealism, which studies the world as a crystal-gazer reading the forces of destiny in a piece of glass.

III.

A week later, in the early afternoon, Selwyn was going up Whitehall, when he heard the sound of pipes, and turned with the crowd to gaze. With rhythmic pomposity a pipe-major was twirling a staff, while a band of pipes and drums blared out a Scottish battle-song on the frosty air. Following them in formation of fours were five or six hundred men in civilian clothes, attested recruits on their way to training-centres.

With the intellectual appetite of the psychologist, Selwyn looked searchingly at the faces of the strangely assorted crowd, and the contrasts offered would have satisfied the most rapacious student of human nature.

His eyes seized on one well-built, well-groomed man of thirty odd years whose slight stoop and cultured air of tolerance marked him a "Varsity man" as plainly as cap and gown could have done. Just behind him a costermonger in a riot of buttons was indulging in philosophic quips of a cheerfully vulgar nature. A few yards back a massive labourer with clear untroubled eye and powerful muscles stood out like a superior being to the three who were alongside. Half-way a poet marched. What form his poesy took—whether he expressed beauty in words, or, catching the music of the western wind, wove it into a melody, or whether he just dreamed and never told of what he dreamed—it matters not; he was a poet. His step, his dreamy eyes, the poise of his forehead raised slightly towards the skies, were things which showed his personality as clearly as the mighty forearm or the plethora of buttons bespoke the labourer or the costermonger.

With a great sense of pity the American watched them pass, while the skirl of the bagpipes lessened in the distance. In spite of the dissimilarity of type, there was a community of shyness that embraced almost every one—a silent plea not to be mistaken for heroes. As they passed the Horse Guards and saw the two sentries astride their horses still as statues (their glorious trappings, breastplates, helmets, and swords, the embodiment of spectacular militarism) an apologetic, humorous smile was on the face of almost every recruit. The sight was a familiar enough one to the large

majority, but in the presence of those grim, superb cavalrymen they felt the self-conscious embarrassment of small boys about to enter a room full of their elders.

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In its own way it was Britain's mob saying to Britain's Regulars that it was to be hoped no one would think they imagined themselves soldiers in the real sense of the word.

But to Selwyn the noise of their marching feet on the roadway had the ominous sound of the roll of the tumbrils, bearing their victims to the guillotine.

The procession was nearly ended and he was about to turn away, when his eye was attracted by a peculiar pair of knees encased in trousers that were much too tight, working jerkily from side to side as their owner marched. Although his face was almost hidden by reason of his vagabond hat being completely on one side, it was not difficult to recognise the futurist, Johnston Smyth. He appeared to be in rare form, as an admiring group of fellow-recruits in his immediate vicinity were almost doubled up with laughter, and even the grizzled Highland sergeant marching sternly in the rear had such difficulty in suppressing a loud guffaw that his face was a mottled purple.

And marching beside the humorist, with a slouch-cap low over his eyes, was the lad who was known as 'Boy-blue.'

IV.

As this tale of the parts men play unfolds itself a passing thought comes.

From the standpoint of fairness, economics, and efficiency, conscription should have been Britain's first move. But nations, like individuals, have great moments that reveal the inner character and leave beacons blazing on the hills of history.

In a war in which every nation was the loser, Britain can at least reclaim from the wreckage the memory of that glorious hour when the Angelus of patriotism rang over the Empire, and men of every creed, pursuit, and condition dropped their tasks and sank themselves in the great consecration of service.

What is the paltry glory of a bloody victory or the passing sting of a defeat?

War is base, senseless, and degrading—that was one truth that Selwyn did recognise; but what he failed to see was that in the midst of all the foulness there lay some glorious gems. When battles are forgotten and war is remembered as a hideous anachronism of the past, our children and their children will bow in reverence to that stone set high in Britain's diadem—THEY SERVED.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FEMININE TOUCH.

I.

In a small South Kensington flat a young woman was seated before a mirror, adding to her beauty with those artifices which are supposed to lure the male to helpless capitulation. Two candles gave a shadowy, mysterious charm to the reflection—a quality somewhat lacking in the original—and it was impossible for its owner to look on the picture of pensive eyelashes, radiant eyes, and warm cheeks without a murmur of admiration. She smiled once to estimate the exact amount of teeth that should be shown; she leaned forward and looked yearningly, soulfully, into the brown eyes in the glass. With a sigh of satisfaction she lit a cigarette from one of the candles, and leaning back, watched the smoke passing across the face of the reflection.

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'Hello, Elise!' said the beauty casually, as the door opened and Elise Durwent entered, dressed in the uniform of an ambulance-driver.

'You'll find the room standing on its head, but chuck those things anywhere.'

'Going out again?' asked the new-comer, stepping over several feminine garments that had been thrown on the floor.

'Just a dance up the street—in Jimmy Goodall's studio. Listen, old thing; do put on some water. I'm croaking for a cup of tea.'

Without any comment, Elise went into the adjoining room, used as a kitchen, while the voluptuary dabbed clouds of powder over her neck and shoulders. With a tired listlessness, Elise returned and sank into a chair, from the back of which an underskirt was hanging disconsolately.

'You didn't do the breakfast-dishes, Marian.'

'Didn't I? Oh, well, they're not very dirty. Had a rotten day at the garage?'

'It was rather long.'

'You're a chump for doing it. Working for your country's all very well, but wait until after the war and see if the girl who's spoiled her hands has a chance with the men. Why don't you wangle leave like I do? You can pull old Huggin's leg any day in the week—and he likes it. All you have to do is to lean on his shoulder and say you won't give up—you simply *won't*. Aren't men a scream?'

'I suppose so,' said Elise after a pause. 'Who is your cavalier to-night?'

'Horry.'

'Horace Maynard?'

'Absolutely. You know him, don't you, Elise?'

'Yes. He was visiting at our place in the country when war broke out. When is he going back to France?'

'Monday.'

'He's been dancing pretty constant attendance, hasn't he?'

'Ra-ther. He says if I don't write him every day after he buzzes back, he'll stick his head over the parapet and spoil a Hun bullet.'

'Those things come easily to Horace.'

'Oh, do they? I notice he doesn't go to you to say them.'

'No,' said Elise with a smile, 'that is so. Think of the thrills I miss.'

'Now don't get sarcastic. If Horry wants to make a fuss over me, that's his business.'

'What about your husband at the front?'

'My husband and I understand each other perfectly,' said the girl, glancing critically at the picture of two parted, carmined lips in the mirror. 'He wouldn't want me to be lonely. He knows I have my boy friends, and he's not such a fool as to be jealous. You want to wake up, Elise—things have changed. A woman who sticks at home and meets her darling hubby at night with half-a-dozen squalling kids and a pair of carpet slippers—no thanks! The war has shown that women are going to have just as much liberty as the men. We've taken it; and I tell you the men like us all the better for it.'

'You think that because every man you meet kisses you.'

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'Elise!'

'Good heavens! Don't they?'

'Well, I never! Anyhow, what if they do? Is there any harm in it?'

Elise smiled and shook her head. 'None, my dear Marian,' she said. 'There is no possible harm in it. There's no harm in anything now. The old idea that a woman's purity and modesty—— But what's the use of saying that to you? Of course you're right. Who wants to stay at home with a lot of little brats, if you can have a dozen men a week standing you dinners, and mauling you like a bargee, and'——

'Elise!'

'There's the water getting near the boil.' Elise rose with a strange little laugh and looked at a yellow silk stocking which dangled over the side of a wicker table. As if trying to solve a conundrum, she glanced from it to the shapely form of the young woman at her toilet. 'When the war's over,' she said ruminatingly, 'and our men find what kind of girls they married when they were on leave'——

'There you go again. For Heaven's sake, Elise, if you can't attract men yourself, don't nag a girl who does. You're positively sexless. The way you talk'——

'There's the water. When Horace comes I don't want to see him.'

'I guess he can live without it,' said the patriotic, leave-wangling war-worker, with an angry glance at Elise as she disappeared into the kitchen. Catching a glimpse of the frown in the mirror, she checked it, and once more leaned towards the reflection as if she would kiss the alluring lips that beckoned coaxingly in the glass.

II.

Marian had gone, radiant, and exulting in her radiance; and Elise sat by the meagre fire trying to take interest in a novel. Although she had found it easy to be confident and self-assertive when the other girl was there, the solitariness of the flat and the silence of the street undermined her courage. The dragging minutes, the meaningless pages. . . . She wished that even Marian were there in all her complacent vulgarity.

Although she had drawn many people to her, the passing of the years had left Elise practically friendless. It was easy for her to attract with her gift of intense personality; but the very quality that attracted was the one that eventually repelled. The impossibility of forgetting herself, of losing herself in the intimacies of friendship, made her own personality a thing which was stifling her life. Since she was a child she had craved for understanding and sympathy, but nature and her upbringing had made it impossible for

her to accept them when they were offered. Lacking the power of self-expression, and consequently self-forgetfulness, her own individuality oppressed her. It was like an iron mask which she could not remove, and which no one could penetrate.

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Going to London soon after the outbreak of war, she had been taken on the strength of a motor-ambulance garage; and to be near her work she had leased a small flat in Park Walk, sharing it by turn with various companion drivers. Although her desire to be of service was the prime reason of her action, it was with unconcealed joy that she had thrown off the restraints of home. Freedom of action, a respite from the petty gossip of her mother's set, had loomed up as the portals to a new life. The thought of sharing the discomforts and the privileges of patriotic work with young women who had broken the shackles of convention was a prospect that thrilled her.

To her amazement, she discovered that the feminine nature alters little with environment. It was true, her new companions had broken with all the previous conceptions of decorum, but they had used their newly found liberty to enslave themselves still further with the idea of man-conquest. Officers—callow, heroic, squint-eyed, supercilious, superb, of any and every Allied country—officers were the quarry, and they the hunters. To love or not to love? Their talks, their thoughts, their lives concerned little else. They fought for the attentions of men like starving sparrows for crumbs.

In such an environment, where she had hoped to lose the burden of persistent self, Elise found emancipation farther away than ever. The *abandon* of the others first created a reversion to prudery in her breast, and then developed a cynical indifference. The others treated her with friendly insouciance. Had she been ill, or had she met with an accident, there was probably not one who wouldn't have proved herself a 'ministering angel.' As it was, they largely ignored her, indulging the instinct of inhumanity which so often is woman's attitude towards woman.

So she sat alone, the Elise who had always been so resolute and independent, feeling very small and pathetic, yearning for far-off things—utterly lonesome, and a little inclined to cry.

The words of the book grew dim, and her thoughts drifted towards Austin Selwyn. He had been contemptible! A pacifist! His idealism was a pose to try to ennoble utter cowardice. At a time when men's blood ran high he had prated of brotherhood, and peace, and suggested that the infamous Hun had a soul! How she hated him! . . . And when she had finished with that thought her heart's yearning returned more cruelly than before.

That evening by the trout-stream when she had seen Dick hiding in the bush, Selwyn had caught her when she had almost swooned. He had gripped her arms with his hands, and, quivering with emotion, had lent his strength to her. At the memory the crimson of her cheeks deepened. They had been so close to each other. His burning eyes, his lips trembling with passion—what strange impulse in her heart had made her thrill with a heavenly exhilaration? For that instant while his hands had gripped her a glorious vista had appeared before her eyes—a world of dreams where the tyranny of

self could not enter. For that one instant her whole soul had leaped in response to his strong tenderness.

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She tried to dismiss the recollection as an admission of cowardice engendered of the night's mood. But she could not do away with the memories which lingered obstinately. Not since the days when Dick had offered his blind loyalty had any one tried to understand her as Austin Selwyn had done. She was grateful for that. She might even have valued his friendship if he had not been so despicable that awful night. To insult her with his talk of pacifism, and then, heedless of her intensity, to propose to her! She could not forgive him for that. She was glad her words had stung him!

Minutes passed. The fire would not answer to any attention, but sulkily lived out its little hour. The evening seemed interminable.

It was shortly after ten o'clock when there was a knock at the door, and Elise hurried to open it, thinking there might be a message from the garage.

'It's only me, Elise,' said a familiar voice.

'Oh!—Horace,' she laughed. 'What's the trouble? Did Marian leave anything behind?'

'No. I was just absolutely fed up; and when she told me you were here alone, I thought I'd jolly well come down and talk to you.'

'Good! Come in. You mustn't stay long, though. Please don't notice this horrible mess.'

In sheer pleasure at the breaking of the solitude, her vivacity made her eyes sparkle with life. Her sentences were crisp and rapid, and as she led the young officer to a seat by the fire it would have been difficult for Elise herself to think that a few minutes before she had been helplessly and lonesomely on the brink of tears.

'How is the dance going on up the street?' she asked, as Maynard inserted a cigarette between his lips without lighting it.

'It's a poisonous affair.'

'Poor boy!'

'I'm fed up, Elise. I'm—I'm *gorged*. When I heard you were down here, I said, "By George! I'll go and see her. I can talk to Elise. She's got some sense."'

'What a thing to say about a woman!'

'Don't chaff me, Elise. I can't stand it. I'm frightfully upset—really.'

'What has Marian been doing to you?'

'Nothing, except making a blithering ass of me. You know, I was fearfully keen on her, and I've passed up all sorts of fluff so as to do the decent; but when that brute Heckles-Jennings advised me to-night to be sure and sit out a dance with Marian because she was such hot stuff, he said . . . Of course, he's an outsider and all that, and I told him to go to hell—but you don't blame me for feeling cut up, do you, Elise?'

'Didn't you know she was that kind?'

'What kind?'

'Oh—the—the universal kisser—the complete osculator—the'——

'I say'——

'But surely you don't think you are the only one she has made a fool of? To begin with, there's her husband in France—a brother-officer, Horace.'

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Maynard wriggled uneasily, sliding down the chair in the movement until his knees were very near his chin.

'He's a rotter, Elise.'

'Do you know him?'

'N-no. But Marian says he absolutely neglects her. He's one of those cold-blooded fish—doesn't understand her a bit. After all—the extra vehemence shifted him another few inches, so that he presented an extraordinary figure, like the hump of a dromedary—'women must have sympathy. They need it. They'——

'Oh, Horace!' Elise burst into a laugh. 'Are there really some of you left? How refreshing! Why don't you put it on your card: "2nd Lt. Horace Maynard, Grenadier Guards, soul-mate by appointment"?''

'I wish you wouldn't laugh like that.'

He was a picture of such utter dejection that, checking her mirth, Elise laid her hand on his arm. 'Sorry, Horace. You know, if it hadn't been for this war we might never have known how *nice* our men are. I only wonder how it is that the women have the heart to make such fools of you.'

The unhappy warrior pulled himself up to a fairly upright posture and tapped his cigarette against the palm of his hand. 'I'm glad,' he said with a slight blush, 'that you don't quite put me down as a rotter. I don't know what's come over us all. Before the war, when you met a chap's wife—well, hang it all!—she was his wife, and that was all there was about it. But nowadays'——

'I know, Horace, it's a miserable business altogether—partly war hysteria, and partly the fact that women can't stand independence, I suppose. Marian's a splendid type of the female war-shirker. You know she's married; yet, because she lets you maul her'——

'I say, Elise!'

'——and she murmurs pathetically that her husband in France neglects her—at least, that's what she tells you. When she was dressing to-night Marian said that she and her husband absolutely trusted each other.'

'By Jove! You don't mean that?'

'She also said that all men, including you, were a scream. Probably she considers you a perfect shriek.'

Trembling with indignation, Maynard suddenly collapsed like a punctured balloon and relapsed dejectedly into his recumbent attitude. 'What an ass I have been!' he lamented sorrowfully. 'What a sublime ass! And Marian—the little devil!'

'Rubbish!'

'Eh? I suppose you think I am an idiot for—— Well, perhaps you're right.'

For a couple of minutes nothing was said, and the melancholy lover, with his chin resting on his chest, ruminated over his unhappy affair.

'Hang it all!' he said at last, hesitatingly, 'when a chap gets leave from the front he's—he's sort of woman-hungry. You don't know what it feels like, after getting away from all that mud and corruption, to hear a girl's voice—one of our own. It goes to the head like bubbly. It's a—a dream come true. There's just the two things in your life—eight or nine months in the trenches; then a fortnight with the company of women again. It's awfully soppy to talk like this'——

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'No, it isn't, Horace. It's the biggest compliment ever paid our women. I only wish we could try to be what you boys picture us. That's what makes me feel like drowning Marian every few days. Horace, I'm proud of you.'

She patted his hand which was grasping the arm of the chair, and he blushed a hearty red.

'Elise!' He sat bolt-upright. 'By gad! I never knew it until this minute. *You* are the woman I ought to marry. You are far too good and clever and all that; but, by Jove! I could do something in the world if I had you to work for. Don't stop me, Elise. I am serious. I should have known all along'——

'Horace, Horace!' Hardly knowing whether to laugh or to cry, Elise put her hand over his mouth and checked the amorous torrent. 'You're a perfect dear,' she said, 'and I'm ever so grateful'——

'But'——

'But you mustn't be silly. This is only the reaction from Marian.'

'It's nothing of the sort,' he blurted, putting aside her hand. 'I—I really do—I love you. You're different from any other girl I ever met.'

'My dear, you mustn't say such things. You know you don't love me as you will the right girl when you meet her.'

He got out of the chair by getting over its arm. 'I beg your pardon, Elise,' he said, not without a certain shy dignity. 'I meant every word I said—but I suppose there's some one else.'

'Only a dream-man, Horace.'

'What about that American?'

'What—American?' Her agitation was something she could hardly have explained.

'That author-fellow at Roselawn. He was frightfully keen on you. I remember half-a-dozen times when he would be talking to us, and if you came in he'd go as mum as an oyster, and just follow you with his eyes. Is *he* the chap, Elise?'

'Good gracious!'—she forced a laugh— 'why, I don't even know where he is.'

'Don't you? He's in London; I can tell you that much. Last month in France I ran across that Doosenberry-Jewdrop fellow—you know—the futurist artist.'

'Do you mean Johnston Smyth?'

'That's the chap.'

'I didn't know he was in France.'

'Rather. I thought your brother would have told you.'

'*My brother?*' There was not a vestige of colour in her cheeks. 'What do you mean?'

Maynard scratched the back of his head. 'Smyth told me,' he said, wondering at the cause of her agitation, 'that Dick and he enlisted together some months ago. By Jove! I remember now. He told me that this American fellow put them up at his rooms in St. James's Square one night. Smyth didn't know who Dick was until they got to France. He was travelling under the name of Sherlock, or Shylock, or Sherwood'——

'I—I thought Dick was in China.' She wrung her hands nervously. 'You didn't see him?'

'No. That's all I know about him, except that he was transferred to some other battalion than Dinglederry Smyth's.'

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She went over to a table and took a piece of notepaper from a drawer. 'Mr. Selwyn used to belong to the R.A.C.,' she said quickly. 'Would you do me a favour, Horace dear?'

He murmured his desire to be of service in any capacity. Hesitating a moment, she wrote hurriedly:

'4th March 1915, 21A PARK WALK.

'DEAR MR. SELWYN,—Will you please come and see me as soon as you can? I am not on night-duty this week.—Yours sincerely, ELISE DURWENT.'

She sealed the envelope and handed it to Maynard. 'Please find out from the R.A.C. where he is, and ask them to send this note to him. I am ever so grateful, Horace.'

'I suppose,' he said, looking at the envelope, 'that this means the—the finish of my chances?'

She answered the question by wishing him good luck in France, but there was a strange tremulousness in the softly spoken words.

He put out his hand shyly. 'Good-night, old girl,' he said, smiling with a sort of rueful boyishness.

She took his proffered hand, and then, obeying an impulse, stooped and pressed her burning cheek against it. 'Good-night, Horace,' she said softly. 'I hope you'll come back safe to be a fine husband for some nice girl.'

When he had gone, and his footsteps died away, she returned to the table. Burying her face in her hands, she fought back the tears which surged to the surface. Her love for Dick, her own loneliness, a mad joy in the thought of seeing Selwyn again, a motherly pity for Maynard, a fury towards Marian, an incomprehensible yearning—she felt that her heart was bursting, but could not have said herself whether it was with grief or with joy.

III.

From the time that Austin Selwyn received the note there was nothing else in his mind—as in Elise's—but the coming meeting. As playwrights planning a scene, each went through the encounter in prospect a dozen times, reading into it the play of emotions which was almost certain to dominate the affair. Although completely ignorant of her motive in writing to him, Selwyn invented a hundred different reasons—only to discard them all. Nor was Elise more able to satisfy herself as to the outcome of the meeting. It was not his actions that were difficult to forecast, but her own. Would her dislike of him

be intensified? Would she experience again the momentary rapture of that summer afternoon?

It was fortunate that another lover had appeared for Marian, so that the desertion of Maynard did not leave her moping untidily about the place. She was one of those women who are so singularly lacking in self-sufficiency that, except when in the company of men, they are as flat as champagne from which the sparkle has departed.

It so happened, therefore, that Elise was again alone the following evening, dreading Selwyn's arrival, yet impatient of delay.

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A few minutes after eight she heard him knock, and going to the street door, opened it for him. The night was a vapourish, miserable one, blurring his figure into indistinctness, and when he spoke his voice was hoarse, as though the damp tendrils of the mist had penetrated to his throat.

Answering something to his greeting, she led him through the hall into the sitting-room. He paused as he entered. Without looking back, she crossed to the fireplace, and kneeling down, stirred the fire.

'May I help?'

'No, thanks. I prefer to do it.'

Her answer had followed so swiftly on his question that he stopped in the act of stepping forward. She looked over her shoulder with a swift, searching glance.

His face was a tired gray, and the silk scarf thrown about his neck looked oddly vivid against the black evening-clothes and overcoat. But if his face suggested weariness, his eyes were alive with dynamic force. The intensity of the man's personality strangely moved Elise. She felt the presence of a mind and a body vibrating with tremendous purpose—a man who drew vitality from others, yet charged them in return with his own greater store.

To her he seemed to have divorced himself from type—he had lost even the usual characteristics of race. With the thought, she wondered how far his solitary life had effected the transition, if his idealism had brought him loneliness.

'Won't you sit down?' she said hesitatingly.

He acquiesced, and took a seat in the chair from which Maynard had run the emotional gamut the previous evening.

'You look pale,' she said, drawing a chair near the fire. 'I hope you have not been unwell.'

'No—no; it is merely that I have been so little out of doors. I could not gather from your note what kind of work you were engaged in. I see you are an ambulance-driver. I congratulate you.'

His voice conveyed nothing but polite interest in an obvious situation. With over-sensitive apprehension she listened for any suggestion of sarcasm that lay behind his words, but she could detect nothing beyond mere impersonal courtesy—that, and a far-off weariness, as of one who has passed the borders of fatigue.

'I wrote to your mother,' he said, 'when I heard of your elder brother's death. It must have been a great grief to you all.'

She did not answer him. His manner was so cold that he might have been deliberately disposing of a number of prepared comments rendered imperative by the laws of polite intercourse.

'Why didn't you let us know you had seen Dick?' she said abruptly.

'Then—you have heard?' He raised his eyebrows in surprise.

'Only last night, by the merest accident. He might have been killed in France, and we should never have known about it.' Her words were resentful and swift. 'Will you please tell me about him?'

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Omitting the incident of Archibald's tavern, Selwyn told of the chance meeting with Dick, the encounter with Johnston Smyth, the night at the rooms in St. James's Square, and the subsequent glimpse of them marching through Whitehall.

'Your brother asked me to say nothing,' he said calmly. 'That is one of the reasons why I did not let you know.'

'Had Dick changed at all?' she asked, trying to make her words as listless as his. 'I wish that you would tell me something that he said. You must know more about him than just'——

'I don't think he had changed,' said Selwyn; and for the first time his voice was tinged with compassion. 'He spoke of you with a kind of worship. I suppose you know how he idolises you.'

His dark eyes looked at her through partially closed eyelashes, but only the manner in which her fingers compressed the fold of her skirt betrayed the turmoil of her feelings.

'Is that all you can tell me?'

'That is all.' He made no attempt to elaborate the conversation or to introduce any new theme. The scene which had promised to be so dramatic was actually dragging with uncomfortable silences. She waited long enough for him to speak, but when he remained silent—it was a sardonic silence to her—she rose from the chair with the manner of one who has determined to bring an interview to a close.

'Thank you for coming so promptly,' she said. 'I am most grateful for your kindness to Dick—and I know enough of the law to realise that you were taking a risk in hiding him.'

'It was nothing at all,' he said. He looked at her for an indication that her questions were at an end.

'I hope you will be able to get a taxi,' she ventured helplessly.

For the first time he smiled, and she reddened with mortification. He had been so cool and unyielding, so bloodless, that he had forced her to a disadvantage. She knew he could not be ignorant of the strain of the affair on her, yet he had done nothing to ease it. If she could have projected her mind into his, she would have seen that his conduct was as inexplicable to himself as to her. He knew he was hurting her. Perhaps it was because her warm lips and crimson cheeks were creating a torment in his soul that he could not curb the impulse to wound her. It may have been the subconscious knowledge that where one can hurt one can conquer that dominated his actions. While she resented the invulnerability with which he guarded his own feelings, it is probable that any different attitude on his part would have brought forth a more active unkindness on hers. When men and women love, strange paradoxes are found.



They went to the door together, and in the brighter light of the hall Elise saw for the first time that he was considerably thinner, and that his brow was like marble. She felt a little stab of pity for him, forgetting his own lack of sympathy towards herself; she caught a faint realisation of what he must have endured for it to have marked him so indelibly.

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'Don't you think,' she said, 'that you ought to go to the seaside for a while? You are not looking at all well.'

His lips grew firmer, but there was a curious look in his eyes as he turned towards her. 'I have work to do here,' he said crisply.

'I know—but surely'——

'In London,' he said—and there was a suggestion of the fanatic's ecstasy in his voice——'it is impossible to forget life. I don't want my mind soothed or lulled. You can always hear the challenge of the human destiny in London. It cries out to you everywhere. It'—— He had held his head erect, and had spoken louder than was his custom; but, checking himself, he made a queer, dramatic gesture with his hands.

The fire of his spirit swept over her. Once more she stood close to him, as she had done so many times in her thoughts. She did not know whether she loved or detested him. She was fascinated—trembling—longing for him to force her to surrender in his arms—knowing that she would hate him if he did. She gave a little cry as Selwyn, almost as if he read her conflicting thoughts, took her arms with his hands once more.

'If we had both been English,' he said, and his voice was so parched that it seemed to have been scorched by his spirit, 'or if we had met in other times than these, things might have been different. I know what you think of me for the work I am doing, but it would be as impossible for me to give it up as for you to think as I do. We come of two different worlds, you and I. . . . I am sorry we have met to-night. For me, at least, it has reopened old wounds. And it is all so useless.'

She made no reply; but as his eyes were lowered to her face, and he saw once more the trembling lips, her unsoiled womanliness, her whole vivid, lonely, gripping charm, a look of suffering crossed his face. He realised the hopelessness of it all, but the admission was like tearing out a thread which had been woven into the whole scheme of his being.

'We both have our work to do,' he said wearily, letting his arms drop to his side.

'Good-night.'

She answered, but did not give him her hand. With a repetition of the farewell he left her, and she walked musingly into the room again. She felt a flush of anger at his daring to say their friendship was impossible, when she had not even suggested that it could ever be resumed. His vanity knew no bounds. She was furious at having let him hold her as he did—even more furious with the knowledge that she would not have resisted if he had kissed her.

CHAPTER XVII.

MOONLIGHT.

I.

Two summers came and went, and the little park in St. James's Square rested once more beneath its covering of autumn leaves.

Selwyn, who was still occupying the rooms of the absent New Yorker, was looking over his morning mail. The thinning of his hair at the temples was more pronounced, and here and there was the warning of premature gray. He had lost flesh, but his face had steadied into a set grimness, and his mouth had the firmness of one who had fought a long uphill fight.

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Looking through a heavy mail, he extracted a letter from his New York agent:

'Oct. 2nd, 1916.

'DEAR MR. SELWYN,—You will be interested to know that the extraordinary sensation caused by your writings in America has resulted in the sale of them to Mr. J. V. Schneider for foreign rights. They have been translated, and will shortly appear in the press of Spain, Norway, Holland, and the various states of South America.

'It would be impossible for me to forward more than a small percentage of the comments of our press on your work, but in my whole literary experience I don't remember any writer who has caused such a storm of comment on every appearance as you. As you can see by the selection I have made, the papers are by no means entirely favourable. I feel that you should know that you are openly accused of pro-Germanism, of being a conscientious objector, &c., &c.—all of which, of course, means excellent advertisement.

'I have had many inquiries as to whether you would care to conduct a lecture-tour. There is a Mr. C. B. Benjamin, who is financially interested in Mr. Schneider's affairs, and who is willing to pay you almost anything within reason, if you care to state your terms.

'Of course, the most discussed article of all is "The Island of Darkness," in which you accuse Britain of contributing so largely towards bringing about the present war. The German-American organisations and the strong Irish section here were especially jubilant, and every one concedes that it has awakened a great deal of resentment against Britain that had been forgotten since the beginning of the war. Even your detractors admit that "The Island of Darkness" will live as a literary classic.

'Your first ten articles have been made into book form under the title *America's War*, and are selling most satisfactorily. The first edition has gone into 40,000 copies. The attached clipping from the *New York Express* is fairly typical of the reception given the book by the pro-Entente press.

'Your September statement will go forward to-morrow with cheque covering foreign rights, royalties, &c.—I am, Mr. Selwyn, yours very truly,

S. T. LYONS.'

With hardly more than a merely casual interest, Selwyn glanced at the clipping attached to the letter. It was from the editorial page of the *Express*.

'THE MENACE OF SELWYN.

'In 1912 Austin Selwyn was known as a younger member of New York's writing fraternity. He had done one or two good things and several mediocre ones, but promised to reach the doubtful altitude of best-sellership without difficulty. To-day Selwyn is the mouthpiece of neutrality. He has preached it in a language that will not permit of indifference. He has succeeded in surrounding his doubtful idealism with a vigour that commands attention, even if not respect. Right in the heart of London he is turning out insidious propaganda which is being seized upon by every neutral American who has his own reasons for wanting us to keep out of war. It would be absurd to say that one man's writing could in itself sway a great nation, but nevertheless it is a vehicle which is being used to the limit by every pro-German agency in this free land.

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'Truly we are a strange people. We have a President who deliberately cuts his political throat with a phrase, "too proud to fight;" but because we think Wilson is a greater man than he himself knows, we sew up the cut and send him back for another term. In the same way, although every red-blooded American has in his heart been at war with Germany since the *Lusitania*, we permit this man Selwyn to go on cocaining the conscience of our people until our flag, which we have loved to honour, is beginning to be a thing of shame. He should be brought back from England and interned here with a few "neutral" German-Americans. He certainly can write, and perhaps from confinement he might give us a second *De Profundis*. His book, *America's War*, which is now on the market, is a series of arguments showing that America is at war with the causes of the war. It is a nice conceit. Our advice is to add the book to your library—but don't read it for ten years. In that time it will be interesting to see the work of a brilliant mind prostituted (and in this we are placing the most charitable construction on Mr. Selwyn's motives) by intellectual perversion.'

Without the expression of his face undergoing any change, Selwyn carefully placed the letter on his file, and took from the envelope a number of American press clippings. Choosing them at random, he contented himself with reading the headings:

'Author of "The Island of Darkness" again hits out.'

"'Britain has thrived on European medievalism,'" says Austin Selwyn.'

'More hot air from the super-Selwyn.'

'Selwyn is the spokesman for enlightened America.'

'Masterful thinker, masterful writer, is the author of "The Island of Darkness."'

'What does Selwyn receive from Germany?'

'The arch-hypocrite of American letters.'

With a shrug of his shoulders he threw them to one side. 'A pack of hounds,' he muttered, 'howling at the moon!'

He leaned back in his chair and pondered over the written word that could leap such spaces and carry his message into countries which he had never seen. It was with a deeper emotion than just the author's pleasure at recognition that he visualised his ancestor leaving Holland for the New World, and the strange trend of events which was resulting in the emigrant's descendant sending back to the Netherlands his call to higher and world citizenship.

Still ruminating over the power that had become his, he noticed a letter, on the envelope of which was written 'On Active Service,' and breaking the seal, found that it was from

Douglas Watson, written at a British hospital in France. As Selwyn read it the impassiveness of his face gave way to a look of trouble. For the first time in many months there was the quick play of expression about his lips and his eyes that had always differentiated him from those about him.

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At the conclusion of the letter he put it down, and crossing to the French windows, leaned against them, while his fingers drummed nervously on the glass. With a gesture of impatience, as though he resented its having been written at all, he picked up the letter once more, and turning the pages, quickly reached the part which had affected him so:

'They tell me I'm going to lose my arm, and that I'm out of it; but they're wrong. I'm going back to America just as soon as they will let me, and I'm going to tell them at home what this war is about. And, what's more, I'm going to tell them what war is. It isn't great armies moving wonderfully forward "as if on parade," as some of these newspaper fellows tell you. It's a putrid, rotten business. After Loos dead men and horses rotted for days in the sun. War's not a thing of glory; it's rats and vermin and filth and murder. Three weeks ago I killed a German. He hadn't a chance to get his gun up before I stuck him with my bayonet like a pig. As he fell his helmet rolled off; he was about eighteen, with sort of golden hair, and light, light blue eyes. I've been through some hell, Austin, but when I saw his face I cried like a kid. To you that's another argument for our remaining neutral. To me that poor little Fritzie is the very reason America should have been in it from the first. Can't you see that this Prussian outfit is not only murdering Frenchmen and Russians and Britishers, but is murdering her own men as well? If America had been in the war it would have been over now, and every day she holds back means so many more of the best men in the world dead.

'For the love of Mike, Austin, clear your brains. I have seen your stuff in American papers sent over to me, and it's vile rot. Tomorrow they're going to take my left arm from me, but'——

Selwyn crumpled the letter in his hand and hurled it into the fireplace. Plunging his hands into his pockets, he paced the room as he had done that night when Watson had called to tell him he was going to enlist. He was seized with an incoherent fury at it all—the inhumanity of it—the degradation of the whole thing. But through the formless cloud of his thoughts there gleamed the one incessant phrase 'about eighteen, with sort of golden hair, and light, light blue eyes.' Why should that groove his consciousness so deeply? He had heard, unmoved, of the death of Malcolm Durwent. A month ago he had read how Captain Fensome, of Lady Durwent's house-party, had been killed trying to rescue his servant in No Man's Land. The sight of Dick Durwent and Johnston Smyth marching away had been only a spur to more intensive writing. Then why should that haltingly worded sentence lie like ice against his heart?

A sharp pain shot through his head.

Stopping his walk, he leaned once more against the windows, and rested his hot face on the grateful coolness of the glass.

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What, he questioned, had he accomplished, after all? He had gained the ears of millions, but the war was no nearer a close. America was neutral—that was true. *But why was America neutral?* Had he falsely idealised his own country? Was her aloofness from the world-war the result of a passionate, overwhelming realisation of her God-deputed destiny, as he had imagined?

Hitherto he had paid no attention to the writings in the English press chronicling the passing of the world's gold reserve from London to New York. He had ignored the evidence of nation-wide prosperity from the Atlantic coast to San Francisco. All such things he had dismissed as unavoidable, unsought material results of America's spiritual neutrality.

Yet, while the wheels of prosperity were turning at such a pitch, there was a boy lying dead—about eighteen.

He beat his fist into the palm of his hand. Who was this Schneider who had purchased the foreign rights of his articles? What sort of a man was this Benjamin who wanted him to lecture? Were they, as he had supposed, men of vision who wished to co-operate in achieving the great unison of Right? . . . Or were they . . . ?

The thought was hideous. Was it possible that those writings, born of his mental torture, robbing him of every friend he valued—was it thinkable that they had been used for gross purposes?

His fingers again played rapidly against the windows as he wrestled with the sudden ugly suspicion. At last, utterly exhausted, he sank into a chair.

'There is only one thing I can do,' he said decisively; 'return to America at once. If, as I have thought, her neutrality is in tune with the highest; if my fellow-countrymen are imbued with such a spirit of infinite mercifulness that from them will flow the healing streams to cure the wounds of bleeding Europe, then I have carried a lamp whose light reflects the face of God. . . . But if . . .'

II.

That night a glorious moonlight silvered the roof-tops of old London, touching its jumbled architecture with fantastic beauty.

Vagrant towers and angular church spires, uninspired statuary, and weary, smoke-darkened trees shed their garments of commonplaceness and shimmered like the mosques and turrets of an enchanted city.

It was one of those nights that are sent to remind us that Beauty still lives; a night to challenge our mad whirl of bargaining and barter, to urge us to raise our eyes from the

grubbing crawling of avarice; a night to awaken old memories, and to stir the pent-up streams of poetry lying asleep in every breast.

It was a moonlight that descended on Old England's troubled heart as a benediction. Her rivers were glimmering paths winding about the country-side; her villages and her heavy-scented country lanes shared its caress with open meadows and murky cities. The sea, binding the little islands in its turbulent immensity, drew the night's beauty to its bosom, and the spray of foam rising from the surf was a shower of star-dust leaping towards the moon.

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As a weary traveller drinks thirstily at a pool, Selwyn wandered about the streets trembling with emotion in the breathless ecstasy of the night. All day the conjured picture of the German boy, guilty of no crime save blind devotion to his Fatherland, had haunted him like the eyes of a murdered man. It had robbed him of the power of constructive thought, and stopped his writing with the decisiveness of a sword descending on his wrist; it had made the food on his table tasteless, and given him a dread of the solitude of his rooms.

With nerves that contracted at every untoward sound, he had gone out at dark, and gradually the peacefulness of the night had soothed and calmed him as the dew of dusk cools the earth after the heat of a summer's day. The familiar strains of Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata' came to his mind, and as he walked he idly traced the different movements of the music in the moods of the evening's witchery.

His steps, like his thoughts, pursued a tangled course, and led him into the prosaic brick-and-mortar monotony of Bayswater, but the moon was lavish in her generosity, and strewn his path with glinting strands of light. He paused in a quiet square to get his bearings. There was the heavy smell of fallen leaves from the gardens on the other side of the railing.

His mind was still playing the slow minor theme of the sonata's opening movement.

Suddenly the air was shattered with the noise of warning guns. As if released by a single switch, a dozen searchlights sprang into the sky, crossing and blending in a swerving glare. There was the piercing warning of bugles and the heavy booming of maroons.

Dazed by the swiftness of it all, Selwyn leaned against the low iron fence. A Boy Scout whirled past on a bicycle, his bugle hoarse and discordant; an old woman went whimpering by, hatless, with a protesting child in her arms; an ambulance, clanging its gong, rounded the corner with reckless speed; a mightier searchlight than any of the rest swept the sky in great circles.

It seemed only a matter of seconds, though in reality much longer, when the American heard a faint crunching sound in the distance, followed by a deep, sullen thud. In rapid succession came three more, and the defence guns of London burst into action, changing the night into Bedlam.

Still motionless, he listened, awe-struck, to the din of the weird battle with an unseen foe, when the cough of exploding shells in the air grew appreciably louder. Raising a whirlwind of dust, a motor-car swerved dangerously into the square, and with a roar sped up the road, carrying to their aerodrome three British airmen. As if driven by a gale, the battle of the clouds drew nearer and nearer, the whine and barking of the shells like a pack of dogs trying to repel some monster of the jungle.

There was a deafening crash.

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Selwyn was thrown against the fence, and almost buried beneath a shower of bricks and earth. With the roar of a rushing waterfall in his ears, and blood streaming from a wound in his forehead, he sank to his knees and for a moment lost consciousness; but mastering his weakness, he staggered to his feet and looked wildly about. On the other side of the street, where there had been a house, there was a smoking chaos. A little crowd had appeared seemingly from the bowels of the earth, and a woman was shrieking horribly.

Selwyn wiped his forehead with his hand and gazed stupidly at the blood which covered it. The roar of the guns was louder than it had yet been, and from a few streets away came the crunch of another bomb, shaking the earth with the explosion which followed. Selwyn leaned impotently against a post, and a quivering uncanny laugh broke from his lips. It was all so grotesque, so absurd. *Human beings didn't do such things*. It was a joke—a mad jest. He held his sides and laughed with uncontrollable mirth.

Then his whole form became rigid in a moment. A man had shouted something. There had been a wail from the crowd. Was it true? Some one buried alive—a little girl?

With a blasphemous curse Selwyn staggered across the road, and roughly elbowing his way through the crowd, found a solitary policeman, hindered by willing undirected hands, digging in the wreckage as best he could, while a couple of women sobbed hysterically and wrung their hands.

Those who watched hardly knew what had happened, but they saw a hatless, bleeding figure appear, and, with the incision of snapping hawsers, question the policeman and the weeping women. They heard his quick commands to the men, and saw him jump into the centre of the debris. With the instantaneous recognition of leadership his helpers threw themselves to the work with a frenzy of determination. Lifting, digging, pulling with torn hands and arms that ached with strain, they struggled furiously towards the spot where it was known the girl was buried. They were like starving wolves tearing at the carcass of an animal. They yelled encouragement and fought through the chaos—and still the stranger whipped them into madness with his cries.

There in the smoke and the choking dust Austin Selwyn shook in the grip of the greatest emotion he had ever known. A girl was buried—a fraction of a minute might mean her life. With hot breath and pulses on fire, he led his unknown men through the choking ruins to where one small, insignificant life was imprisoned.

An ambulance sounded its gong, and drew up by the crowd; the storm of the guns continued to rage, but no one thought of anything but the fight of those men for one little unknown life.

At last. They had uncovered a great iron beam which had struck on a stone foundation and left a zone of safety beneath. Eager hands gripped it, dragging it aside, and there

was hardly a sound as the stranger lowered himself into the chasm. A minute later he reappeared, and a shout broke from the on-lookers. He was carrying a little form in his arms.

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But when they saw his face a hush fell on every one. She was dead.

Wild-eyed, with the ghastliness of his pallor showing through the coating of grime and blood, Austin Selwyn stood in the ruins of the house, and the brown tresses of the child fell over his arm.

Kind hands were stretched out to him, but he shook them off angrily. He was talking to the thing in his arms—muttering, crooning something.

Slowly he raised his face to the skies. In the glare of the searchlights a gleaming, silvery, oblong-shaped form was turning and twisting like an animal at bay. They heard him catch his breath; then their blood was frozen by a choking, heart-rending cry of agony and rage.

It was the cry of the crystal-gazer who has had his crystal dashed from his eyes, to find himself in the presence of murder.

The crowd remained mute, helpless and frightened at the spectacle, when they saw a young woman approach him, a woman dressed in the khaki uniform of an ambulance-driver.

‘Austin,’ they heard her say, ‘please give me the little girl.’

With a stupid smile he handed the child to her, and she laid it on a stretcher. When it had been taken away, she took Selwyn’s hand in hers and led him, unresisting, to the ambulance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ELISE.

I.

Early next morning, in a large military ward of a London hospital, Austin Selwyn woke from a sleep that had been charged with black dreams, and tried to recall the events leading to his present whereabouts.

By slow, tortuous process he reconstructed the previous evening as far as the moment when he had heard the warning guns. After that the incidents grew dim, and faded into incoherency. He seemed to remember rushing somewhere in a motor-vehicle. He distinctly recalled seeing a policeman in Trafalgar Square. Yes, that was very clear—quite the most vivid impression of the whole night, indeed. He would hang on to that policeman.

With the care of an Arctic explorer establishing his base before going farther into *terra incognita*, he attached the threads of his wandering mind to that limb of the law, and groped in all the directions of his memory's compass. But it was of no avail. Tired out with the futile efforts he had made, his bandaged head sank back in the pillows, and the vivid policeman in Trafalgar Square was reluctantly surrendered as a negligible means of solution.

When he next awoke, it was to the sound of many voices. There were two that were very close—one on either side of him, in fact. Affecting sleep, Selwyn listened carefully.

'Wot's that you say, Jock?' said a Cockney voice to his left.

'I was obsairvin',' said the other, 'that Number Twenty-sax is occupied this mornin'.'

'Ow yus, so it is. I was 'oping as 'ow me pal the Duke of Mudturtle would buy the plice next to mine. But he don't look a bad cove, wot you can see under 'is farncy 'ead-dress.'

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'I dinna think he can be o' the airmy. His skin's as pale as a lassie in love.'

'In the army, Jock? Don't hinsult 'im. 'E's one of the 'eroes of the 'ome front—hindispensibles, they calls 'em.'

'Weel, weel, noo,' expostulated the Scot, 'dinna tak' ower muckle for granted. We canna a' gang tae the war, or wha wud bide at hame an' mak the whusky?'

'By Gar!' said a third patient opposite, sitting up suddenly and speaking in the disjointed but strangely musical dialect of the French-Canadian, 'she is a wise feller, dis Scoachie.'

'Bonn swoir, Frenchy,' said the Cockney graciously. "Ow alley you mantenongs?'

'Verra good, Tommee. How is de godam bow bells?'

'Well, the last toime I sees me old side-kick the Lord Mayor, 'e says as 'ow they was took by a Canadian for a soovenir.'

'Na,' said the Scotsman reprovingly; 'I'm thinkin' yon's exaggerated.'

'By Gar!' said the French-Canadian. 'See, the orderly come now with water for shav'. Back in de bush or on de long portage I shav' once, twice, perhaps tree time a month. Always before I meet my leetle girl I shav'. But when I say good-bye and go to war—by gollies! de army make me for do it every day. My officier, he say, "What for you no shav' dis morning?" "Sair," I say, "I no kees de Boche—I keel him." He say noding to dat excep', "Look at you. I shav' every day. Do you preten' I doan' fight?" "Well," I say, "if de cap feets you, smoke it." And for no reason he give me tree time extra for carry de godam ration.'

At this stage the arrival of wash-basins interrupted further anecdote and philosophy, and the entire ward became animated with soldiers performing their ablutions, some sitting up in bed, others on the edge of their beds, and a few so weak that they could just turn painfully on their side and wait for other hands to help.

A burst of hearty greetings told Selwyn that some one must have entered the ward, and a few minutes later he felt the presence of a nurse beside him.

'Good-morning,' she said, gently touching him on the shoulder. 'How is your head feeling?'

He opened his eyes and looked into the face bending over his. 'I think it's all right,' he said weakly. 'But, nurse, won't you tell me how I got here?'

She dipped a cloth into a basin and bathed his hands and face.



'You were hit by a piece of shrapnel in last night's air-raid. I wasn't on duty when you came in, but the night-sister said you were quite delirious—though you seem ever so much better this morning, don't you? I'll take your temperature, and after you've had some breakfast I'll put a new dressing on your wound.'

She was just going to insert the thermometer between his lips, when he stopped her with his hand. 'Nurse,' he said, 'why was I brought here—among soldiers?'

'Because every hospital is filled to overflowing. The casualties are so heavy just now.' Her voice was still kind, but there was a look of resentment in her eyes at his question.

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'Please don't misunderstand me,' said Selwyn wearily. 'It is only the feeling that I have no right here. This cot should be for a soldier, and I'm a civilian. I'm an American, and—and if you only knew'——

'Just a minute, now, until we get this temperature, and then you can tell me all about it.'

With his lips silenced, but his doubts by no means so, he watched her move down the ward in commencement of the countless duties of her day. She was a woman of thirty-three or thirty-four years, still young, and possessed of a womanliness that softened her whole appearance with a tranquil restfulness. But beneath her eyes and in the texture of the skin faint wrinkles were showing, thinly pencilled protests against overwork, that no treatment could ever eradicate. On the red collar of her uniform was a badge which told that she had gone to France with the first little army of Regulars in 1914.

Noting her calloused hands and the too rapid approach of life's midsummer, Selwyn watched her, and wondered what recompense could be offered for those things. In ordinary life, given the privileges and the opportunities which she deserved, she would have been another of those glorious English women whose beauty is nearest the rose. She would have been a wife to grace any home, and as a mother her charm would have been twofold. But for more than two years incessant toil and endless suffering had been the companions of her days, and the not over-strong body was giving to the ordeal.

But as his heavy thoughts drifted slowly through this channel, he saw grinning patients who were well enough get out of bed to help her. As if she carried some magic gem of happiness, her soft voice and deft touch brought smiles to eyes that had been scorched in the flames of hell. Men looked up, and seeing her, believed once more in life; and hope crept into their hearts. Men in the great shadowy valley murmured like a child in its sleep when a ray of morning sunshine, stealing through the curtains, plays upon its face.

And of the many things which Selwyn learned that day, one was that those ministering angels, those women of limitless spirit and sympathy, have memories of mute, unspoken gratitude, beside which the proudest triumphs of the greatest beauties are but the tawdry, tinsel glory of a pantomime queen.

II.

After the nurse had taken the thermometer from Selwyn and marked his temperature on a chart which she placed beside him, breakfast was brought in, and he was propped up with pillows.

'Guid-mornin',' said the Highlander. 'I hope ye're nane the waur o' your expeerience.'

'Not 'im,' broke in the Cockney, eating his porridge with great relish. 'It done 'im good.'

'I am very well,' said Selwyn haltingly. 'I hope my arrival did not disturb any of you last night.'

At the sound of his carefully nuanced Bostonian accent there was a violent dumb-play of smoothing the hair and arranging the coats of pyjamas, while one Tommy placed a penny in his eye in lieu of a monocle.

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'I was 'oping,' said the Cockney, with a solemn wink to the gathering, 'as 'ow Number 26 would be took by a toff, and, blime, if it ain't! It were gettin' blinkin' lonesome for me with only Jock 'ere and Frenchy opposite, who ain't bad blokes in their wy, but orful crude for my likin'.'

'Where did it hit ye?' asked the Scot encouragingly.

'On the head,' said Selwyn, pointing to his bandage.

'Mon, mon, that's apt to be dangerous.'

'Nah then!' cried the Cockney, reaching for his temperature-chart, 'we'll open the mornink proper with the 'Ymn of 'Ate. In cise you don't know the piece, m'lud, you can read it off your temperacher-ticket. Steady now—everybody got a full breath? Gow!'

With great zest all the patients who were able to sit up broke into a discordant jumble of scales as they followed the course of their temperatures up and down the chart. Gradually, one by one, they fell out and resumed their breakfast, until the Scotsman was the only one singing.

'Ye ken,' he said, pausing temporarily and looking at Selwyn, 'yon should be rendered wi' proper deegnity.' With which explanatory comment he finished the last six notes, and solemnly replaced the chart on the ledge behind him, as if it were a copy of Handel's *Messiah*.

The last note had hardly died away when a violent controversy broke out between a pair of Australian soldiers on one side and almost the entire ward on the other. The thing had started by one of the Anzacs venturing the modest opinion that if Britain had had a million Australian troops, they, the present gathering, would be 'hoch, hoching' in Berlin (apparently a delightful prospect) instead of being cooped up in a London hospital.

The little Cockney was just going to utter a crushing sarcasm, the French-Canadian had taken in a perfectly stupendous breath, the Highlander was calmly tasting the flavour of his own reply, when the impending torrent was broken by the entrance of the chaplain, who wished every one a somewhat sanctimonious 'Good-day.'

'I shall read,' he said, putting on a pair of glasses, 'the latest *communique* from the front. We have done very well. The news is quite good—quite good. "*This morning, on a front of three miles, after an intense artillery preparation, the Australians*"——

"OORAY!" roared the Cockney.

The glasses popped off the chaplain's startled nose, and he just managed by a brilliant bit of juggling to rescue them before they reached the floor.



'I—I,' he ventured, smiling blandly, 'am delighted at your enthusiasm, but you did not let me finish. "*This morning*"—um, um, ah—"three miles"—um, um, yes—"three miles, after an intense artillery preparation, the Australians"—

'OORAY!' It was a deafening roar from the whole crowd.

"*The Australians*"—

'OORAY!'

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""The""——

'Oo'——

Really, men, you must control yourselves. We are all glad and sustained by any victory, however slight, but you must not give way to unmeaning boisterousness. "*This morning, on a front of three miles, after an intense artillery preparation, the Australians*"——

There was a medley of submerged, prolonged snores. The chaplain looked up indignantly. With the exception of Selwyn and the two Australians, every one had followed the lead of the Cockney and disappeared underneath the bed-clothes.

'This,' said the good man—'this frivolity at such a harrowing moment in our country's destiny is neither seemly nor respectful. Cheerfulness is admirable, until it descends to horseplay.'

With which parting salvo the worthy chaplain, who had never been to France, and who was doing the best he could according to his clerical upbringing, left his unruly flock, taking the *communique* with him.

A little later the doctor made his rounds, pronouncing Selwyn's wound as not dangerous, but assuring him he was lucky to be alive. Another inch either way and—— Passing on to the Scotsman, he stayed a considerable length of time; but as the screen was set for the examination, the American had no way of knowing its nature.

And so, with constant badinage, seldom brilliant, but never unkind, the morning wore on. It was nearly noon when Selwyn saw a wheeled stretcher brought into the ward and the Highlander lifted on to it.

'Jock,' said the little Cockney, 'I 'opes as 'ow everythink will come out orlright.'

'By Gar, Scoachie!' cried the French-Canadian, 'I am sorree. You are one dam fine feller, Scoachie.'

'Dinna worry yersel's,' said the man from the North. 'I'm rare an' lucky that it's to be ma richt leg an' no the left, for that richt shank o' mine was aye a wee thing crookit at the knee, and didna dae credit tae the airchitecture o' tither ane.'

Thus, amid the rough encouragement of his fellows, and by no means unconscious of the dignity of his position, the Highland soldier was taken away to the operating-room.

The French-Canadian made a remark to Selwyn, but it was not until the second repetition that he heard him.

III.

About three o'clock that afternoon a little stream of visitors began to arrive, and Thomas Atkins, with his extraordinary adaptability, gravely, if somewhat inaccurately, answered the catechism of well-meaning old ladies, and flirted heartily and openly with giggling 'flappers.'

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To the visitors, however, Austin Selwyn paid no heed. He was enduring the lassitude which follows a fever. He knew that the crisis had come, the hour when he must face fairly the crash and ruin of his work; but he put it off as something to which his brain was unequal. Like slow drifting wisps of cloud, different phrases and incidents floated across his mind, shadows of things that had left a clear imprint upon his senses. With the odd vagrancy of an undirected mind, he found himself recalling a few of Hamlet's lines, and smiled wanly to think how, after all those years, the immortal Shakespeare could still give words to his own thoughts: 'This goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, . . . this brave overhanging firmament—this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.'

The wings of memory bore him back to Harvard, where once in a scene from *Hamlet* he had mouthed those very words, little dreaming that in a few short years he would lose the sense of euphony in the cruel realisation of their meaning.

Then, before he saw her or heard her step, he knew that SHE had come. His heart quickened, and his breathing was tremulous with mingled emotions.

'Well,' she said, coming to his bedside and offering her hand, 'how is the invalid?'

'Elise,' he said, 'it is wonderful of you to come.' He looked at her khaki uniform, at the driver's cap which imprisoned her hair. 'Now,' he went on dreamily, 'it all comes back to me. It was you who brought me here.'

'Had you forgotten that already?' she said, bringing a chair to the bedside.

'I couldn't remember,' he answered weakly. 'All I know is that I was walking alone—and there came a blank. When I woke up I was here with a head that didn't feel quite like my own. But I knew, somehow, that you had been with me.'

'What does the doctor say about your wound?'

'It is not serious.'

'You have heard since what happened?'

'Yes.'

'It was absolutely topping the way you fought for that child's life.'

He made a deprecatory gesture, and for a moment conversation ceased. He was wondering at her voice. A subtle change had come over it. Her words were just as uncomfortably rapid as in the first days of their friendship, but there was a hidden quality caught by his ear which he could not analyse. Looking at her with eyes that had waited

so long for her coming, he felt once more the affinity she held with things of nature. Her presence obliterated everything else. They were alone—the two of them. The hospital, London, the world, were dimmed to a distant background.

‘After such a night,’ he said, ‘it is very kind of you to make this effort.’

‘Not at all. We’re cousins, you know.’

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'I—I don't'—

'The Americans and the English, I mean. Relatives always go to each others' funerals, so I thought I might stretch a point and take in the hospital.'

'Oh! That was all?'

'Goodness, no! You automatically became a protege of mine when I picked you up last night. Isn't that a horrid expression?—but frightfully fashionable these unmoral days.'

'You must excuse me,' he said slowly, 'but I was foolish enough to think you came here because—well, because you wanted to.'

'So I did. An air-raid casualty is ever so much more romantic than a wounded soldier. If he lives through it, he always proposes the very next day either to the nurse or to the ambulance-driver, whereas a Tommy, after his third wound, becomes so *blase*.'

'You shouldn't torture me,' he said, wincing noticeably under the incision of her words.

Just for a fleeting instant her eyes were softened with a tender look of self-reproach. His heart warmed at the sight, but before he could convince himself that it was not a creation of his own fancy, it had passed, and once more she was holding him at bay with her impersonal abruptness.

'Will you tell me about yourself?' he urged. 'Please.'

'What do you want to know?'

'Everything—everything!' he blurted out, impetuously leaning forward. 'My heavens! Don't you know how I've longed and waited for this moment ever since that night at your flat? I want to hear all about you—what you've done, where you've been, and—and in what mysterious way you've changed.'

'Have I changed?'

'Of course you have. You're trying to appear just as you were when we first met, but you can't do it. Even if I hadn't noticed the difference in you, I should have known that no one could live through these times and remain the same.'

'Why not? Haven't you?'

He laughed grimly, and his head sank back on the pillows. 'I want to know all about you, Elise,' he repeated dully.

'Very well.' She smoothed her skirt with her hands, and folded them Quakeress-fashion.

'As you know, I once had a flat in Park Walk—which I shared with various and variegated female patriots, also engaged in guiding the destinies of motor-cars. Edna was the first one to follow Marian, after she and I quarrelled; but Edna couldn't break herself of the habit of wandering into the Ritz for luncheon every second day with only a shilling in her pocket.'

'But I don't see how'——

'You poor innocent! Some one always paid—don't worry. So we parted company on that issue, and I asked Mabel to take Edna's place. Mabel was frightfully nice, but took to opium cigarettes, and then to heroin. She disappeared one night, and never came back. Poor girl! Her going made room for Lily, who read the very nicest modern novels, and always cried through the love scenes. I wish you could have seen her sitting up in bed reading a book, eating chocolates, and sobbing like a crocodile. Lily had only one weakness—marrying Flying Corps officers. It was really the army's fault giving two of her husbands leave at the same time.'

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Selwyn frowned, 'What a dreadful experience!' he said.

'Oh, I don't know.' She gave a little shrug of her shoulders, but the spirit of badinage had vanished both from her face and from her voice. 'It didn't take long to lose most of one's illusions. It is one thing to meet people as Lord Durwent's daughter, and quite another as a free-lance ambulance-driver. I've seen what people really are since I've been on my own, and I'm sick of the whole thing.'

'You don't mean that, Elise?'

'I do. Men are rotten, and women are cats.'

He smiled quizzically, but she kept her eyes averted from his. It almost appeared as if she were determined to retain her pose of callousness at any effort, but his sense of psychology told him that his first conjecture was correct. The girl who had endured was trying to hide herself behind the personality of her old self.

'My dear girl,' he said slowly, 'it is an old trick of women to talk for the purpose of convincing themselves. I don't care what you have seen—you could not have passed through the ordeal of these long months and believe in your innermost soul that either men or women are rotten. In many ways I feel as if what little knowledge I possess dates from last night; and I have learned things about men right here in this ward to-day that have made me humble. These chaps that we call ignorant, the lower classes—why, they are superb, wonderful. I tell you they have greatness in them. I wish you could have seen them'——

'Haven't I seen them,' she cried, with a little catch in her throat, 'hundreds and hundreds of times? Almost every day, and at all hours of the night, I've gone to meet the Red Cross trains. I have seen men die while being lifted out of the ambulance—men who would try to smile their thanks to us just before the end came. I have'—— She caught her hands in a tight grip, and her eyes welled with tears. 'But they're just jingoes, I suppose,' she said, blending a scornfulness with her repressed grief.

'I have deserved this,' said Selwyn, his face drawn. 'Nothing that you can say is half so bitter as my thoughts.'

'I didn't mean to hurt you,' she said.

'If ever a man was sincere, I was, Elise. Since I left you at Roselawn I have followed the one path, thinking there was a great light ahead. Now I am afraid that, perhaps, it was only a mirage.'

'No, it wasn't,' she replied vehemently. 'I hated you for thinking English women would not aid their men to fight, and I wanted never to see you again. But do you remember when I said that the glory of war was in women's blood? There was a certain amount of



truth in it at the beginning; for when I first saw the wounded arrive I was madly excited. I wanted to shout and cheer. But as the months have gone on, and I have seen our soldiers maimed and bleeding and suffering, while thousands of their women at home have simply broken loose and lost all sense of decency or self-respect—oh, what's the use?'

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'But you mustn't forget the women who have done such great things for the country.'

'I know—but what's it all for? Since this battle of the Somme our casualties have been frightful, and every day means so many of our real men killed, and so many more shirkers and rotters in proportion to carry on the life of England. We've had our women's revolution all right. There are not many of the old barriers left; but what a mess we have made of our freedom! When I think of all that, and then recall what you said about war, I know that you were right, and we were wrong.'

'You are wonderfully brave,' said Selwyn, 'not only for having done so much, but in telling me that.'

'No,' she said, lowering her eyes to the gloves which she held in her hand; 'I have lost all my courage. Every night I feel as if another day of meeting the wounded will kill me. . . . If it could only end! Anything would be better than these awful casualty lists.'

'Elise'—he raised himself on his elbow and leaned towards her—'you prove yourself a woman when you say that; but you're wrong. I can't give my reasons yet, but since last night I have been seeing clearer and clearer that Britain not only must not lose, but must *win*. I know other men have said it ten thousand times, but only to-day have I begun to see that, in its own strange, unidealistic manner, this Empire is fighting for civilisation.'

'Then'—her eyes were lit with sudden, glistening radiancy—'then you don't think our men have died uselessly?'

'I could not believe in God,' he answered, wondering at the calm certainty of his voice uttering things which would have infuriated him a few hours before, 'if I thought that this war's dead had fallen for nothing.' His hand, which had been raised in gesture, fell limply on the bed. 'Up to yesterday,' he went on slowly, 'I reasoned truth; to-day—I feel truth. I wonder if it is not always so, that higher knowledge begins with the end of reasoning.'

For a couple of minutes neither spoke, and his head was throbbing with anvil-beats. Twice she started to speak, but stopped each time as though distrustful of her own words.

'I am going back to America, Elise.' His dreamy eyes were gazing beyond her into the distance, or he might have noted that the colour in her cheeks fluctuated suddenly and the fingers on her gloves tightened.

'Why?' There was nothing in her voice to indicate anything but casual interest.

'I must go back,' he said, leaning towards her—'back to my own country. You don't understand. . . . There comes a moment when every fibre of a man's being craves for his own people, for the very air that he breathed as a boy. All these wasted months and

last night's climax of damnable murder have left me dazed. I am floundering hopelessly—but at home I shall be able to clear my mind of its mists and see this whole thing as it really is.'

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A wall of pain pressed against his head, and his face went gray with agony. In an instant she was standing over him arranging his pillows, and soothing his temples with the gentle pressure of her hands.

For the first time in many months he knew the help and compassion of a woman—and the woman was Elise. He was weak from loss of blood, weary from the long travail of the mind, and her presence, with its indefinable fragrance of clover and morning flowers, was as exquisite music to his senses.

'If you only knew,' he murmured, 'how I have longed for this moment. It has been very lonely for me—and I have wanted you so much, Elise. God! I've wanted you until I had to struggle to keep from crying out your name in the very streets. Forgive me talking like this.' He groped for her hand and held it tightly in his. 'I never had any right to tell you what you meant to me—and less now than before—but when I come back'——

'You will never come back.' She laughed with a strange tremulousness, but in her eyes there was something of the scorn she had shown towards him at Roselawn.

'You are wrong,' he said; 'I must'——

'You are an American,' she answered quickly, 'and that comes first with you. Your country has nothing to do with this war, and you are going back to it. You will stay there. I know you will.'

With his old decisive mannerism he sat up, and his eyes flashed with vigour.

'I will come back,' he said firmly. 'Life has separated us—it has not been your fault or mine—but some day, Elise, when I get my grip on things again, I shall come to you, and you will have to listen. We need each other, and nothing on the earth can alter that'——

'Except America!' She laughed again, and withdrew her hand from his.

'Elise!' he cried, reaching towards her, 'listen to me'——

The Cockney patient leaned over with a bag in his hand. "Ave a gripe?" he said genially.

'No, th'—— began Selwyn.

'Thanks so much,' said Elise, taking the bag and picking a small cluster for the American, afterwards handing the bag back to the Tommy.

"Ave a few yourself, won't yer?" said the warrior.

'May I?'

‘Ere,’ said the Cockney, with mock brusqueness. ‘Tike a bunch.’

Perhaps from the very intensity of their previous talk, the threads snapped, and her quickly uttered sentences, with the accompanying sparkle in her eyes, showed him that he could hope for little more than badinage for the rest of her visit. Almost as if she desired to eradicate the memory of her emotional admission, she gave her vivacity full play. For a few minutes he tried to bring back the close intimacy of their souls, but she fenced him off, and met his heart-hungry glances with the gayest of smiles.

Roselawn, she told him, had been transformed into a convalescent home, and Lord and Lady Durwent were living in one of the wings. Practically all the servants had enlisted or gone into war-work; and even Mathews, the groom, after perjuring himself before a whole regiment of army doctors, had been accepted (with grave official doubts) for military service.

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Interspersed with these details she recounted incidents of her London life as an ambulance-driver, and it was all her listener could do to follow the swift irrelevance of her course. Only once did she pause when, in answer to his question, she told him she had heard nothing of Dick.

IV.

A few minutes later she rose to go.

'I have stayed much too long,' she said. 'I do hope you'll get better quickly.'

He took her hand in his, but made no attempt to translate the meaning of the moment into language. He had worked against her country; while she plied her rounds of mercy, he had written on the debasement and the fallacy of it all. Lying in the wreck of his idealism, in the grip of physical pain, dreading the torture of his own thoughts, could he express what her coming had meant? He wanted to tell her of his heart-hunger, of his loneliness, his gratitude, understanding, reverence, and, above all, of his love. There was so much that it made him silent.

'Good-bye, Elise,' he said.

'Good-bye,' she answered.

That was the end. Of such paltry substance are words.

'By Gar!' said the French-Canadian, looking after her as she disappeared down the ward, 'she mak me tink of my leetle girl Marie; only Marie, mebbe, is only so high, *comme ca*, and got de black hair, so! I am homeseek. Yes. It mak me verra homeseek. *Godam!*'

V.

She did not come again. Every morning his heart quickened with hope, and each afternoon grew heavy with discouragement as the hours passed by without the step he listened for. The arrival of the mail was an instant of mad expectancy and mute resignation. But every day carried its cargo of renewed hope, and he grudged the very hours of sleep that separated him from it.

He wrote to her three times—pleaded with her to come again. He begged forgiveness for omitted or committed things which might have hurt her, but no reply came. He thought of writing to Roselawn, fancying she might have gone there, but he was certain that before the letter could reach her she would have come again, and they would only laugh at the idea of any misunderstanding.

He blamed himself for a hundred imaginary crimes. He had not asked her if she would return. Perhaps he had carelessly uttered words that wounded her. He knew her pride; knew that after their parting at the flat it must have been hard for her to make the first move towards reconciliation—and she might have mistaken his joy for petty personal triumph.

Or—had he been an utter fool? Was this her punishment of him? With the consummate artistry of her sex, had she simulated sympathy and forbearance to make his torture all the more exquisite? He dismissed the suggestion as something vile, but, feeding on his doubts and longings, it grew stronger and more insistent with every hour's passing. A hundred times a day he closed his eyes and lived the sweet memory of her visit; but with the gathering arraignments of his doubts, he wondered if it had all been the studied act of the English girl's reprisal on the American who had dared to challenge her nation.

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Weary, weary hours—the inactivity of the body lending fuel to the flames of his mind. He determined to dismiss her from his thoughts, and with his power of mental discipline he reduced his mood to one of mute resignation.

Then the thought of America came to him, and he was seized with an impetuous craving for his own country, his own land, where men's natures were broad and mountainous, like America itself. He pictured New York towering into the skies, the charming homes of Boston, where so many happy hours had been spent in genial, cultured controversy. He smelt the ozone of the West, where sandy plains melted into the horizon; where men lived in the open, and a man was your friend for no better reason than that he was following the same trail as yourself.

America. . . . He was impatient now of every day that kept him in England. He felt that his emotions, his brain, his convictions would all be rudderless until he breathed once more the air of the New World, with its vassal oceans bringing tribute to both Eastern and Western coasts.

He would not call himself a failure or a success until he looked on his handiwork in the light of the great Republic. As his ancestors leaving the shores of Holland and Ireland, as millions of men and women had done with the Old World dwindling away in the distance, he looked towards America for the answer to existence.

Ten days after his admission he was allowed to leave the hospital for his rooms in St. James's Square.

He took his leave of the little group who had been his companions for the time—the little Cockney with his incessant exuberance; the French-Canadian, picturesque of language and imagination; the one remaining Australian, vigorous of thought and forceful of temperament; the nurse, carrying Florence Nightingale's lamp through the blackness of war. He tried to say a little of what was bursting for utterance, but they only laughed and fenced it off. They wished him 'Cheerio—good-bye—good luck;' and he wondered if the whole realm of lived or written drama held any farewell more sublimely expressive of a great people enduring to the uttermost.

His servant had a taxi-cab waiting for him. Driving first to a florist's, he purchased roses for the nurse; then, stopping at a tobacconist's, he left a generous order for all the occupants of the ward. After that he went directly to the American Consul's office and made arrangements for his return to New York.

VI.

It was late in December when, driving to Waterloo to catch the boat-train to Southampton, Selwyn was held up in the Strand by the crush of people welcoming the arrival of Red Cross trains from the front.

Leaning out of the window, he watched the motor-cars and ambulances coming out from the station courtyard, while London's people, as they had done from the beginning, welcomed the unknown wounded with waving handkerchiefs and flowers, with hearts that wept and faces that bravely smiled.

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With a suppressed cry, Selwyn opened the door and leaped into the crowd. He had seen her driving one of the ambulances, and he fought his way furiously through the human mass to the open roadway. But it was useless. The ambulance had disappeared.

Struggling back to the taxi, he re-entered it, and turning round, made for Waterloo Bridge by way of the Embankment.

CHAPTER XIX.

EN VOYAGE.

From a sheltered position on the hurricane-deck, Austin Selwyn watched the curtain of night descending on England's coast. Portsmouth, with its thousand naval activities, was already lost to view off the ship's stern; and the Isle of Wight was but a dark margin on the water's edge.

Not a light was to be seen on shore. Like an uninhabited island, England lay in the mingled menace and protection of the sea, while unseen eyes kept their endless vigil.

The vibration from the ship's engines told him she was gathering speed. Impatient of the six days that must elapse before harbour could be reached, he walked to the front of the deck and watched the officers on the bridge peering into the darkness ahead.

When he retraced his steps he could no longer distinguish land. Two searchlights playing on the surface of the water revealed a cruiser steaming silently out to sea.

A feeble star appeared in the sky.

* * * * *

Mid-ocean.

A clear winter sunlight touching the green, swirling water with strands of yellow gold; a wind sweeping the ship's decks, blowing boisterously down companion-ways and along the corridors; a few shimmering snowflakes from an almost cloudless sky; everywhere the vastness of ocean. And the ship buffeting its way towards the New World.

Mid-ocean.

* * * * *

The City of New York.

Anchored down the bay just after sunset, Selwyn watched the great metropolis as her form was vitalised with a million lights. From the ship's side, it seemed to the eyes watching the birth of New York's night that the buildings had come to the very water's edge to gaze into its depths, and see their own reflection.

Here and there in the outline of great buildings a mammoth structure raised its head above all others, losing itself in the foam of light that floated mist-like over the city's towering majesty.

For more than two hours Selwyn remained motionless in the thrill of patriotism. The burst of light challenging the reign of darkness was a symbol to him. The Old World was crouching in darkness, fingering and fearing the assassin's knife. . . . But America was the Spirit of Light.

How many times, he thought, emigrants must have looked on just as he was doing! How many times that sight must have brought hope to weary, discouraged souls that never thought to hope again!

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To the idealist returning to his own country, New York was not a citadel guarding the entrance to a Nation, but a gateway opening to the Continent of Opportunity.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GREAT NEUTRAL.

I.

One afternoon a tall, heavily built young man entered his house on 128th Street, New York, and after divesting himself of his coat and hat, rubbed his hands in genial appreciation of his own hearth and the exclusion of the raw outside air. He was dressed in a gray lounge suit, a clerical collar alone denoting his vocation.

'There's a gentleman in your room, Mr. Forbes,' said his housekeeper, appearing from the kitchen. 'He said he was an old friend, and would wait.'

'What's his name?'

'Mr. Selwyn, sir.'

'Austin Selwyn? By George!' Taking the stairs three at a time, the energetic clergyman burst into the library and advanced with both hands outstretched. 'For the love of Pete!' he ejaculated most unclerically. 'How are you, my boy? Let me have a look at you. Still the same old Sel, eh? A little thinner, I think, and not quite so much hair—humph! Sit down; have that easy-chair; tell me all about yourself. Well, well! this is an unexpected treat.'

The Rev. Edgerton Forbes, who had been looking Selwyn over after the custom of tailors about to offer sartorial advice, ceased his inspection, and shook hands all over again.

'Edge,' said Selwyn, speaking for the first time, 'you can't imagine what your welcome means to me.'

'My dear boy, you never doubted its warmth?'

'Yes I did, old man—after what I've been writing.'

The athletic clergyman laughed uproariously. 'I suppose you're a dyed-in-the-wool Englishman now, and want your cup of tea. Well, I'll join you.—Mrs. Perkins.' Going to the door, he gave the necessary orders, and returned rubbing his hands, and venting

his surplus energy in a variety of hearty noises expressive of pleasure at seeing his old friend.

'Now, start at the beginning,' he said, 'and give me everything. The semaphore's up, and there's a clear track ahead.'

'But I want to know about things here first.'

'After you, my son. Put it over now. By the way, that's a nasty scar on your head. How did you get it?'

In a few words Selwyn traced the course of events which had led to his crusade against Ignorance, a crusade which had in an inexplicable way turned particularly against England. He spoke of Doug Watson's letter with its description of the slaughtered German boy, and he told of the air-raid in the moonlight, the climax to his long orgy of idealism. He touched lightly and humorously on his hospital experience, but not once did he mention the inner secret of his heart. To the whole recital Forbes listened with a genuineness and a bigness of sympathy which seemed to belong to his body as well as his mind.

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'That is pretty well everything,' said Selwyn. 'I have come back here, humble and perplexed, to try to get my bearings. There have been two men financing my stuff, and they must account to me for the uses to which they have put it. Edge, I was sincere. Not one word was written but I put my very life-blood into it.'

The arrival of tea put a temporary stop to the author's self-revelation, and his host busied himself with his hospitable duties.

Selwyn passed his hand querulously over his face. The clergyman looked at him with a feeling of pervading compassion.

'I was going to ask about Gerard Van Derwater,' said Selwyn, 'How is he?'

'Van's very well. He is in the Intelligence Division right here in New York.'

'I heard he was engaged to Marjory Shoreham.'

'Yes—he was. They broke it off a few weeks ago; or, rather, she did.'

'I am sorry to hear that,' said Selwyn earnestly. 'I always liked her immensely, and I was glad that poor old Van had been the lucky suitor. You remember how I used to say that he always carried a certain atmosphere of impending tragedy, although he was never gloomy or moody about it.'

'Well, Austin, I think the tragedy has come.'

'I must see him,' said Selwyn. 'In coming back here, you and he were the two I wanted most to meet. I knew that neither of you would withdraw your friendship without good reason; but also I knew you would tell me bluntly where I stood. Why did Marjory break off with Van?'

The clergyman told what he knew, and at the conclusion of the story Selwyn rose to his feet.

'I must see Van at once,' he said. 'There's more in this than appears on the surface. If you will give me his number, I'll find out when we can get together.'

Receiving the necessary information, Selwyn went downstairs to the telephone, returning in a couple of minutes to the den.

'I just caught him,' he said to his host, 'and I am going to his rooms at nine tonight.'

'Good work. Now sit down and tell me about the English. You'll find me the most attentive audience you ever had.'

II.

It was theatre-time when Selwyn left his hotel and walked over to Broadway. That diagonal, much-advertised avenue of Gotham was ablaze with light. From shop windows, from illuminated signs, from office buildings, street-cars, and motors, the carnival of theatre-hour was lit with glaring brilliancy. Women, in all the semi-barbaric costliness with which their sex loves to adorn itself of a night, stepped from limousines with their tiny silvery feet twinkling beneath the load of gorgeous furs and vivid opera-cloaks; while well-groomed men, in the smart insignificance of their evening clothes, guided the perilous passage of their fair consorts from the motor's step to the pavement.

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Momentarily reduced to the democracy of pedestrianism, they would lose themselves in the surging mob of passers-by—shop-girls on their way to a cinema; rural visitors shocked and thrilled with everything; keen-faced, black-haired Jews speculating on life's profits; sallow-faced, lustrous-eyed girls hungry for romance, imagining every begowned woman to be an adventuress, and every man a Prince Charming; here and there an Irish policeman, proving that his people can control any country but their own. Of such threads is woven the pattern of New York's theatre-hour on Broadway.

From sheer inability to stem the traffic, Selwyn stepped into a doorway. On the opposite side of the street a theatrical sign announced that 'Lulu' was 'the biggest, most stupendous, comedy of the season.' He wondered what constituted largeness in a comedy. Surely not the author's wit! Before he could formulate a solution of the mystery, a great overhead sign suddenly ignited with the searching question—

DO YOU CHEW SWORDSAFE'S GUM?

Hastily detaching his mind from the biggest, most stupendous, comedy of the season, he stared at the interrogation of the gum company. It suddenly disappeared, however, and then he saw that, like the goblins who chased the small boy who was lost, the business interests of New York had assumed a violent interest in his personal habits. What underwear did he buy? Did he know that Hot-door's shaving-soap was used by 76 per cent. of the entire manhood of America? There was only one place humanly conceivable where lingerie could be purchased; to prove it, the illuminated signboard promptly showed a lady in a costume usually confined to boudoirs. To equalise the immodesty of the sexes, a near male neighbour, at a height of two hundred odd feet, did an electrified turn by putting on and taking off a pair of trousers-suspenders.

DO YOU CHEW SWORDSAFE'S GUM?

That was the question. What importance could a mere war have in comparison with that? Blinking in the glare, Selwyn left the doorway and made for Madison Avenue, where Van Derwater's rooms were.

The clocks were just striking nine when he reached the number he wanted, and a negro servant led him upstairs. As Selwyn entered Van Derwater rose from his chair and greeted him with a restrained courtliness that was gentlemanly to a degree, but had an instantly chilling effect on the visitor. It was the room the owner used for lounging or reading, and the only light was the shaded one on the table.

Van Derwater had just passed thirty, but the premature thinness of his hair in front, the listless droop of his heavy shoulders, and the bluish pallor about his firm jaw contrived to make him appear older than he was. There was a kindness in the wrinkles about his eyes, and his mouth, though solid, was not lacking in indications of intuitive understanding. It was perhaps the formality of his bearing, the stiffness of his body from

the hips, that gave him the air of one who belonged by right to a past and more ceremonious age.

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Although Van Derwater encouraged his guest, after the exchange of greetings, to talk of his voyage and its attendant experiences, Selwyn was aware that he was placing a cold impersonal wall between them. His old friend was interested, courteous, intellectually even cordial, but Selwyn knew he was being kept at a distance. He forced the talk to old intimacies—recalled the game when, together, they had crossed Yale's line in the closing moments of the great Rugby match—brought back a host of joint experiences, trivial in themselves, but hallowed by time.

Van Derwater remembered them all. For each one he had the slight smile of his mouth and the quizzical weariness of his eyes; but when the conversation would droop after each outburst of reminiscence, he would not make the least attempt to lift it up again. Finally, being convinced that nothing could come of so bloodless a meeting, Selwyn dropped the impersonal mask.

'I was mighty sorry,' he said, 'to hear that you and Marjory have broken off your engagement.'

'It was her wish: not mine.' Van Derwater's voice was deep and rich, but almost monotonous in its lack of inflection.

'I was talking to Forbes to-day,' went on Selwyn tenaciously. 'He had been to see Marjory.'

'Yes?'

'Marjory told him that you didn't care enough for her to go overseas. I should think she would realise that such a matter concerns you only.'

'Not a bit of it.' For the first time the other's manner showed signs of vitality. 'It means everything to her. She wants to feel that the man she marries is big enough to go and help France. I admire her for it. I wish there were more women with her character.'

Selwyn shifted his chair uneasily. 'But—I don't understand,' he stammered. 'You told her you wouldn't go.'

'Well, what of it?'

'Look here, Van,' said Selwyn vehemently; 'we have been friends for many years. I came to you to-night because my whole career is at a standstill. I want to tell you everything—I must do it—but I can't as long as you withhold your confidence. It isn't curiosity on my part—you know that. I want to bring back the old sense of understanding we once had.'

'You haven't changed,' said Van Derwater, an inscrutable smile playing about his mouth. 'You always had a habit of piercing people's moods, no matter what defence

they put up. But if you want candour, I'll tell you frankly I am sorry you came here this evening. I knew that it would be difficult to keep from hurting you, and for old-times' sake I didn't want to do that. As you know, I have never made friends. You and Forbes were the nearest thing to it, and I suppose you two meant more than I would ever care to admit. You might ring the bell over your head. The fire needs more coal.'

As the negro obeyed his master's instructions and stoked the fire into vigour, the two friends sat without speaking. Selwyn was mute with apprehension of what he was to hear; the older man was dreading the words he had to utter. To certain strong natures it is more painful to inflict than to receive a wound.

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'If you want my story,' resumed the host, after the servant had left the room, 'and as you are concerned you have a right to hear it, this is how it goes. I went into the diplomatic service. Then I met Marjory. I needn't say what that meant to me. For the first time, I think, I knew what living was. Shortly after came the war. At first I thought that if America remained neutral as a country, it was not up to individuals to quarrel with that attitude. Then came the *Lusitania*. I wanted to go over at once, but hated to suggest it to Marjory. One night, though, to my delight, the plucky little girl mentioned it herself. I hurried back to Washington and offered my resignation, but the chief urged me to remain three months longer, saying that I was absolutely necessary in the reorganisation of a certain branch of the Intelligence Division in New York. To cut the story short, months and months went on, and they refused to release me. As a matter of fact I was directing an investigation into German foreign diplomacy that was of so delicate a nature I dared not mention it to Marjory. At its conclusion I went to Washington and demanded that they let me go—I gave my exact reason. The chief said he would give me a reply in a week; but I told him that, no matter what he wrote, I would go at the expiration of that time. It was while I was waiting for the answer that Marjory said it rested with me whether or not the engagement was to be broken. I told her that I should be able to state my position in a couple of days. Well, the letter came. Perhaps you had better see it. You can read it to yourself.'

He went to his desk, and searching among the papers, produced a correspondence-form bearing an official stamp. He handed it to Selwyn.

'WASHINGTON, November 2, 1916.

'Personal and Confidential.

'MY DEAR VAN DERWATER,—As a boyhood friend of your father's I have been most anxious to accede to your request for release from your present duties. I may say that in my desire to do the fairest thing by you, I went so far as to place the facts of the matter before the President himself. He agreed with me that your services entitled you to every possible consideration; but he also pointed out that the intimate knowledge of our secret diplomacy which you have gained marks you as too valuable a man to let go lightly. I finally secured his consent, but an hour later he sent for me again. It was to talk over a new enemy that has arisen in this fight of the present administration to weld the conflicting elements of our nation into a single-thinking whole. I refer to the ultra-pacifist section which has grown so large recently.

'You told me once that you knew this fellow, Austin Selwyn. I am sorry to set friend against friend, but his influence over the cultured and pacifist elements has to be met sternly and at once. We cannot take personal action against him, because he is within his rights as a citizen of a neutral country; but nevertheless his writings are proving a strong disrupting force—stronger, in fact, than many of the clumsier methods employed by subjects of belligerent nations.

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'Word has reached us that in all probability this nation will be faced shortly with the most momentous decision of the war. Therefore I must insist that you take charge of the anti-disruptionist propaganda. I shall be in New York next Wednesday, and will discuss with you the methods by which we can stem the tide of disloyal pacificism as exemplified by this man Selwyn.

'We have no hold over you, my boy; but in the name of this great Republic which is struggling against such odds for unification of her national life, I bid you remain at your post. I know that the son of my old friend Colonel Van Derwater will not question an order.—Yours faithfully,

A. WALTER GALLEY.'

As Selwyn finished the letter, a flush swept into his cheeks and his jaw stiffened with his old fighting mannerism.

'This is infamous!' he cried hotly. 'Do you accuse me of disloyalty to my own country?'

'I do,' said Van Derwater calmly.

Selwyn's fists clenched with fury. 'Van,' he said, his voice quivering with suppressed passion, 'I may have been blind—I can see where I have injured you and many others—but when you or Galley say that I have been trying to disrupt America, you lie. There is no one more passionately devoted to his country than I.'

'Which is your country?' said Van Derwater.

Through the dim light of the room the eyes of the two men met. Selwyn's were blazing like hot coals; Van Derwater's were cold and steely.

'What have I done,' said Selwyn, twice checking himself before he could trust his voice, 'but tried to show that war is wrong—that men without quarrel are killing each other now—that every nation has contributed to this terrible thing by its ignorance? What is there in that which merits the name of traitor?'

Van Derwater shrugged his shoulders, and taking a book from the table, idly studied its cover. 'Since the war began,' he said, his tones calm and low, 'the United States has been trying to speak with one voice, the voice of a united people. It was the plain duty of every American to aid the Administration in that. Instead, what have we found? Pro-Germans plotting outrage, and pro-Britishers casting slurs; conspiracy, political blackmailing, financial pressure—everywhere she has looked, this country has found within her borders the factors of disruption. We have fought them all. We have refused to be bullied or cajoled into choosing a false national destiny. At the moment that we seem to have accomplished something—with Europe looking to us for the final decision that must come—you, and others of your kind, contrive to poison the great educated,

decent-thinking class that we always thought secure. Your cry of "Peace—peace—at any price let us have peace," has done its work. Consciously or unconsciously, Austin, you have been a traitor.'

Selwyn rose furiously to his feet. 'This is the end of our friendship,' he said, with his voice almost choking, and his shoulders chafing under the passion which possessed him. 'Your chief has chosen to name me as a reason for keeping you in America, and so it is I who have come between you and Marjory. For that I am sorry. But when you question my loyalty to America—that is the finish.'

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Van Derwater had also risen to his feet and with the utmost courtesy listened to Selwyn's outburst. More than ever there was a mystic atmosphere of the Past in his bearing. He might have been a diplomat of the sixteenth century bidding adieu to a thwarted enemy plenipotentiary.

'Austin,' he said, with the merest inclination of his head, and his arms hanging wearily by his sides, 'we live in difficult times.'

With an angry gesture, Selwyn left the room, and taking his coat and hat from the negro, went again into the street.

Closing his study door, Van Derwater moved slowly to his chair, and lifting his book, opened it. For a long time he gazed at the open page without reading a line. 'Difficult times,' he murmured.

III.

Still in the grip of uncontrollable fury, Selwyn stamped his way through the streets. Colliding heavily with a passer-by, he turned and cursed him for his clumsiness. He cherished a mad desire to return to Van Derwater's rooms and force an apology by violence. He had expected criticism, reproach, even abuse; but that any man should brand him treasonous! . . .

He spat into the gutter, and a sound that was almost a snarl escaped from his throat. He stopped, irresolute, and the wound in his head burst into a violent pain. He leaned against a post until the agony had passed, and once more he made for Broadway. At the sight of his face glowing-red with passion, girls tittered and men drew aside.

Crossing the road, he stood to let a street-car pass, its covered wheels giving an odd resemblance to an armoured car, when an extra burst of light made him look up.

It was the gum advertisement again.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NIGHT IN JANUARY.

I.

Next morning, when Selwyn left his hotel, a few desultory snowflakes were falling through the air, and moistly expiring on the asphalt pavements. It lacked a few minutes of nine, and the thousands who man the machinery of New York's business were

hurrying to their appointed places. People who had to catch trains were hurrying to stations; and people who had nowhere to go were hurrying still faster. Taxi-cabs were rushing people across the city; and other taxi-cabs were rushing them back again. The overhead railway was rattling and roaring its noisy way; the surface cars were clattering and clanging through the traffic; and every half-minute the subways were belching up cargoes of toilers into the open air.

New York was in a hurry.

All night the great engine of a million parts had lain idle, but morning was the signal that every wheel must leap into action again, driven by the inexhaustible army of human souls. Hurry, noise, clamour, greed, fever, progress. . . . Another day had dawned!

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Crossing Broadway to reach Fourth Avenue, Selwyn could not repress a smile at the stricken glory of the great Midway. The illuminated signs that had searched the secret crevices of the mind, and had aided the iridescent foam seen from the harbour, looked tawdry and vulgar, like a circus on a rainy morning. Even the theatres, with their sign-borne superlatives, were garish and illusion-shattering. There was almost an apologetic air about the bill-boards proclaiming their nightly offering to be the 'biggest ever.'

Selwyn began to resent that word 'biggest.' One of the sad things about America is that she started out to make language her slave—only to find that it is becoming her master.

Entering a great office-building, he consulted the directory-board, and was swooped up to the twenty-fourth floor in a non-stop elevator. Finding the room of his literary agent, he went in, but a young lady told him Mr. Lyons was in Chicago.

'It doesn't matter,' said Selwyn. 'I shall see him when he returns. But I want a couple of addresses. Have you the file of letters to me? Austin Selwyn is my name.'

The young lady was gratifyingly flustered at the announcement, and by her haste to produce the required letters indicated the esteem in which her employer held the author.

'It was early last September,' said he. 'Mr. Lyons mentioned two names: a Mr. Schneider, who purchased the foreign rights of my stuff; and some one who wanted me to lecture—yes, that is the letter. Could you give me the addresses of these gentlemen?'

She wrote them on a card and gave it to him. 'Mr. J. V. Schneider,' she said, 'is in the Standard Exchange Building, just one block below here; and Mr. C. B. Benjamin is on 28th Street, in the United Manufacturing Corporation.'

Thanking her for her courtesy, Selwyn left the office, and going directly to Mr. Schneider's place of business, sent in his card. He was ushered through a large room where a dozen typewriters were clicking noisily, and reaching the private office of Mr. Schneider, found himself in the presence of a small, crafty-faced man, whose oily smile and air of deference did not harmonise with his eyes, which were as shifty and gleaming as those of a rat. He shook hands with his visitor, and then clawed at the papers on his desk with moist fingers that were abnormally long.

'Vell, Mister Selvyn,' said Mr. Schneider gutturally, 'to vot do I attribute dis honour? Have a cigar—sit down.'

'May I break the rule of your office?' said the author, indicating a sign on the wall which read: 'NIX ON THE WAR.' 'If you will be so kind, I want to speak of matters not far removed from that subject.'

Mr. Schneider shifted his cigar to the corner of his mouth, and laughed immoderately.



'Ha, ha, ha!' he roared, leaning forward, and thrusting a long, dirty finger into Selwyn's chest. 'That is vot I call mine adjustable creed. For most peoples vot gom' here—Nix. But for fine fellers like you'——

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With a greasy chuckle, he mounted his chair and turned the sign about. On the reverse side there was a coat-of-arms, and the words: 'DEUTSCHLAND UeBER ALLES.'

'Vot you tink?' grinned Mr. Schneider, speaking from the altitude of the chair. 'Goot, ugh?' He turned the thing about and stepped down again, wringing his hands in huge enjoyment of the whole thing. 'You can spik blainly, Mister Selwyn,' he went on amiably. 'Ve unnerstan' each odder, hein? Von't you smoke one of dem cigars?'

'No,' said Selwyn. He looked at the little man for about ten seconds, then, crossing to the wall, wrenched the sign away, nail and all.

'Here, here,' protested Mr. Schneider, backing warily to the door, 'vot for you do dis? Vot you mean, you great big fourflusher?'

The young man eyed the sign and then the German's head, apparently with the idea of bringing them together. Mr. Schneider further developed his plan of retreat by taking a grasp of the door-handle.

'That's for people who say "Nix on the War,"' said Selwyn, breaking the sign in his hands as if it were made of matchwood. 'And this is for your damned Deutschland!'

He broke the remainder over his knee, and threw the pieces on the flat desk, upsetting an ink-bottle, the contents of which dripped juicily to the floor.

'But ain't you,' said Mr. Schneider, in a voice that was almost a squeal—'don't you got no respect for Chermany? Only yesterday der ambassador, he tole me that after the var, for all you wrote to help der Faderland, der Kaiser, himself, vill on you bestow'——

Before the speaker could acquaint the author with the exact nature of the honour in store for him, Selwyn had seized him by the coat-lapels, and was shaking him so violently that Mr. Schneider's natural talent for double-facedness was developed to a pitch where an observant looker-on might have counted at least five of him vibrating at once.

'You dirty little hound,' said Selwyn, without relaxing in the least the shaking process, 'if you ever use my name again, or send out anything written, or supposed to be written, by me, I'll'——

For once words failed him, and lifting the little man almost off the floor, he deposited him violently on his own desk, in the midst of the pool formed by the ink.

'Nix on the war!' snorted Selwyn defiantly, putting on his hat. He was going to add a few more crushing remarks, but, altering his mind, went out, slamming the door so violently that all the typewriters engaged in sending out German propaganda were startled into an instant of silence.

As for Mr. Schneider, he sat still amidst the wreck of his desk, pondering over a famous definition of war given by an American general named Sherman.

II.

Without waiting to catch the driver's eye, the impetuous idealist overtook an empty taxicab, and jumped into it.

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'United Manufacturing, 28th Street,' he called. 'Make it fast.'

On arrival at his destination he found that Mr. C. B. Benjamin was the president of the United Manufacturing Corporation, which—so a large calendar stated—was the biggest business of its kind in the universe. It had more branches, more output, more character, more push than any other three enterprises in America.

Mr. Benjamin was in, but could be seen only by appointment, so said a sleek-haired young man of immaculate dress.

'Give him that card, and tell him I want to see him *at once*,' said Selwyn, with a forcefulness that caused a look of pain to cross the young man's countenance.

'Please sit down,' he said, 'and I'll see what I can do.'

As a result of his efforts, Selwyn received a summons to go right in—which he did, going past a number of people who had various big propositions to put before the big man when they could gain his ear.

'Good-morning, Mr. Selwyn,' said the president, a smartly dressed Jew, with a shrewd face and an unquestionable dignity of manner. 'You have returned to America, I see.'

'Yes, Mr. Benjamin. Do you mind if I come right down to business?'

'Mind? How else could I have built up the United Manufacturing Corporation? Have a cigar?'

'No, thanks. Mr. Benjamin, you wrote my agent that you wanted me to lecture on the fallacy of war.'

'Sure,' said the president.

'May I ask why?'

Mr. Benjamin removed his spectacles and wiped them carefully. Putting them on, he surveyed his visitor through them. After that he took them off again, and winked confidentially. 'Mr. Selwyn,' he chuckled, 'you ain't a child, and I see that I can't put over any sob stuff with you. I told your agent I would pay him real money for you to lecture. Well, take it from me, when the president of the United Manufacturing Corporation pays out any of his greenbacks he don't expect nothing for something, eh?'

'I don't understand you—yet,' said Selwyn quietly.

Mr. Benjamin leaned back in his swivel-chair and cut the end of a cigar with a little silver knife. 'Business,' he said, 'is business, eh?'

'Agreed,' was the terse response. 'I am still waiting to know why you offered your money to me.'

Mr. Benjamin leaned forward, and taking up his glasses, waved them hypnotically at the young man. 'Simply business,' he said. 'Same with you—same with me. You write all this dope against war—why? Because you know there's big money in it. I pay you to lecture because you can help to keep America out of the war. In 1913 I was worth two hundred thousand dollars. To-day I have ten million. We are wise men, Mr. Selwyn, both of us. While all the rest of the peoples fight, you and I make money.'

As if his bones were aching with fatigue, Austin Selwyn rose wearily to his feet, and, without comment, walked slowly out of the office. But the clerks noticed that his face was ashy-pale, like that of a prisoner who has received the maximum sentence of the law.



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III.

The days that followed were the bitterest Austin Selwyn had ever known.

It is not in the plan of the Great Dramatist that men shall look on life and not play a part. It is true that there are a few who escape the call-boy's summons, and gaze on human existence much as a passing pageant, but even for them is the knowledge that there is a moment called Death when every man must take the stage.

For years Austin Selwyn had stood apart, mingling with those who were enduring the sword-thrusts of fate, as an author chats with the players on the stage between the acts. Even the great tragedy of war had served only to enrich the processes of his mind. It is true he had known compassion, sorrow, and anger through it, but they were only counterfeit emotions, born of the grip of war on his imagination.

But at last life had reached out its talons and grasped him. Every human experience he had avoided, he was now to know, multiplied. Stripped of his last hope of justifying his idealism, he saw remorse, discouragement, a sense of utter futility, the scorn of friends, the applause of traitors—he saw them all as shadows closing into blackness ahead of him.

He tried to return to England, but passport difficulties were made insurmountable. He went to Boston, only to find that those he valued turned against him, and those he detested welcomed him as comrade. He returned to New York, but every avenue of activity was closed to him, save the one he had chosen for himself—that of world-pacifism.

He had always been a man of strong, underlying passions, and in his veins there was the hot undissipated blood of youth; but his brain had been the controlling force in every action of his life. Hitherto he had never questioned its complete mastery; but as he pondered over his fall he knew that it was his brain that had ridden him to it. He no longer trusted its workings. It had proved rebel and brought him to disaster.

And with that inner challenge came the supreme ordeal of his life.

As rivers, held imprisoned by winter, will burst their confines in the spring and overrun the land, all the passions which had been cooled and tempered by his intellectual discipline swarmed through his arteries in revolt. No longer was the brain dominating the body; instead, he was on fire with a hundred mad flames of desire, springing from sources he knew nothing of. They clung to him by day and haunted him at night. They sang to him that vice had its own heaven, as well as hell—that licentiousness held forgetfulness. He heard whispers in the air that there were drugs which opened perfumed caves of delight, and secret places where sin was made beautiful with mystic music and incense of flowers.

When conscience—or whatever it is in us that combats desire—urged him to close his ears to the voices, he cursed it for a meddlesome thing. Since Life had thrown down the gauntlet, he would take it up! If he had to travel the chambers of disgrace and discouragement, he would go on to the halls of sensual abandonment. Life had torn aside the curtain—it was for him to search the recesses of experience.

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IV.

One night towards the end of January Selwyn had tried to sleep, but the furies of desire called to him in the dark. He got up and dressed. He did not know where he was going, but he knew that his steps would be guided to adventure, to oblivion.

There was a drizzling rain falling, and, with his coat buttoned close about his throat, he walked from street to street, his breath quickening with the ecstasy of sensual surrender which had at last come to him. Men spoke to him from dark corners; women called at him as he passed; he caught faint glimmers down murky alleys, where opium was opening the gates to bliss and perdition; but, with a step that was agile and graceful, he went on, his arteries tingling in anticipation of the senses' gratification. Once a mongrel slunk out of a lane, and he called to it. It crawled up to him, and he stooped down to stroke its head, when, with a yelp of terror, it leaped out of his reach and ran back into the lane. As if it was the best of jests, he laughed aloud, and picking up a stone, sent it hurtling after the cur. Then he was suddenly afraid. The loneliness of the spot—the horrors lurking in the dark—the dog's howl and his own meaningless laughter. He felt a fear of night—of himself. He hurried on, but it was not until he reached a lighted street of shops that his courage returned, and with the courage his fever of desire, greater than before.

An extra burst of rain warned him to seek shelter, and hurrying down the street, he paused under the canopy of a shabby theatre. There was one other person there—a woman. She came over to speak to him; but when she saw the mad gleam of his eyes she drew back, and, with a frightened exclamation, pressed her hand against her breast.

He made an ironic bow, then, with a smile, looked up at her, and she heard him utter an ejaculation of amazement.

For a moment he had fancied that it might be true. The likeness was uncanny! The burnished-copper hair, the silk-fringed eyes, the poise of her head, the tapering fingers—even in the scarlet of her rouged cheeks, there was a similarity to the high colouring of the English girl. What a jest of the Fates—that they should cast this poor creature of New York's streets in the same mould with her who was the very spirit of chastity!

'What a mockery!' he muttered aloud. 'What a hideous mockery!'

He was touched with sudden pity. Perhaps this woman had been born with the same spirit of rebellion as Elise. Perhaps her poor mind had never been developed, and so she had succumbed to the current of circumstance. She might have been the plaything of environment. The wound in his head was hurting again, and he covered the scar with his moist hand. Horrible as it seemed, this creature had brought Elise to him once more

—Elise, and everything she meant. He wanted to cry out her name. His hands were stretched forward as if they could bridge the sea between them.

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Like a man emerging from a trance, he looked dreamily about him—at the street running with streams of water—at the silent theatre—at the woman. A weakness came over him, and his pulses were fluttering and unsteady.

A peddler of umbrellas passed, and Selwyn purchased one for a dollar.

‘Won’t you take this?’ he asked, stepping over to the woman, who cringed nervously. ‘It is raining hard, and you will need it.’

She took the thing, and looked up at him wonderingly, like a child that has received a caress where it expected a blow.

‘Say,’ she said, in a queer nasal whine, ‘I thought you was a devil when I seen you a minute ago. Honest—you frightened me.’

He said nothing.

‘Why’—there was a weak quaver in her whine, and she caught his wrist with her hand—‘why, you’re kind—and I thought you was a devil. Gee! ain’t it funny?’

With a shrill laugh that set his teeth on edge, she put up the umbrella and walked out into the rain. And only a passing policeman saw, by the light of a lamp, that her eyes were glistening.

Selwyn remained where he was, blinking stupidly into the rain-soaked night, as one who has been walking in his sleep and has waked at the edge of an abyss.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CHALLENGE.

I.

It was nearly noon next day before Selwyn woke from a heavy, dreamless sleep. Both in mind and in body there was the listlessness which follows the passing of a crisis, but for the first time in many days he felt the impulse to face life again, to accept its bludgeonings, unflinching.

He was almost fully dressed, when a messenger arrived with a letter. It was from Edgerton Forbes.

‘MY DEAR AUSTIN,—I have been trying to get hold of you for the past week, but you are as elusive as a hundred-dollar bill. Douglas Watson has returned from the front,

minus an arm, and he has asked as many ex-Harvard men as possible to meet him at the University Club. We are having dinner there to-night in one of the smaller rooms, and I want you to come with me. I'll pick you up at your hotel at seven, and we can walk over. If it is all right, send word by the messenger.—As ever, FORBES.'

Selwyn's first instinct was to refuse. He had no desire to meet Watson again just yet, nor did he want to face men with whom he had lived at Harvard. But the thought of another lonely night arose—night, with its germs of madness.

'Tell Mr. Forbes,' he said, 'that I shall expect him at seven.'

A few minutes before the time arranged the clergyman called, and they started for the club. The air was raw and chilling, and people were hurrying through the streets, taking no heed of the illuminated shop windows, tempting the eye of woman and the purse of man. In almost every towering building the lights of offices were gleaming, as tired, routine-chained staffs worked on into the night tabulating and recording the ever-increasing prosperity of the times.

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The times!

Ordinary forms of greeting had changed to mutual congratulations on affluence. Anecdotes of business men were no longer of struggle and privation, but of record outputs and maximum prices. Theatres, cafes, cinema palaces, churches, hotels—they had never seen such times. Success was in the very dampness of the air as thousands of people looked at it from the cosy interior of limousines, people who had never aspired higher than an occasional taxi-cab. The times! Dollars multiplied and begat great families of dollars—and Broadway glittered as never before.

It is difficult to state what trend of thought made conversation between the friends difficult, but after two or three desultory attempts they walked on without speaking. As they were entering the majestic portals of the club, Selwyn was reminded of a question he had intended all day to ask.

‘Edge,’ he said, ‘have you heard anything of Marjory Shoreham?’

‘She sailed two weeks ago for France,’ answered the clergyman.

They were directed to an upper floor, where they found a hundred or so guests who claimed Harvard as their *alma mater*. Although most of his old acquaintances were quite cordial, Selwyn felt oddly self-conscious. He caught sight of Gerard Van Derwater with his impassive courtliness dominating a group of active but less impressive men; and behind them he saw Douglas Watson of Cambridge surrounded by a dozen guests; but he pleaded a headache to Forbes, and sought a secluded corner, where he remained until dinner was announced.

Like all affairs where men are alone and the charming artifices of femininity are missing, there was a severity and a formality which did not disappear until the ministrations of wine and food had engendered a glow which did away with shyness. The table was arranged in the form of the letter U, with Watson beside the chairman at the head.

Towards the end of the dinner conversation and hilarity were growing apace. Men were forgetting the scramble of existence in the recollection of old college days, when their blood was like wine and the world a thing of adventure. Mellowed by retrospect, they laughed over incidents that had caused heart-burnings at the time; and as they laughed more than one felt a swelling of the throat. It was, perhaps, just an odd streak of sentiment (and the man who is without such is a sorry spectacle); or it may have been the memory of ideals, aspirations, dreams—left behind the college gates.

‘Gentlemen.’ The chairman had risen to his feet. Cigars were lit; and he was greeted with the usual applause. ‘Gentlemen, we have gathered here at short notice to welcome an old boy of Harvard—Douglas Watson. He has a message which he wants to deliver to us, and not only because he is one with us in tradition would we listen, but

his empty sleeve is a mute testimony that he has fought in a cause which—though not our own—is one which I know has the sympathy of every man in this room. I shall not detain you, gentlemen, but ask your most attentive hearing for Mr. Watson.'

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As the guest of the evening rose to speak he was greeted with prolonged applause, which broke into 'For he's a jolly good fellow,' and ended in a college football yell. During it Selwyn sat motionless, his alert mind trying to decipher the difference between Watson's face and the others. It was not only that they were, almost without exception, clean-shaven, and that Watson wore a small military moustache; the dissimilarity went beyond that. Although he was obviously nervous, Watson's eyes looked steadily ahead as those of a man who has faced death and looked on things that never were intended for human vision. It had left him aged—not aged as with years, but by an experience which made all the keen-faced men about him seem clever precocities whose mentalities had outstripped the growth of their souls.

And studying this phenomenon, Selwyn became conscious of the American business face.

Although differing in colouring and shape, practically every face showed lips thin and straight, eyes narrowing and restlessly on the *qui vive*, the nervous, muscular tension from the battle for supremacy in feverish competition, the dull, leaden complexion of those who disregard the sunshine—these combined in a clear impression of extraordinary abilities and capacities with which to meet the affairs of the day. What one missed in all their faces was a sense of the centuries.

No—not in all. At the table opposite to Selwyn was Gerard Van Derwater, whose self-composure and air of formal courtliness made him, as always, a man of distinctive, almost lonely, personality.

'Thank you very much,' said Watson, as the applause and singing died away. His fingers pressed nervously on the table, and his first words were uneven and jerky. 'I needn't tell you I am not a speaker. I have a great message for you chaps, but I may not be able to express it. That was my reason for asking to speak to ex-Harvard men. I did it because I knew I should have men who thought as I did—men who looked on things in the same way as myself. I knew you would be patient with me, and I was certain you would give an answer to the question which I bring from France.'

He paused momentarily, and shifted his position, but his face had gained in determination. A few of his listeners encouraged him audibly, but the remainder waited to see what lay behind the intensity of his manner.

'I don't want pity for my wound,' he resumed. 'The soldier who comes out of this war with only the loss of an arm is lucky. Put that aside. I want you to listen to me as an American who loves his country just as you do, and who once was proud to be an American.'

He raised his head defiantly, and when he spoke again, the indecision and the faltering had vanished.

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'Gentlemen, the question I bring is from France to America. It is more than a question; it is a challenge. It is not sent from one Government to another Government, but from the heart of France to the conscience of America. They don't understand. Month after month the women there are seeing their sons and husbands killed, their homes destroyed, and no end in sight. And every day they are asking, "Will America never come?" My God! I've seen that question on a thousand faces of women who have lost everything but their hope in this country. I used to tell them to wait—it would come. I said it had to come. When the Hun sank the *Lusitania* I was glad, for at last, I told them, America would act. Do you know what the British Tommies were saying about you as we took our turn in the line and read in the papers how Wilson was *conversing* with Germany about that outrage? I could have killed some of them for what they said, for I was still proud of my nationality; but time went on and the French people asked "When?" and the British Tommy laughed.

'If I'm hurting any of you chaps, think of what I felt. One night behind the lines a soldiers' concert-party gave a show. Two of the comedians were gagging, and one asked the other if he knew what the French flag stood for, and he said, "Yes—liberty." His companion then asked him if he knew what the British flag stood for, and he replied, "Yes—freedom." "Then," said the first comedian, "what does the American flag stand for?" "I can't just say," said the other one, "but I know that it has stood a hell of a lot for two years." The crowd roared—officers and men alike. I wanted to get up and fight the whole outfit; but what could I have said in defence of this nation? America—our country here—has become a vulgar joke in men's mouths.'

He stopped abruptly, and poured himself out a glass of water. No one made a sound. There was hot resentment on nearly every face, but they would hear him out without interruption.

'The educated classes of England,' he went on, 'are different in their methods, but they mean the same thing. They say it is America's business to decide for herself, but the Englishman conveys what he means in his voice, not in his words. When I was hit, I swore I would come back here and find out what had changed the nation I knew in the old days into a thing too yellow to hit back. Mr. Chairman, you said I had fought in a cause that is not yours. I beg to differ. There are hundreds of Americans fighting to-night in France. They're with the Canadians—they're with the French—they're with the British. Ask them if this cause isn't ours. I lay beside a Princeton grad. in hospital. He had been hit, serving with the Durhams. "I'm never going back to America," he said. "I couldn't stand it." As a matter of fact, he died—but I don't think you like that picture any more than I do.'

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Bringing his fist down on the table with a crash, Watson leaned forward, and with flashing eyes poured out a stream of words in which reproach, taunts, accusations, and pleading were weirdly mixed. He told them they should remove the statue of Liberty and substitute one of Pontius Pilate. In a voice choking with emotion, he asked what they had done with the soul left them by the Fathers of the Republic. He pictured the British troops holding on with nothing but their indomitable cheeriness, and dying as if it were the greatest of jokes. In one sentence he visualised Arras with refugees fleeing from it, and New York glittering with prosperity. With no relevancy other than that born of his tempestuous sincerity, he thrust his words at them with a ring and an incision as though he were in the midst of an engagement.

'That is all,' he said when he had spoken for twenty minutes. 'In the name of those Americans who have died with the Allies, in the name of the *Lusitania's* murdered, in the name of civilisation, I ask, *What have you done with America's soul?*'

He sat down amidst a strained silence. Everywhere men's faces were twitching with repressed fury. Some were livid, and others bit their lips to keep back the hot words that clamoured for utterance. The chairman made no attempt to rise, but by a subconscious unanimity of thought every eye was turned to the one man whose appearance had undergone no change. As if he had been listening to the legal presentation of an impersonal case, Gerard Van Derwater leaned back in his chair with the same courtly detachment he had shown from the beginning of the affair.

II.

'Mr. Van Derwater,' said the chairman hoarsely; and a murmur indicated that he had voiced the wish of the gathering.

Slowly, almost ponderously, the diplomat rose, bowing to the chairman and then to Watson, who was looking straight ahead, his face flushed crimson.

'Mr. Chairman—Mr. Watson—Gentlemen,' said Van Derwater. He stroked his chin meditatively, and looked calmly about as though leisurely recalling a titbit of anecdote or quotation. 'Our friend from overseas has not erred on the side of subterfuge. He has been frank—excellently frank. He has told us that this Republic has become a jest, and that we are responsible. I assume from several of your faces that you are not pleased with the truth. Surely you did not need Mr. Watson to tell you what they are saying in England and France. That has been obvious—unpleasantly obvious—and, I suppose, obviously unpleasant.'

He smiled with a little touch of irony, and leaning forward, flicked the ash from his cigar on to a plate.

'Mr. Watson,' he resumed, 'has asked what we have done with America's soul. That is a telling phrase, and I should like to meet it with an equally telling one; but this is not a matter of phraseology, but of the deepest thought. Gentlemen, if you will, look back with me over the brief history of this Republic. There are great truths hidden in the Past.

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'In 1778 Monsieur Turgot wrote that America was the hope of the human race—that the earth could see consolation in the thought of the asylum at last open to the down-trodden of all nations. Three years later the Abbe Taynals, writing of the American Revolution, said: "At the sound of the snapping chains our own fetters seem to grow lighter, and we imagine for a moment that the air we breathe grows purer at the news that the universe counts some tyrants the less." Ten years after that the editor Prudhomme declared: "Philosophy and America have brought about the French Revolution."

'I will not weary you, gentlemen, with further extracts, but I ask you to note—and *this is something which many of our public men have forgotten to-day*—that at the very commencement of our career we were inextricably involved with European affairs. Entangling alliances—no! But segregation—impossible!'

For an instant his cold, academic manner was galvanised into emphasis. His listeners, who were still smarting under Watson's words, and had been restless at the unimpassioned tone of Van Derwater's reply, began to feel the grip of his slowly developing logic.

'Thus,' the speaker went on, 'at the commencement, our national destiny became a thing dominated by the philosophy of humanitarianism. When we had shed our swaddling-clothes and taken form as a people, the issue of the North and the South began to rise. Because of his realisation of the part America had to play in human affairs, Lincoln, the great-hearted Lincoln, said we must have war. Against the counsel of his Cabinet, loathing everything that had to do with bloodshed, this man of the people declared that there could be no North or South, but only America. And to secure that he plunged this country into a four years' war—four years of untold suffering and terrible bravery. When, during the struggle, Lincoln was informed that peace could be had by dropping the question of the slaves' emancipation, his answer was the proclamation that all men were free. With his great heart bleeding, he said, "The war must go on." Philosophy and America brought on the French Revolution. Philosophy and humanitarianism brought on the war of North and South.

'The psychology of America, which had been hidden beneath the physical side of our rebellion, took definite form as a result. The gates of the country were open to the entire world. The down-trodden, the persecuted, the discouraged, the helpless, no matter of what creed or nationality, saw the rainbow of hope. By hundreds of thousands they poured into this country. Slav and Teuton, Galician, Italian, Belgian, Jew, in an endless stream they came to America, and, true to Washington and Lincoln, she received them with the words, "Welcome—free men." And so we shouldered the burdens of the Past, and men who had been slaves—white as well as black—drank of freedom.'

There was no applause, but men were leaning forward, afraid they might miss a single word. Van Derwater's depth of human understanding, his lack of passion, his solitariness that had been likened to an air of impending tragedy, held his listeners with a magic no one could have explained. He might have come as a spirit of times that had passed, so charged with the ages was his strange, powerful personality.

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'From an open sky,' he continued, 'came the present war. The older nations, knit by tradition and startled by its imminence, flew to arms at a word from their leaders. France, who had been our friend, looked to us; but what was our position? In fifty tongues our citizens cried out that it was to escape war that they had come to America. Could we tell the Jew that Russia, which had persecuted him to the point of madness, was on the side of mercy? Could we convince the Teuton that his Fatherland had become suddenly peopled with savages? Could we say to the Irishman, bitterly antagonistic to England, that Britain was fighting for the liberation of small nations? Could we ask the Greek, the Pole, the Galician, to go back to the continent from which they had come, and give their blood that the old order of things might go on?

'But, you ask, what of the real American, descended from the men who fought in the War of Independence and the Civil War. Yes—what of him? From earliest boyhood he has been taught that Britain is our traditional enemy. To secure existence we had to fight her. To maintain existence we fought her again in 1812. When we were locked in a death-struggle with the rebellious South, she tried to hurt our cause—although history will show that the real heart of Britain was solidly with the North. In our short life as a people we find that, always, the enemy is Britain. In one day could we change the teaching of a lifetime? The soul of America was not dead, but it was buried beneath the conflicting elements in which lay her ultimate strength, but her present weakness.

'What, then, was the situation? Events had outridden our national development. Whether it could have been avoided or not I do not know. Whether our education was at fault, or whether materialism had made us blind—these things I cannot tell you. I only know that this war found us potentially a nation, but actually a babel of tongues. Without philosophy and humanitarianism this nation could not go to war—and in those two things we were not ready.

'I do not belittle the many gallant men who have left these shores to fight with the Allies, but I say that in a world-crisis the voices of individuals cannot be heard unless they speak through the medium of their nationality. The question from France is not "Will Americans never come?" but "Will America never come?" When the war found the Americanisation of our people unfinished, it became the duty of every loyal man in the Republic to give his very life-blood to achieve solidarity. Do you think we could not see that the Allies were fighting our battle? It was impossible for this nation that had shouldered the problems of the Old World not to see it; so we began the education of all our people. We could have hurled this nation into war at almost any hour by an appeal to national dignity, but our destiny was imperative in its demands. Not in heat, which would be bound to cool; not in revenge, which would soon be forgotten; but by philosophy and humanitarianism alone could this great Republic go to war.

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'Yet, when this Administration looked for help, what did it find? The two races that come to this country and never help its Americanisation are the Germans and the English. They remain true to their former citizenship, and they die true to them. Gentlemen, that must not be again. America will always be open to the world, but he who passes within these gates to live must accept responsibilities as well as privileges.

'I am almost finished. For two years and a half we have fought against the disintegrating forces within our country. We have endured the sneers of belligerents, the insults of Germany, and the tolerance of Britain—and still we have fought on. Literally we were struggling, as did our forefathers, for nationhood. But let me ask Mr. Watson if our psychological unpreparedness was entirely our fault. When Britain allied herself with Russia, did she give a thought to the effect it would have on the American mind? To us, Russia was the last stronghold of barbaric despotism, and yet Britain made that alliance, identifying herself with the forces of reaction. I do not say that we would have entered into a similar or any agreement with Britain, but there are alliances of the spirit far more binding than the most solemn treaties. I accuse Britain of failing to make the advances toward a spiritual covenant with the United States, in which lay—and still lies—the hope of this world.'

A messenger had entered the room and handed a note to the chairman. It was passed along to Van Derwater's place and left in front of him. He took it up without opening it, and fingered it idly as he spoke.

'A nation does not need to be at war,' he went on, 'to find that traitors are in her midst. The struggle of this Administration for unity of thought has been thwarted right and left by men of no vision, men drunk with greed, men blinded with education and so-called idealism. Mr. Watson, you ask what we have done with America's soul. I will tell you what we have done *for* it. There are many of us in this room who have given everything we have—our time, our friends, and things which we valued more than life—because we have respected the trust imposed on us of maintaining America's destiny. I am sorry for your empty sleeve. But let me assure you that we, also, have known suffering. Because we believe in America—*first, last, and always in America*—we have stayed here, enduring sneers and contumely, in order that when America speaks it will be like the sound of a rushing cataract—one voice, one heart, but the voice and heart of Humanity. In no other way can America go to war. . . . And until that moment arrives I shall wear this garb of neutrality as proudly as any soldier his uniform of honour.'

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He sat down, and in an instant the whole crowd was on its feet. Men cheered and shouted, and, unashamed, tears ran down many faces. With his heart pounding and his eyes blinded with emotion, Selwyn did not make a move. He could only watch, through the mist, the figure of Gerard Van Derwater with its cloak of loneliness. He saw him look down at the message and break the seal of the envelope. He saw a flush of colour sweep into the pallid cheeks and then recede again. Still with the air of calmness and self-control, Van Derwater rose again to his feet. 'Gentlemen,' he said. The room was hushed instantly and every face was turned towards him. 'Gentlemen, I have received a message from my headquarters. Germany has announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare.'

For a moment the room swam before Selwyn's eyes. The shouts and exclamations of the others seemed to come from a distance. And suddenly he found that he was on his feet. His eyes were like brilliants and his voice rang out above all the other sounds.

'Van!' he cried, 'does this mean war—at last?'

With steady, unchanging demeanour his former friend looked at him. 'Yes,' he said. 'At last.'

And as they watched they saw Van Derwater's hands contract, and for a moment that passed as quickly as it came his whole being shook in a convulsive tremor of feeling. Then, in a silence that was poignant, he sank slowly into his chair, his shoulders drooping, listless and weary. With eyes that were seeing into some secret world of their own he gazed dreamily across the room, and a smile crept into his face—a smile of one who sees the dawn after a long, bitter night.

'Thank God,' he said, with lips that trembled oddly. 'Thank God.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SMUGGLER BREED.

I.

On an April evening, fifteen months later, a certain liveliness could have been noted in the vicinity of Drury Lane Theatre. The occasion was another season of opera in English, and as the offering for the night was *Madam Butterfly*, the usual heterogeneous fraternity of Puccini-worshippers were gathering in large numbers.

Although the splendour of Covent Garden (which had been closed for the war) was missing, the boxes held their modicum of brilliantly dressed women; and through the audience there was a considerable sprinkling of soldiers, mostly from the British

Dominions and America, grasping hungrily at one of the few war-time London theatrical productions that did not engender a deep and lasting melancholy—to say nothing of a deep and lasting doubt of English humour and English delicacy.

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In one of the upper boxes Lady Erskin had a small unescorted party. Lady Erskin herself was a plump little miniature who was rather exercised over the dilemma of whether to display a huge feathery fan and obliterate herself, or to sacrifice the fan to the glory of being stared at by common people. With her was her sister, the wife of a country rector, who assumed such an elaborate air of *ennui* that any one could have told it was her first time in a box. Between them was Lady Erskin's rather pretty daughter, and behind her, with all her vivid personality made glorious in its setting of velvety cloak and creamy gown, was Elise Durwent, enjoying a three days' respite from her long tour of duty.

The lights went out, and with the rising of the curtain the little drama of tenderness and cruelty held the stage. From the distance, Butterfly could be heard approaching, her voice coming nearer as the typical Puccini progressions followed her ascent. There was the marriage, the cursing of Butterfly by the Bonze, and the exquisite love duet, so full of passionate *abandon*, and yet shaded with such delicacy. At the conclusion of the act, where the orchestra adds its overpowering *tour de force* to the singers', the audience burst into applause that lasted for several minutes. It was the spontaneous gratitude of hundreds of war-tired souls whose bonds had been relaxed for an hour by the magic touch of music.

'Do you think the tenor is good-looking?' asked Lady Erskin of no one in particular.

'Who is that in the opposite box, with the leopard's skin on her shoulders?' queried the rector's wife.

'I think Butterfly is topping,' said Lady Erskin's daughter. 'I always weep buckets in the second act.'

'I should like to die to music like that,' said Elise, almost to herself.

II.

Close by a communication-trench, Dick Durwent stood shivering in the cool night-air. He was waiting to go forward on sentry-duty, the remainder of the relief having gathered at the other end of the reserve-trench in which he was standing; but though it was spring, there was a chill and a dampness in the air that seemed to breathe from the pores of the mutilated earth. A desultory shelling was going on, but for a week past a comparative calm had succeeded the hideous nightmare of March and early April, when Germany had so nearly swept the board clean of stakes.

He heard the voices of a carrying-party coming up, and suddenly he crouched low. There was a horrible whine, growing to a shriek—and a shell burst a few yards away. Shaken and almost deafened, Durwent remained where he was until he saw an object



roll nearly to his feet. It was a jar of rum that was being brought up for issue. He lifted the thing up, and again he shivered in the raw air like one sickening of the ague. Quick as the thought itself, he put the jar down, and seizing his water-bottle, emptied its contents on the ground. Kneeling down, he filled it with rum, and leaving the jar lying at such an angle that it would appear to have spilled a certain amount, he hurriedly joined the rest of the relief warned for duty.

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Dick had been on guard in the front line for an hour, when he received word that a patrol was going out. A moment later they passed him, an officer and two men, and he saw them quietly climb over the parapet which had been hastily improvised when the battalion took over the position. They had been gone only a couple of minutes when pistol-shots rang out, and the flares thrown up revealed a shadowy fight between two patrols that had met in the dark. The firing stopped, and Durwent's eyes, staring into the blackness, saw two men crouching low and dragging something after them. He challenged, to find that it was the patrol returning, and that the one they were bringing back was the officer, killed.

The trench was so narrow that they could not carry him back, and they left the body lying on the parapet until a stretcher could be fetched.

Dulled as he had become to terrible sights, the horror of that silent, grotesque figure began to freeze Dick Durwent's blood. A few minutes before it had been a thing of life. It had loved and hated and laughed; its veins had coursed with the warm blood of youth; and there it sprawled, a ghastly jumble of arms and legs—motionless, silent, *dead*. He tried to keep his eyes turned away, but it haunted him. When he stared straight ahead into the dark it beckoned to him—he could see the fingers twitching! And not till he crept near could he be satisfied that, after all, it had not moved.

'Sherwood!' He heard a quivering voice to his right. It was the nearest sentry, an eighteen-year-old boy, who had called him by the name given him by Austin Selwyn, the name under which he had enlisted.

'What's the matter?' called Durwent.

Without his rifle, the little chap stumbled towards him, and, dark as it was, Dick could see that his face was livid and his eyes were wide with terror.

'Sherwood,' whimpered the boy, 'I can't stand it—I've lost my nerve. . . . That thing there—there. . . . It moves. It's dead, and it moves. . . . Look, it's grinning at me now! I'm going back. I can't stay here—I can't.'

'Steady, steady,' said Durwent, gripping the boy by the shoulder and shaking him roughly. 'Pull yourself together. Don't be a kid. You've seen far worse than this and never turned a hair.'

'I can't help it,' whined the boy. 'There's dead men walking out there all over. Can't you see them? They whisper in the dark—I can hear them all the time. I'm going back.'

'You can't, you little idiot. They'll shoot you.'

'I don't care. Let them shoot.'



'Where's your rifle? Get back to your post. If you're caught like this, there'll be a firing-party at daybreak for you.'

'I don't care,' cried the lad hysterically. 'They can't keep me here. I'm going'——

'Here'—— Throwing the young fellow against the parapet and holding him there by leaning heavily against him, Durwent felt for his water-bottle and withdrew the stopper. 'Drink this,' he said, forcing the mouth of the flask between the boy's lips. 'Take a shot of rum. It will put the guts back into you.'

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The young soldier choked with the burning liquid, and tears oozed from his eyes, but the chill of the body passed, and with it the chill of cowardice. With a half-whimper, half-laugh, he forced a silly, coarse jest from his lips. 'Where did you get it, Sherwood?'

'Never mind,' said Dick. 'Come on now. Back you go—and stick it out.'

III.

The second act of *Madam Butterfly* was in progress.

With the sure touch of high artistry, both composer and librettist had delineated the result of Pinkerton's faithlessness—a faithlessness that was obvious to every one but Cho-cho-san, who still believed that her husband would return with the roses. Firm in her trust, she pictured to Sazuki the day when he would come, 'a little speck in the distance, climbing the hillock'—how she would wait 'a bit to tease him and a bit so as not to die at our first meeting'—ending with the triumphant assurance (born of her woman's intuition, which, alas! proves so frequently unreliable) that it would all come to pass as she told. She *knew* it.

And so to the visit of the American consul, who tries to tell her that her husband has written that he has tired of her—she, poor soul, reading in his words the message that he still loves her. Then the final tableau of the act with Butterfly, her baby and Sazuki standing at the Shosi facing the distant harbour where his ship has just been signalled. Softly the humming of the priests at worship ceases, and the curtain descends on what must always remain a masterpiece of delicate pathos—a story that will never lose its appeal while woman's trust in man lends its charm to drab existence.

'The tenor didn't come in at all in that act,' said Lady Erskin.

'Really,' said the rector's wife, fixing her lorgnette on the opposite box, 'that person with the leopard's skin looks absolutely like a cannibal.'

'I'm just swimming in tears,' was the comment of Lady Erskin's daughter.

Elise said nothing; nor did she hear them speak. Her heart was fluttering wildly, and her hands were clasped tightly together. She had heard a far-away cry—and the voice was Dick's.

IV.

The raw air of the night, the dread of that loathsome, silent thing, the haunting terror of the boy's eyes a few minutes before, the whine of shells, all bored their way into Dick

Durwent's brain. He began to tremble. With every bit of will-power he fought it off, but he felt the fumes of madness coming over him.

For days on end he had had no rest. In the Fifth Army *debacle* of March his battalion had been one of the first to break, although remnants had fought as few men had ever fought before; and when they had been reorganised they were moved back into the line, undermanned, ill-equipped, and branded with disgrace. It was the culmination of three years' service at the front, and his nerves were at the breaking-point. Mounds of earth ahead of him, and gnarled, dismembered trees, began to take the ghostly shapes that the frightened boy had told of.

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Mumbling meaningless things, he reached for his water-bottle and poured a mouthful of rum down his throat. It set his heart beating more firmly, and his blood was no longer like ice in a sluggish river. He replaced the stopper and resumed his watch, but every fibre of his body was craving for more of the alcohol. With set teeth he struggled for self-control, but every instinct was fighting against him. He took another sip, then a long draught of the scorching liquid, and leaned against the parapet. He pressed his hot face against the damp earth, and burrowed his fingers into it in a frenzied effort for self-mastery. Again he drank, and his mouth burned with the stuff. His head was swimming, and he could hear surf breaking on a rocky coast. The dead man was grinning at him, but death no longer held any terrors for him. He raised the bottle in a mock toast and drank greedily of the rum again.

The pounding of the waves puzzled him. He could not remember that they were near any water. But more and more distinctly he could hear the roll of surf dashed into spray against the shore. . . . It was strange. . . . Once more he pressed the bottle to his lips, and it set his very arteries on fire. Yes. Over to the left he could see the glimmer of the ocean. There was a light; some one was beside it. It was Elise! She was giving a signal. That was it—the smugglers were landing their contraband, and she was signalling that all was clear.

He looked over to the dead man. The corpse was rising to its feet. It had all been a hoax on its part—it was an excise officer. His eyes were fixed on the light, too. His men would be near, and they would capture Elise—and afterwards the smugglers, led by their great-grandfather. He would have to warn her. He couldn't shout, for that would give everything away. He would crawl near to her first.

He finished the rum, draining the bottle to the last drop, and started to creep along the trench, his heavy, powerless limbs carrying him only inches where his imagination made it yards. He looked back once. The dead man was following him. It had become a race between himself and a corpse. He kept his eye on the light. He could see Elise quite plainly. She was looking out towards the sea.

Feeling his muscles growing weaker, and fearful that the dead man would overtake him, he struggled to his feet and clapped his hands to his mouth.

'Elise!' he yelled. *'Elise!'*

And with the roar of surf in his ears, he sank to the ground in a drunken stupor.

V.

The last act of *Madam Butterfly* was ending. The cruel little story wound to a close with the return of Pinkerton and his sympathy-uninspiring American wife, and then the suicide of Butterfly—the logical, but comparatively unmoving, finale to the opera.

But Elise neither saw the actors nor heard the music. With her hands covering her eyes, she had been listening for the voice of Dick. She could hear it, distant and faint, growing nearer, as if he were coming towards her through a forest. There was in it a despair she had never heard before. He was in danger—where or how she could not fathom—but over the surging music of the orchestra she could hear the voice of Boy-blue crying through the infinity of space.

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The opera was over, and there was a storm of applause that developed into an ovation.

'The tenor isn't really handsome, after all,' said Lady Erskin.

'I think the women of to-day are shameless,' said the rector's wife, casting a last indignant glance at the box across the theatre.

'I feel a perfect rag,' said Lady Erskin's daughter. 'Good heavens! Elise, what's the matter?'

'Nothing. I—I don't know,' Elise answered, looking up with terror-stricken eyes. 'I'm just overwrought. That's all.'

'You poor dear!' said Lady Erskin. 'You shouldn't take the opera so seriously. After all, it didn't really happen—and I have no doubt in real life the tenor is quite a model husband, with at least ten children.'

VI.

'Drunk,' said the company commander, stooping over the prostrate body of Dick Durwent. 'He was all right when he took over. Where did he get the stuff?'

'Smell that, sir,' said the subaltern of the night, handing him a water-bottle.

'Humph! This looks bad. Have him carried to the rear and placed under arrest.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SENTENCE.

I.

On the outskirts of a village near the junction of the British and French armies, two guards with loaded rifles kept watch at the doors of a hut. The warm sunlight of May was bathing the fields in gold, where here and there a peasant woman could be seen sprinkling seed into the furrows. Across a field, cutting its way through a farmyard, a light railway carried its occasional wobbling, narrow-gauged traffic; and outside half-a-dozen huts soldiers were lolling in the warmth of early afternoon, polishing accoutrements and exchanging the lazy philosophy of men resting after herculean tasks. Elsewhere there was no sign of war. Cattle browsed about the meadows, and the villagers, long since grown used to the presence of foreign soldiers, pursued their endless duties.

A sergeant walked briskly from a cottage in the village and went directly to the field where lay the hut guarded by the sentries. 'Fall in outside!' he said sharply, opening the door.

Bareheaded, and with his dark hair seeming to cast the shadows that had gathered beneath his eyes, Dick Durwent emerged and took his place between the guards.

'To receive the sentence of the court,' said the sergeant in answer to his questioning glance. 'Escort and prisoner—'shun! Right turn! Quick march!'

Past the lounging soldiers to the road, and on to the village, they marched. Women glanced up, curious as to the meaning of the little procession, but with a shrug of their shoulders resumed their work, and soon forgot all about it. The escort halted outside the cottage from which the sergeant had come, and he entered it alone. A minute later he reappeared, and marched prisoner and guards into the room where the court-martial had been held that morning. The three officers were sitting in the same places—a lieutenant-colonel, whose set, sun-tanned face told nothing; a captain, whose firmness of jaw and steadiness of eye could not hide his twitching lip; and a subaltern, pale as Dick Durwent himself.

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As president of the court, the senior officer handed a sealed envelope to the prisoner. Not a word was spoken on either side. The sergeant's command rang out, and the noise of metalled heels upon the floor was startlingly loud.

Still without a word, carrying the unread sentence in his hand, Durwent was marched back to the hut. Again the women cast curious glances, and a little urchin in a cocked-hat stood at the salute as they passed.

When he was alone once more, Dick broke the seal of the envelope, and without his face altering, except that the shadows grew darker beneath his eyes, he read the finding of the court.

He was to be shot.

He read it twice. With a long, quivering intake of the breath, he tore the thing slowly into a dozen pieces and threw them into a corner.

Walking to the end of the hut, he leaned against the ledge of a little window, and looked out towards the horizon where the great blue of the sky stooped to earth. There was the laughter of soldiers, and from an adjoining meadow came the neighing of a restive horse. The sunlight deepened, and from a hundred branches birds were trilling welcome to the promise of another summer.

Two hours passed. The warmth of early afternoon was giving way to the cool mood of twilight—but the solitary figure had not moved.

II.

Nine days had passed when a motor-lorry drew up on the road, and the same sergeant ordered Dick Durwent to take his place outside the hut with his escort. The prisoner asked as to his destination, and was told that the sentence, having been confirmed, was to be promulgated before his unit.

They had been travelling for half-an-hour when they reached a field in which Durwent saw two companies of his battalion drawn up in the form of a hollow square. Faint with shame, staggering under the hideous cruelty of the whole thing, he was marched into the centre and ordered to take a pace forward, while the commanding officer read the sentence of court-martial to the men: that Private Sherwood, being found guilty of drunkenness while on guard—it being further proved that he had obtained unlawful possession of the liquor—was to be shot at dawn, and that the sentence would be carried out the following morning.

Although his senses reeled with the shock and ignominy of it all, the prisoner's bearing showed no sign of it. With his head erect, he looked into the faces of the men whom he

had lived and slept and fought beside; men with whom he had shared privation and danger; men who had been his comrades through it all. But as he searched their faces he felt an overpowering loneliness. In the eyes of every one there was horror; To be killed in battle—what was that? But to be shot like a cur in the grizzly morning! Yet their horror, their anger, was against the military law, and was born of a fear that the same thing might come to them. It was that which cut him to the quick. It was not that *he* was to be shot the next day, but that *they* might meet a similar fate. That was the fear which drove the blood from their cheeks and left their lips parted in awe.

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And then he saw a face which almost broke down his manhood, and sent scalding tears to the very brink. It was the face of the lad he had saved from deserting that terrible night. The boy's agony was for him alone; it was pleading for understanding; it was trying to tell him that he would never forget—that the condemned man would not go to his death unmourned by one human heart.

III.

It was his last night. All evening the chaplain had been with him, offering the solace of divine mercy and forgiveness; but though he was grateful for the good man's ministrations, Durwent felt that he wanted to be alone. He hardly knew why; but there were many things to think of, things which would be remembered more easily if he were by himself. Towards eleven o'clock he made the request of the chaplain, who left him, promising to return shortly after midnight; and, with his hands clasped behind his back, Dick walked slowly up and down the hut.

His mind journeyed to Roselawn—and Elise. At least—and at the thought he struck his hands together with joy—she would never know. She would think he had died in China. For several minutes he walked without his thoughts taking any other form than that, but gradually the realisation of his surroundings began to leave him. He was roaming through the woods with Elise; they were climbing a great tree for birds' eggs; they were casting flies for trout in the stream that ran through their estate; they were riding across country on ponies that whinnied with pleasure at the feel of the soft turf. But wherever his hungry imagination painted her, there was in her face the womanly tenderness that had always been hers in their companionship.

He stopped in his walk and pressed his clenched fingers against his lips. She had always believed in him. Through all the hell in which the Fates had cast his destiny, she had been one star towards which he could grope. But now—a drunkard—a renegade soldier of a renegade battalion—to be shot. He had killed her trust! The horrors of the night closed on him like hounds on a dying stag.

Uttering a dull cry of agony, he staggered across the hut with outstretched hands—and in the darkness his poor disordered fancy saw once more the vision of his sister's face. It was as he had seen her when, as a boy bruised by life, he had gone to her for solace. She had not changed. She could not change. Her eyes, her lips, were saying that in the morning she would stand beside him, holding his hand in hers, until the levelled rifles severed his soul and his body for eternity.

He sank to his knees, and for the first time in many years he prayed. It was a prayer to an unknown God, in words that were meaningless, disjointed things. It was a soul crying out to its source, a soul struggling towards the throne of Eternal Justice, through

a darkness lit only by a sister's love and the gratitude of an eighteen-year-old boy saved from shameful death.

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The commands of the sergeant of the guard could be heard as sentries were changed. Durwent rose to his feet and tried to look from the window, but the night was as black as the grave which had already been dug for him. Once more there was no sound but the wind moaning about the deserted fields.

'Mas'r Dick.'

Dick's body grew rigid. Was it a prank of his mind, or had he really heard the words?

'Mas'r Dick.'

The door had opened an inch. His heart beat wildly, and he crouched close to the crevice.

'Mathews!' he gasped.

'Sh-sh.' An admonishing hand touched him. 'Come close, sir. This is a dirty business, Mas'r Dick. If you hear me cough noticeable, get back and pretend like you're asleep.'

'But—but, in God's name, what are you doing there?'

'I'm a-guardin' you, sir. Sh-sh.'

The old groom moved a couple of paces away from the door, humming a song about a coachman who loved a turnkey's daughter. Almost mad with excitement, Dick stood in the darkness of the hut with his outstretched arms shaking and quivering. He was afraid he would shout, and bit his finger-nails to help to repress the wild desire.

'Mas'r Dick.'

In an instant he was crouching again by the door.

'There'll be a orficer's inspection,' whispered the sentry, 'a minute or two arter midnight. When that there little ceremony has took place, you and me is goin' for a walk.'

'Where?'

'Anywheres, Mas'r Dick.'

'You mean—to escape?'

'Precisely so, sir.'

For a moment his pulses beat furiously with hope; but the realisation of what it meant for the old groom killed it like a sudden frost. 'No, Mathews,' he whispered. 'It isn't fair to you. I am not going to try to escape. Give me your hand; I want to say good-bye.'



For answer, the imperturbable Mathews moved off again, and, in a soft but most unmusical bass, sang the second verse about the amorous coachman and the susceptible turnkey's daughter. Dick listened, hanging greedily on every little sound with its atmosphere of Roselawn.

'Mas'r Dick.' Mathews had returned. 'No argifyin' won't get you nowhere. If I have to knock you atwixt the ears and drag you out by the 'eels, you're comin' out o' that there stall to-night. I ain't goin' for to see a Durwent made a target of. No, sir; not if I have to blow the whole army up, and them frog-eaters along with 'em. Close that door, Mas'r Dick. I've got a contrary temper, and can't stand no argifyin' like. Close that door, sir.'

Almost crazed with excitement, Dick strode about the hut. Even if he were to get away, the chances of capture were overwhelming. But—to be shot in an open fight for freedom! That would be a thousand times better than death by an open grave. Freedom! The word was intoxication. To breathe the air of heaven once again—to feel the canopy of the stars—to smell the musk of flowers and new grass! If only for an hour; yet, what an hour!

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And then the chance, remote, but still within the realm of possibility, of reaching the front line, where men died like men. Of all the desires he had ever known, none had gripped him like the longing for battle, where death and honour were inseparable.

But once more the thought of Mathews chilled his purpose. It would mean penal servitude or worse for the old groom, and he was not going to be the means of ruining him for his faithfulness. He could not stoop so low as that.

These and a hundred similar thoughts flashed through his mind, and he was no nearer their solution when the door was opened and a sergeant shouted a command. He started. For a second he thought that dawn might be breaking, and that his hour had arrived; but an officer came up the steps, and he saw with a quiver of relief that it was the nightly inspection.

'Everything all right?'

'Yes, sir,' he answered.

'Where's the chaplain?'

'He'll be back directly, sir.'

'Food all right—everything possible being done for you?'

'I have no complaints, sir.'

In the light of the lamp held by the sergeant the two men looked at each other. Without saying anything more, the officer glanced about the hut. 'That will do, sergeant.—Good-night.'

'Good-night, sir,' answered Durwent.

The officer had hardly reached the door, where the sergeant had preceded him with the light, when he turned back impulsively and put out his hand. 'I suppose this sort of thing is necessary,' he said hoarsely; 'but it's a damned rotten affair altogether.'

They clasped hands; and turning on his heel, the officer left the hut.

'Take every precaution, sergeant,' Dick heard him say; 'and send a runner to the chaplain with my compliments. Tell him he must not leave the prisoner.'

'Very good, sir.'

Silence again—and the crunching of the sentries' heels on the sparsely sprinkled gravel. The ordeal was becoming unbearable. Dick feared the passing of the minutes

which would bring back the chaplain, and yet every minute seemed an eternity. The conflict ravaged his very soul. Was he to take the chance offered him by the strangest trick of Destiny, or remain and die like a rat caught in a trap?

‘Mas’r Dick.’

The door was quietly opened. The old groom’s hand fell on his arm and drew him firmly outwards. He tried to pull back, but with unexpected strength the older man exerted pressure, until Dick found himself outside.

It was so dark that he could not see a yard ahead of him as Mathews, retaining his grip on his companion’s arm, led him towards the road. They were nearly clear of the field, when the groom stopped abruptly, and they lay flat on the ground. It was the orderly officer and the sergeant returning from the inspection of a hut some distance off.

‘Sentry.’ The officer had paused opposite the hut where the prisoner had been.

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'Yes, sir,' came the answer from the soldier still on guard at the other door.

'Has the chaplain returned?'

'Not yet, sir.'

With an impatient exclamation, the officer went on towards the village; and gaining their feet, the two men reached the road.

'There's a path alongside, sir,' whispered Mathews, 'and you and me is goin' to put as much terry-firmy atwixt this village and us as our four legs can do. Now, sir, we're off!'

With lowered heads, they broke into a run. Stumbling over unseen stones, lacerating their hands and faces against bushes which over-hung the path, they ran on into the dark. Once a staff car passed them, and they huddled in a ditch; but it was only for a few seconds, and they were up again. Unless they were unfortunate enough to run right into the arms of the military police, the night was offering every chance of success. A barking dog warned them that they had come to the outskirts of another village. Leaving the road, they circled the place by tortuously making their way through uneven fields, until they thought it safe once more to take the path. On they ran—past silent fields—by streams—by murky swamps.

Towards dawn Dick was faint with fatigue. The ordeal of the last month had cruelly sapped his vitality, and as he ran he found himself stumbling to his knees.

'Hold hard, sir,' said the groom, who was leading. 'Another mile or so, and you and me, sir, will breathe ourselves proper.'

Only another mile—but a mile of utter anguish. Twice Dick fell, and the second time he could not rise without assistance.

'Mas'r Dick,' pleaded the groom, 'look 'ee, sir. Up yonder hill somewheres about I knows there is a cornfield, for I have noted it many a time. 'We can't hide here, sir, in this stubble. Lean on me, Mas'r Dick—that's the way. Now, sir, for England, 'ome, and beauty.'

Struggling to retain his consciousness, Dick limped beside the old servitor, until, gaining the hill, they saw an abandoned cornfield. There was a roll of guns as they made their way into the field, and through the dense blackness of the night a few streaks of gray could be seen towards the east.

Without a sound, Dick sank to the ground in complete exhaustion. The groom unstrapped his own greatcoat, which had been carried rolled, and covered the lad with it. Taking a thermos bottle from his haversack, he poured some hot tea between Dick's lips, and saw a little glow of warmth creep into the cheeks.



'Now, sir,' he said, 'take a bit 'o' this sandwich. 'Ave another swig o' the tea. Bless my heart, sir, won't them fellers be surprised when they finds as how they ain't got no corpse for their funeral? That's better, sir. I will say about army tea that even if it ain't what my old woman would make, it's rare an' strong, Mas'r Dick—rare an' strong an' powerful, likewise and sim'lar.'

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'Mathews,' said Dick weakly, 'how was it—you were on guard—last night? Was it just an accident?'

'Yes, sir. Just a accident. Well, not precisely a accident neither, sir. I be what the War Office calls "a headquarter troop," and do odd jobs behind the lines. Sometimes I dig graves, and other times I be a officer's servant, and likewise do a turn o' sentry-go. Well, sir, when I heard that you was a prisoner and was goin' for to be shot, I persuades the corp'l to put me on guard, exchangin' a diggin' job with a bloke by the name o' Griggs, so as not to incormode the records o' the War Office. That's all, sir. There I were, and here we be; and arter you've had a sleep, you and me will have a jaw on our immed'ate future. 'Ave a good snooze, Mas'r Dick, and I'll keep an eye trimmed on the road.'

With the same boyishness he had shown that night in Selwyn's rooms, Dick put out his hand and pressed the old groom's arm. With a paternal air, Mathews patted the hand with his own and reached for his pipe, explaining that he would steal a smoke before daylight. But the lad did not hear him. He was lost in a deep, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FIGHT FOR THE BRIDGE.

I.

It was nearly noon when the tired youth awoke. He looked wonderingly about, and there was a haunting fear in his light eyes, like those of a stag that dreads the hunters. From the north there came the sound of drum-fire, a weird, almost tedious, rhythm of guns working at a feverish pace; and the near-by road was a mass of jumbled traffic. Ambulances, supply-wagons, field-artillery, lorries, with jingling harness or snorting engines—streams of vehicles moved slowly up and down their channel. At a reckless speed motorcyclists, carrying urgent messages, swerved through it all; and in the ditches that ran alongside, refugees were stumbling on, fleeing from the new terror, their crouching, misshapen figures like players from a grotesque drama of the Macabre.

'The sausage-eaters,' said Mathews philosophically, 'must be feelin' their oats, sir.'

At the sound of the familiar voice the fear passed from Dick's face. Memory had returned, and he smiled, though his body trembled as if with a chill. 'I'm starved,' he said, 'and I have nothing with me. How long did I sleep, Mathews?'

'Pretty near seven hours, Mas'r Dick. Here you are, sir—feedin'-time, and the bugle's went.'

He handed Durwent a sandwich, which the young man devoured ravenously, washing it down with some cold tea. Mathews also munched at a sandwich, and through the cornstalks they watched the two currents of war-traffic eddying past each other. There was a roar of engines behind them, and, flying low, a formation of sixteen British aeroplanes made in a straight line for the battle area.

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With a map which the groom had thoughtfully borrowed from an officer the previous day, Dick managed to gain fairly accurate information as to their position. By calculation he figured out that they had travelled seventeen or eighteen miles during the night, and identifying the main road on which they had come, he saw that after two or three miles it would take a rectangular turn to the right, running parallel to the line of battle. Four miles to the south-east of the turning-point there was a river, and this the fugitives decided to reach that night.

'If we can locate that,' said Dick eagerly, 'it is bound to lead us into the French lines.'

'Werry good, sir,' said the groom, with an air of resignation. His contempt for maps and their unintelligibility was deep-rooted, but if his young master thought he could locate a river with one, he would keep an open mind on the subject until it had, at least, been given a fair trial.

'You see,' said Durwent, 'a great many of these troops on the road are French, so when we follow that route we must get into French territory.'

'Yezzir,' said Mathews profoundly. 'I won't go for to say as 'ow you mayn't be right. All the same, Mas'r Dick, when it comes to enterin' the ring wi' them sausage-eaters I'd raither 'ave a dozen Lancashire or Devon lads about me than all the Frenchies you could put in Hyde Park. It ain't that these here spec'mens don't 'ave a good sound heart as far as standin' up and takin' knocks is concerned, but they be too frisky and skittish for my likin'. I see 'em all wavin' their arms like as if a carriage and pair has run away, and talkin' all at once and together, likewise and sim'lar. Wot's more, they does it in a lingo that no one can't go for to make out, not even a Frenchy hisself, because I never see one Frog listenin' to another—did you, sir? Wot's more, sir, they gets all of a lather over things which is only fit for women-folk to worry on—such as w'ether a hen has laid its egg reg'lar; or the coffee, was it black enough? From wot I see as puts a Frog in a dither, I sez to myself that if you was to take him to a real hoss-race, he'd never see the finish. No, sir; he'd be dead o' heart-failure afore the hosses was off.'

Dick smiled at the tremendous seriousness of the old groom, and lay back wearily on the ground. 'We had better both turn in for another nap,' he said. 'We'll need all our strength to-night, and if we stay awake we're sure to get hungry.'

'Werry sound advice, Mas'r Dick,' said Mathews. 'But would I be presumin', sir, to ask you a favour? I got a letter yesterday from my old woman, and wot with her writin' and me bein' nought o' a scholar, I was wonderin', Mas'r Dick, if you would just acquaint me with any fac's that you might think the old girl would like me for to know.'

'Willingly,' said Dick, taking a sealed letter from the groom, who squatted solemnly on the ground, assuming an air of deep contemplation, as one who has to give an opinion on a hitherto unread masterpiece.

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'It begins,' said Dick, with some difficulty making out the writing, which was extremely small in some words and very large in others, and punctuated mainly with blots—"Dear Daddy"—

'That,' said Mathews, 'is conseckens o' me bein' sire to little Wellington.'

'Oh yes,' said Dick. "Dear Daddy, ther ain't nothing to tell you Wellington has took the mumps and the cat had some more kittens"—

'That's a werry remark'ble cat,' observed Mathews. 'I never see a animal so ambitious. Wot does the old girl say Wellington has took?'

'Mumps.'

'By Criky! I hope it don't go for to make his nose no bigger. Wot a infant he is! Mumps! Go on, Mas'r Dick—the old girl's doin' fine.'

"The day," resumed Dick—"the day afor Tuesday come last week"—

'Don't pull up, sir,' said Mathews as Dick paused to re-read the puzzling words. 'You has to take my old woman at a good clip to get her meanin'—but you'll find it hid somewere, Mas'r Dick. I never see the old girl come a cropper yet.'

With this to guide him, the reader found his place again with the aid of a blot, a half-inch square, which surrounded the first word. "The day afor Tuesday," he went on, "come last week Wellington and the rector's boy Charlie fit."

'Werry good,' said Mathews approvingly.

"Wellington's nose were badly done in and he looks awful bad but the rector's boy"—

'Wot does she say about him?' asked Mathews, staring into space.

"The rector's boy could not see out of neither eye for 3 days."

Repressing a chuckle by a great effort, Mathews hastily fumbled for his corncob pipe, and placing it unlit in his mouth, continued to look into space with a face that was almost purple from smothered exuberance.

"Milord and Lady," resumed Dick, "is just the same and Milord always asks how you was and will I remember him to you."

'A thoroughbred—that's wot he is,' said Mathews, apparently addressing the distant refugees.



"Miss Elise was heer last week and is that sweet grown that all the woonded tommies fit with pillos to see who wud propos to her. There ain't no news. Bertha the skullery maid marrid a hyland soldier and they are going for to keep a sweet-shop after the war. Wellington sprayned his ankil yesterday by clyming out of the windo where I had locked him in as he has the mumps."

'Wot a infant!' commented Mathews admiringly.

"I am sending you a parsil and a picter of me and Wellington. We are very lonesum, daddy, and I'll be reel glad when the war is over and you come back. It is awful lonesum and Wellington is to. This morning he cut his hand trying to carv our best chair into the shape of a horse. I am feeling fine and hope the reumatiz don't worry you no more. With heeps of love from me and Wellington, your wife, Maggie."

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It was a strange contrast in faces as the young man folded the letter and handed it back. In the countenance of the groom there was a sturdy pride in the epistolary achievement of his wife—a pride which he made a violent but unsuccessful effort to conceal. In the pale, handsome face of the young aristocrat there was a whimsical pathos. By the picture conjured up in the crudely written letter he had seen his parents, his sister, the humble cottage of the groom, and the wife's faithfulness and cheeriness. He had seen them, not as separate things, but hallowed and unified by a common sacrifice for England.

For the first time since his escape Dick Durwent regretted it. He could see no safety ahead for Mathews, no matter how long they evaded arrest. Although a cool, fretful wind was blowing over the fields, the warm noon sun made his eyelids heavy.

Against the wish of the groom, he insisted upon spreading the greatcoat over them both, and in a few minutes master and man were resting side by side as comrades.

'Mathews,' said Dick quietly.

'Yezzir?'

'Give me your word that if you ever reach England you will never tell my family about this. They don't know I am in France, and'——

'Mum as a oyster, sir—that's the ticket. Werry good, Mas'r Dick. A oyster it is.'

Ten minutes had passed without either of them speaking, when Mathews partially raised himself on one elbow. 'If women,' he said ruminatingly, 'was to have votes, my old girl would run for Parlyment, sure as skittles. I wonder, Mas'r Dick, if a feller who courted a girl in good faith, and arter a few years found she were Prime Minister of England——would that constitoot grounds for divorce?'

But Dick was asleep, and dreaming of days when happiness was in the air one breathed; when brother and sister had revelled in nature's carnival of seasons. After several minutes' contemplation of the uncertainty of married life, the old groom followed him into a slumber which was unattended by dreams, but did not lack a sonorous serenade.

II.

The night was streaked with tragedy as the fugitives stole to the road. The drum-fire of the guns had grown to a roar, through which there came the blast and the crash of siege artillery, shaking the earth to its very foundations, as if the gases of hell had ignited and were bursting through. As though by lightning striking low, the night was lit with flashes illuminating the fields and the roads about; and shells were screaming and whining

through the air, winged, blood-sucking monsters crying for their prey. Across a yellow moon broken clouds were driven on a gale that whipped the dust of the roads into moaning whirlpools.

Dense traffic moved sullenly on, the ghostly figures of drivers astride horses that whinnied in terror of the night. Not a light was shown. There were only the glimpses of the sickly moonlight and the flame-red flashes of the guns; and, unnoticed, Durwent and the groom followed beside a lorry.

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Once, as they strode forward in the roar and horror of the dark, they heard the explosion of a shell that, by a trick of ill-luck, had found the road. There followed the shriek of wounded horses, quick commands penetrating the darkness. Corpses of men, dead horses, and shattered vehicles were drawn aside, and the long line that had been halted for four minutes closed the gap and moved on.

When they reached the turn in the road, they left the shadowy procession and made for the river by following a soft wagon-path that cut across the fields. For two hours they hurried on through the night's madness. More than once they were almost thrown to the ground by the terrific explosion of heavy guns that had taken up positions by the path; and by the flashes in the fields they could see the weird figures of the gunners toiling at their work of death.

As they neared the river they caught a glimpse of coloured flares not far ahead, and there came a momentary lull in the confused bombardment.

'Listen!' cried Dick.

From somewhere on the banks of the river there was the sound of rifle-fire, and the rat-tat-tat of machine-guns, like the rattle of riveters at work on a steel structure.

Following a tow-path which ran by the river, they appeared to be entering a zone of comparative quiet. Although the sound of rifle-fire grew more clear, the noise of the guns came from behind them, but to the right and the left. For an hour they ran rapidly forward, and it seemed that the tide of battle had swept to the north, leaving this area denuded of troops. They saw neither guns nor infantry, although a renewed burst of machine-gun fire told them they were nearing their unknown destination.

They had not started from their hiding-place until nearly midnight, and as they reached a slight rise of the ground they could see that the darkness was slowly lifting with day's approach.

'See, sir,' said the groom, pointing ahead, 'yonder side o' the river to the right.'

'I can't see anything,'

'Look 'ee, Mas'r Dick. Follow the river. I think that that there gray streak is a bridge.'

It was not until they had gone ahead a considerable distance that Durwent could make out a heavy bridge spanning the river, which ran with a swift current, and was more than two hundred feet in width. A blurring red was tinting the black clouds in the east as they crept along the path, when they heard a sharp challenge.

'Friends,' cried Dick, and halted.

‘Stand still until I give you the once over.’ An American corporal, who had apparently been running and was out of breath, came up to them, carrying a revolver, and looked closely into their faces.

‘What are you doing here?’ he asked.

‘Stragglers,’ answered Durwent, ‘separated from our unit.’

‘Where in Samhill is the rest of your army?’

‘There are no troops back here for ten miles,’ answered Dick.

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The American took off his helmet and wiped his brow.

'Jumping Jehosophat!' he exclaimed ruefully, 'do I have to marathon ten miles and back? They sure are generous with exercise in the army. Say, you guys—if you're on the level about being stragglers, and want a real honest-to-God showdown scrap, you hike over that bridge. Do you see that big tree over in the bush? Can you make it out? Well, when you get across the river, just line your lamps on that tree, and after half a mile or so you'll come to a sunken road. Report to Major Van Derwater, and tell him you're the only army M'Goorty—that's me—has found so far. And tell him I'll discover the French admiral who is supposed to be bringing up reinforcements, if I have to search this whole one-horse country for him. You'd better get a move on before the light comes up, for, believe me, Lizzie, those Boches can shoot, and if ever they see you coming across that bridge you may as well kiss yourselves good-bye.'

Having delivered himself of this expressive monologue, the corporal replaced the revolver in its holster and took a seaman's hitch in his breeches. Again the machine-guns spat out, the sound seeming to be borne on the wind as the bullets traversed the air.

'Gosh!' said the corporal, 'but I'd give a year's tips to see that scrap out. They had the bulge on us by about three to one, and we had to back up to keep the line straight, but now we're holding them great. Say—we've got a bunch of bowhunks there who could shoot the wart off a snail. Some scrap, believe me. Well, so long.'

He had just started off at a run, when he stopped and turned round. 'If you ever come to New York, look me up at the Belmont. I'm a waiter there, and I can put you wise to a lot of things. Chin, Chin!'

'Cheerio,' answered Dick, as the energetic corporal disappeared.

'I'm gettin' 'ard o' 'earin',' said the old groom. 'Leastways I ain't sure I 'eerd 'im correct. Wot did 'e say?'

'Mathews!'—Dick turned to his servant, and his voice shook with excitement—'there's a battle going on the other side of the river, and we're to report to Major Van Derwater. By heavens, Mathews! I feel half-mad with joy. They didn't get us after all, did they? We sha'n't be shot like curs, at any rate. Think of it, old man—we've won out! They can't stop us now'—His words stopped suddenly. 'Mathews,' he said, 'you must not come. Stay here, and join the reinforcements when they turn up. You have to consider your wife and little Wellington.'

For answer the groom started along the path towards the bridge, and Durwent was forced to break into a run before he could head him off.

'Mathews,' he said sternly.

'Mas'r Dick,' replied the groom, snorting violently, 'you shouldn't go for to insult me. Beggin' your pardon and meanin' no disrespeck, this here war is as much mine as yourn. Orders or no orders, I'm agoin' to have a howd'ee with them sausage-eaters, and, as that there free-spoke young gen'l'man observed, the bridge ain't exactly a chancery in the daylight. Come along, sir; argifyin' don't get nowhere.'

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Realising that further expostulation was useless, Dick followed the groom to the bridge. As they crossed it he noted that it was strongly built of steel, with supports that would bear the heaviest of weights. Gaining the opposite side, they waited as Dick took his bearings by the tree; and crossing a hard, chalky field, they stole towards the sunken road. They could hear the occasional crack of a rifle, and there was the *ping* of a bullet passing over their heads as they pressed on through the lightening gloom.

'Halt!'

A voice rang out, and they were questioned as to their identity. On being ordered to advance, they jumped down into a sunken road which constituted an admirable trench, and were at once surrounded by American soldiers.

'I was ordered to report to Major Van Derwater,' said Durwent.

They were asked various questions, and were then escorted a few yards to the right, where an officer was looking over the bank which hid the road.

'British stragglers, sir,' said the sergeant who had taken charge of them.

'What unit are you from?' asked the officer.

His voice was calm and deep, but gave no indication as to how he felt disposed towards the two fugitives. In answer to his question Dick gave the name of his battalion, and Mathews did the same.

'How did you know my name?'

'We met your corporal, sir,' said Durwent.

'Where are your rifles?'

'Lost them, sir.'

'In what engagement were you cut off from your units?'

Dick tried to reply, but not only was he ignorant of the locality through which he had travelled, but his soul burned with resentment at being forced into lying. Mathews said nothing, and seemed quite untroubled. He was prepared to accept his young master's choice of engagements for his own, no matter where or when it might have taken place.

'I don't like this,' said the officer. 'These men are a long way from the British lines, and are either deserters or worse. Guard them closely, and if things get hot, tie their arms together so they will give no trouble.'



'Very good, sir,' answered the sergeant, preparing to lead them away; but Durwent, whose blood, had run cold with dismay at the officer's words, struggled forward.

'Sir,' he cried, 'if you think I'm not to be trusted, give me a dirty job—anything. A bombing-raid, or a patrol—I'll do anything at all, sir, if you'll only give me a chance.'

'Well spoke, Mas'r Dick,' said Mathews proudly. 'Werry well spoke indeed.'

The officer, who had been about to issue a peremptory order, stopped at the sturdy honesty of the groom's voice. 'Send for Captain Selwyn,' he said. 'You will find him at the creek.'

III.

By a creek that trickled across the road, Captain Austin Selwyn was watching the brushwood which concealed the enemy. Beside him, lining the bank, every available man was on the alert, waiting the developments which would follow the raising of night's curtain. In the misty gray of dawn they looked fabulous in size, and indistinct.

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The night in January at the University Club in New York had marked a reconciliation between Selwyn and Van Derwater. With the issue between America and Germany so clearly defined, they had both lent their voices to the insistent demand for war. At first people had been incredulous, and hazarded the guess that the young author was endeavouring to cover his own tracks; but when he enlisted in the ranks at the outbreak of hostilities, they made a popular hero of him. They spoke of him as the Spirit of the Cause; but he paid little attention to the clamour. His joy in the prospect of action, and the release from all his mental tortures, had produced in him a kind of frenzy, that crystallised into an intense hatred of Germany.

The pendulum had swung to its extreme. Once a man animated with a passionate humanitarianism, in whom the spirit of universal brotherhood burned with an inextinguishable force, he had become a creature drunk with lust for revenge. Patriotism, Justice, Freedom—they were all catch-words to hide the brutal, primeval instinct to kill.

In the little thought which he permitted himself, Selwyn argued that the ignorance of many nations had made war possible, but only Germany had been vile enough to try to exploit it for the achievement of world-power. For that reason alone she was a thing of detestation.

His enthusiasm and quickly acquired knowledge of army routine marked him for promotion. He was given a commission, and at the request of Van Derwater was attached to the same regiment as himself. Together they had crossed to France, and were among the first American troops in action.

In the months that followed, Selwyn had revelled in the carnage and the excitement of war. He was reckless to the point of bravado, and his keen dramatic instinct drove him into unnecessary escapades where his senses could enjoy a thrill not far removed from insanity. Only when out of the line, when the mockery and the hideousness of the whole thing demanded his mind's solution, would the mood of despondency return. But in the trenches he knew neither pity nor fear. Men fought for the privilege of serving under him, and with their instinct for euphony and love of the bizarre gave him the name of 'Hell-fire.' He gloried in the physical ascendancy of it all—in the dangers—in the discomforts. He was an instrument of revenge, a weapon without feeling.

On the other hand, Van Derwater had undergone no appreciable change. He carried himself with the same dignity and formality as in his days at Washington—except when emergency would scatter the wits of his fellow-officers, and he would suddenly become a dynamic force, vigorous in conception and swift of action. Yet success or failure left him unmoved, once a crisis had passed. His men respected but did not understand him. They wove a legend about his name. They said he had come to France wanting to be killed, but that no bullet could touch him. And even those who scoffed, when they

saw him, unruffled and strangely solitary, moving about with almost ironic contempt of danger, wondered if there might not be some truth in the story.

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'Major Van Derwater would like to speak to you right away, sir.'

Telling a non-commissioned officer to take his place, Selwyn followed the messenger along the road until they came to the spot which Van Derwater had chosen for his headquarters. Daylight was emerging from its retreat, and there was the promise of a warm day in the glowing east.

'You sent for me, sir?' he said.

'Yes. You might question these two British stragglers. Their story is not straight, but they seem decent enough fellows. If you are not satisfied'——

He was interrupted by an exclamation of astonishment from Selwyn, who had noticed the Englishmen for the first time.

'Great Scott!' gasped Selwyn. 'Dick Durwent!'

Dick looked up, and at the sight of the American's face he uttered a cry of relief. 'Is that really you, Selwyn? What luck! You remember Mathews at Roselawn, don't you? You can say'——

'Good-mornin', sir,' said the unperturbed groom. 'This is a werry pleasant surprise, to be sure. How are you, sir?'

'Van,' said Selwyn, after shaking hands with them both, 'this is Lord Durwent's son, and the other is his groom, Mathews. I will vouch for them absolutely.'

'Good!' Van Derwater slightly inclined his head as an indication that he was satisfied. 'We need every man. You had better take them in your section and equip them with rifles from casualties.'

IV.

A few minutes later, after he had procured food for the two men, who were growing faint with hunger, Selwyn resumed his post. The heavy grass fringing the bank made it possible to keep watch without being directly exposed as a target; but beyond a desultory rifle-fire about a mile on their right, there was no indication of enemy activity.

When Durwent had been equipped with a steel helmet and a rifle, Selwyn called him over to his side, and as concisely as possible explained the military situation. In the German attack against the French forces (with which the Americans were brigaded) the line had been swept back. Deep salients had been driven in on both their flanks, but orders had been received to hold the bridge at all costs, as, if a counter-attack could be launched, it would be an enfilading one made by troops brought across the river.

Relying on their machine-gun and rifle fire to overcome the Americans' resistance, the enemy's artillery had been drawn into the deepening salients; but in spite of all-day fighting the straggling line had held.

After a few questions from Durwent they relapsed into silence, gazing at the undulating expanse of country revealed by the ascending sun.

'Selwyn.' Dick cleared his throat nervously. 'I must tell you the truth. You were decent enough to stand sponsor for Mathews and me, and I want you to know everything. The major was right. We're not stragglers—we're deserters.'



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Selwyn made no comment, and both men stared fixedly through the long grass that drooped with heavy dew.

'Yesterday morning,' said Durwent dully, 'I was to have been shot. I was drunk in the line, and deserved it. It's no use trying to excuse myself. I fancy my nerves were a bit gone after what we'd been through the last few months, but—— Well, I suppose I am simply a failure, as that chap said in London—there isn't much more to it than that. By a queer deal of the cards, Mathews was on guard, and helped me to escape. It was rotten of me to let him take the chance; but it's been that way all through. Even at the end of everything—after being a waster and a rotter since I was a kid—I have to drag this poor chap down with me. Promise, Selwyn, if you come out of this alive, that you'll fight his case for him.'

Selwyn murmured assent, but he was trying to shake off a haunting feeling that was enveloping him like a mist—a feeling that everything the young Englishman was saying he had heard before. It left him dazed, and made Durwent's voice sound far away. He tried to dismiss it as an illogical prank of the mind, but the thing was relentless. He could not rid himself of the thought that sometime in the past—months, years, perhaps centuries ago—this pitiful scene had been enacted before.

It chilled his soul with its presage of disaster. He saw the hand of destiny, and everything in him rebelled against the inexorable cruelty of it all. It was infamous that any life should be dominated by a whim of the Fates; that any creature should enter this world with a silken cord about his throat. Destiny. Does it mould our lives; or do our lives, inundated with the forces of heredity, mould our destinies? He tried to grapple with the thought; but through the pain and confusion of his mind he could only feel the presence of unseen fingers spelling out the words written in a hidden past.

'I wonder,' said Durwent, after a pause of several minutes, during which neither had spoken, 'what happens when this is finished.'

'Do you mean—after death?' said Selwyn, forcing his mind clear of its clouds.

Durwent nodded and leaned wearily with his arms on the bank. 'I tried to think it out the night before I was to be shot,' he said. 'I can't just say what I did think—but I know there's something after this world. Selwyn, is there a God? I wonder if there will be another chance for the men who have made a mess of things here.'

The American turned towards the young fellow, whose pale face looked singularly boyish, and had a wistfulness that touched him to his very heart. Durwent was gazing over the grass into the distance, oblivious of everything about him, and in the blue of his eyes, which borrowed lustre from the morning, there was the mysticism of one who is searching for the land which lies beyond this life's horizon.

'I wonder,' repeated Durwent dreamily.

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Selwyn tried to frame words for a reply, but skilled as he was in the interpretation of thought, he was dumb in confession of his faith. He longed to speak the things which might have brought comfort to the lad's harassed soul, but everything which came to him, echoing from his former years, was so inadequate, so tinctured with smug complacency. Was there a God?

The question left him mute.

'There are times,' went on Durwent, almost to himself, 'when my head is full of strange fancies—when I'm listening to music—or at dawn like this. While I was under arrest, a little French girl who had heard I was to die brought some flowers she had picked for me. When I think of that girl, and her flowers, and Elise, and the faithfulness of old Mathews, I do believe there is some kind of a God. . . . Selwyn'—unconsciously his hands stretched forward supplicatingly—'surely these things can't die? . . . There's been so much that's ugly and lonely in my life. . . . Don't you believe that we fellows who have failed will be able to have a little of the things we've missed down here?'

'Dick,' said Selwyn hoarsely, 'I believe'——

The words faltered on his lips, and in silence the two men stood together in the presence of the day's birth. There was a strange calm in the air. The dew on the grass caught a faint sparkle from a ray of sunlight that penetrated the eastern skies.

V.

'The Boches, sir! They're coming!'

The sergeant's warning rang out, and in an instant the air was shattered with battle. Protected by the fire from a nest of machine-guns, the Germans launched a converging attack towards the bridge. Waiting until the advancing troops were too close to permit the aid of their own machine-gun fire, the Americans poured a deadly hail of bullets into their ranks. The attack broke, but fresh troops were thrown in, and the line was penetrated at several points.

Van Derwater rallied his men, directed the defence, and time after time organised or led counter-attacks which restored their position. His voice rose sonorously above everything. Hearing it, and seeing his powerful figure oblivious to the bullets which stung the air all about him, his men yelled that they could never be beaten so long as he led them.

Half-mad with excitement, Selwyn repelled the attacks on his sector, though his casualties were heavy and ammunition was running low. Durwent's mood of reverie had passed, and he fought with limitless energy. Once, when the Huns had penetrated the road, one of their officers levelled a revolver on him, but discharged the bullet into



the ground as the butt of Mathews's rifle was brought smashing on his wrist. The old groom followed his master with eyes that saw only the danger hanging over him. For his own safety he gave no care, but wherever Dick stepped or turned, the groom was by his side, with his large, rough face set in a look that was like that of a mastiff protecting its young.

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As waves breaking against a rock, the Huns retreated, rallied, and attacked again and again, and each time the resistance was less formidable as the heroic little band grew smaller and the ugly story passed that ammunition was giving out.

They had just thrown back an assault, and Van Derwater had sent for his section commanders to advise an attack on the enemy in preference to waiting to be wiped out with no chance of successful resistance, when he heard a shout, and bullets spat over their heads. Turning swiftly about, they saw a tank lurching across the bridge. Amidst wild shouting from the Americans, the clumsy landship stumbled towards them, with bullets glancing harmlessly off its metal carcass. Lumbering on to the road, the tank stopped astride it.

In almost complete forgetfulness of the impending enemy attack, the jubilant Americans crowded about the machine and cheered its occupants to the echo, as a small door was opened and two French faces could be seen. In a few words Van Derwater explained the situation, receiving the discouraging information that no troops were anywhere near the vicinity. The tank had been discovered by the ex-Belmont waiter and sent on to the bridge.

'Pass word along,' said Van Derwater crisply, 'to prepare for an attack. The tank will go first, and when it is astride their machine-gun position we will go forward and drive them out of the brushwood into the open.—Messieurs, the machine-guns are gathered there—straight across, about forty yards from the great tree.'

The Frenchmen tried to locate the spot indicated, but were obviously puzzled and too excited to listen attentively. Van Derwater was about to repeat his instructions, when Dick Durwent shouldered his way into the group. Men's voices were hushed at the sight of his blazing eyes.

In a bound he was on the bank, and stood exposed to the enemy's fire. With something that was like a laugh and yet had an unearthly quality about it, he threw his helmet off and stood bareheaded in the golden sunlight. '*En avant, messieurs!*' he cried. '*Suivez-moi!*'

There was a grinding of the gears and a roar of machinery as the tank reared its head and lunged after him.

'Stop that man, Selwyn!'

Van Derwater's voice rang out just in time. The old groom had scrambled to the bank to follow his master, but four hands grasped him and pulled him back. With a moan he clung to the bank, following Dick with his eyes. And his face was the colour of ashes.



With their voices almost rising to a scream, the chafing Americans watched the Englishman walk towards the enemy lines. Bullets bit the ground near his feet, but, untouched, he went on, with the metal monster following behind. Once he fell, and a hush came over the watchers; but he rose and limped on. His face pale and grim, Van Derwater moved among his men, urging them to wait; but they cursed and yelled at the delay.

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Again Dick fell, and with difficulty stumbled to his feet. For a moment he swayed as if a heavy gale were blowing against him, and as his face turned towards his comrades they could see his lips parted in a strange smile. Raising his arm like one who is invoking vengeance, he staggered on, and by some miracle reached the very edge of the enemy's position. There he collapsed, but rising once more, pointed ahead, and lurched forward on his face.

With a roar the American torrent burst its bounds and swept towards the enemy. Selwyn leaped in advance of his men, his voice uttering a long, pulsating cry, like a bloodhound that has found its trail.

He did not see, over towards the centre, that Van Derwater had stopped half-way and had fallen to his knees, both hands covering his eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END OF THE ROAD.

I.

One noonday in the November of 1918 a taxi-cab drew up at the Washington Inn, a hostelry erected in St. James's Square for American officers. An officer emerged, and walking with the aid of a stout Malacca cane, followed his kit into the place.

It was Austin Selwyn, who a few days before had come from France, where he had hovered for a long time in the borderland between life and death. Although he had been severely wounded, it was the nervous strain of the previous four years that told most heavily against him. Week after week he lay, listless and almost unconscious; but gradually youth had reasserted itself, and the lassitude began to disappear with the return of strength. The horrors through which he had passed were softened by the merciful effect of time, and as the reawakened streams of vitality flowed through his veins, his eyes were kindled once more with the magic of alert expression.

Having secured a cubicle and indulged in a light luncheon, he went for a stroll into the street. Looking up, he saw the windows of the rooms where he had spent such lonely, bitter hours crusading against the world's ignorance. It was all so distant, so far in the past, that it was like returning to a boyhood's haunt after the lapse of many years.

Going into Pall Mall, he felt a curiosity to see the Royal Automobile Club again. He entered its busy doors, and passing through to the lounge, took a seat in a corner. The place was full of officers, most of them Canadians on leave; but here and there in the huge room he caught a glimpse of sturdy old civilian members, well past the sixty mark, fighting Foch's amazing victories anew over their port and cigars.

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Inciting his eyes roam about the place, Selwyn noticed a group of six or seven subalterns surrounding a Staff officer, the whole party indulging in explosive merriment apparently over the quips of the betabbed gentleman in the centre. Selwyn shifted his chair to get a better view of the official humorist, but he could only make out a tunic well covered with foreign decorations. A moment later one of the subalterns shifted his position, and Selwyn could see that the much-decorated officer was wearing an enormous pair of spurs that would have done admirably for a wicked baron in a pantomime. But his knees! Superbly cut as were his breeches, they could not disguise those expressive knees.

Selwyn called a waitress over. 'Can you tell me,' he said, 'who that officer is in the centre of the room—that Staff officer?'

'Him? Oh, that's Colonel Johnston Smyth of the War Office.'

'Colonel—Johnston Smyth!' Selwyn repeated the words mechanically.

'That's him himself, sir. Will you have anything to drink?'

'I think I had better,' said Selwyn.

About ten minutes later, after perpetrating a jest which completely convulsed his auditors, the War Office official rose to his feet, endeavoured to adjust a monocle—with no success—smoothed his tunic, winked long and expressively, and with an air of melancholy dignity made for the door, with the admiring pack following close behind.

'Good-day, colonel,' said Selwyn, crossing the room and just managing to intercept the great man.

The ex-artist inclined his head with that nice condescension of the great who realise that they must be known by many whom it is impossible for themselves to know, when he noticed the features of the American. 'My sainted uncle!' he exclaimed; 'if it isn't my old sparring-partner from Old Glory!—Gentlemen, permit me to introduce to you the brains, lungs, and liver of the American Army.'

The subalterns acknowledged the introduction with the utmost cordiality, suggesting that they should return to the lounge and inundate the vitals of the American Army with liquid refreshment; but Selwyn pleaded an excuse, and with many 'Cheerios' the happy-go-lucky youngsters moved on, enjoying to the limit their hard-earned leave from the front.

'May I offer my congratulations?' said Selwyn.

'Come outside,' said the colonel.

They adjourned to the terrace, and Smyth placed his hand in the other's arm. 'Do you know who I am?' he said.

'Eh?' said Selwyn, rather bewildered by the mysterious nature of the question.

'I, my dear Americano, am A.D. Super-Camouflage Department, War Office.' The colonel chuckled delightedly, but checking himself, reared his neck with almost Roman hauteur. 'I have one major, two captains, five subalterns, and eleven flappers, whose sole duty is to keep people from seeing me.'

'Why?' asked the American.

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'I don't know,' said the colonel; 'but it's a fine system.'

'You have done wonderfully well.'

'Moderately so,' said the A.D. Super-Camouflage Department. 'I have been decorated by eleven foreign Governments and given an honorary degree by an American university. I also drive the largest car in London.'

'You amaze me.'

'As an opener,' said the colonel, forgetting his dignity in the recital of his greatness, 'I am in enormous demand. I can open a ball, a bottle, or a bazaar with any man in the country.'

'But,' said Selwyn, 'how did it all come about?'

'Ah!' exclaimed Smyth, glancing up and down the terrace after the manner of a stage villain. 'Three years ago I was an officer's servant. I polished my subaltern-fellow's buttons, cleaned his boots, and mended his unmentionables. One day this young gentleman and myself were billeted on an old French artist. When I saw those canvases, I felt the old Adam in me thirsting for expression. Before all I am an artist! I made a bargain with the old Parley-vous—a pair of my young officer's boots for two canvases and the use of his paints. Agreed. On the one I did a ploughman wending his weary thingumbob home—you know. The following day happened to be my precious young officer's birthday, and we celebrated it in style. I would not say he was an expert with his Scotch, but he was very game—very game indeed. After I had put him to bed, I determined to paint my second masterpiece, "St. George to the Rescue!" I did it—and fell asleep where I sat. When I woke next morning, imagine my astonishment! I had done both paintings on the one canvas! The ploughman was toddling along to the left, and St George was hoofing it to the right, but the effect one got was that a milk-wagon was going straight up the centre. It gave me an idea. I waited for my leave, and took the painting to the War Office. I told them if they would give me enough paint I could so disguise the British Army that it would all appear to be marching sideways. That tickled the "brass hats." They could see my argument in a minute. They knew that if you could only get a whole army going sideways the war was won. I was put on the Staff and given a free hand, and in a very short time was placed in complete charge of the super-camouflage policy of the Allies. The testimonials, my dear chap, have been most gratifying. We have undisputed evidence of an Australian offering a carrot to a siege-gun under the impression it was a mule. There was a Staff car which we painted so that it would appear to be going backwards, and the only way that a certain Scottish general would ride in it was by sitting the wrong way, with his knees over the back. In fact, my dear sir, if the war only lasts another year, I shall reduce the whole thing to a pastime, blending all the best points of "Blind Man's Buff" with "Button, button, who's got the button?"'

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Having reached this satisfactory climax, the worthy colonel shifted his cap to the extreme side of his head, and walked jauntily along with his knees performing a variety of acrobatic wriggles.

'I am most gratified,' said Selwyn, repressing a smile. 'I had no idea, when I saw you and poor Dick Durwent marching away together, that you would rise to such fame.'

'Alas, poor Durwent!' cried Smyth, pulling his cap forward to a dignified angle. 'I never knew who he was until we got to France. You passed him along as Sherwood, you know. His people are frightfully cut up about him.'

'They heard of his death, of course?'

'It isn't that, old son; it's the horrible disgrace. It only leaked out a couple of weeks ago from one of his battalion, but it's common property now. The old boy was absolutely done in—looked twenty years older.'

'What has leaked out?' said Selwyn, stopping in his walk.

'Didn't you hear? Durwent was shot by court-martial—drunk, they say, in the line.'

Selwyn's hand gripped his arm. 'Where is Lord Durwent now?' he said breathlessly.

'In the country, I believe. But why so agitated, my Americano?'

There was no answer. As fast as his weary limbs could take him, Selwyn was making for the door.

II.

It was nearly eight o'clock that night when Selwyn alighted from a train at the village where he and Elise had heard the fateful announcement of war. He walked through the quaint street, silent and deserted in the November night. Except for two or three people at the station, there was no one to be seen as his footsteps on the cobbled road knocked with their echo against the casement windows of the slumbering dwellings. Reaching the inn, he bargained for a conveyance, and after taking a little food, and arranging for a room, he went outside again, and climbed into a dogcart which had been made ready.

After three or four futile attempts at conversation, the driver retired behind his own thoughts, and left the American to the reverie forced on him by every familiar thing looming out of the shadows. There was not a turn of the road, not one rising slope, that did not mean some memory of Elise. The very night itself, drowsy with the music of the breeze and the heavy perfume of late autumn, was nature's frame encircling her

personality. He had dreaded going because of the longings which were certain to be reawakened, but he had not known that in the secret crevices of his soul there had been left such sleeping memories that rustling bushes and silent meadows would make him want to cry aloud her name.

He told himself that she must be in London, and had forgotten him—and that it was better so. But the night and the darkened road would not be denied. They held the very essence of her being, and left him weak with the ecstasy of his emotion.

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At the lodge gate they found a soldier, who allowed them to pass, and they drove on towards the house. So vivid was the sense of her presence that he almost thought he saw her and himself running hand-in-hand together again down the road. By that oak he had picked her up in his arms—and he wondered at the human mind which can find torture and joy in the one recollection.

Driving into the courtyard, he told the man to wait, and knocked at the great central door. An orderly admitted him, and took him to a nurse, who offered to lead him to the wing occupied by Lord and Lady Durwent. With wondering eyes he glanced at the transformation of the rooms once so familiar to him. There were beds even in the halls, and everywhere soldiers in hospital-blue were combining in a cheerful noise which was sufficient indication that their convalescence was progressing favourably. In the music-room a local concert-party (including the organist who had tried to teach Elise the piano) were giving an entertainment, with the utmost satisfaction to themselves and the patients.

The nurse led him upstairs and knocked at a door. On receiving a summons to enter she went in, and a moment later emerged again.

‘Will you please go in?’ she said.

Thanking her for her trouble, Selwyn stepped into the room, which was lit only by the light from a log-fire, beside which Lord Durwent and his wife were seated. Lady Durwent, who had just come from her nightly grand-duchess parade of the patients, was busying herself with her knitting, and was in obvious good spirits. Lord Durwent rose as Selwyn entered, and the good lady dramatically dropped her knitting on the floor.

‘Mister Selwyn!’ she exclaimed. ‘This is an unexpected pleasure!’

The American bowed cordially over her proffered hand; but when he turned to acknowledge the old nobleman’s greeting he was struck silent. No tree withered by a frost ever showed its hurt more clearly than did Lord Durwent. Although he stood erect in body, and summoned the gentle courtesy which was inseparable from his nature, his whole bearing was as of one whom life has cut across the face with a knotted whip, leaving an open cut. He had thought to live his days in the seclusion of Roselawn, but destiny had spared him nothing.

‘Have you had dinner?’ asked Lord Durwent. ‘We are strictly rationed, but I think the larder still holds something for a welcome guest.’

‘Isn’t the war dreadful?’ said Lady Durwent gustily.

‘I had something to eat at the inn,’ said Selwyn, ‘so I hope you won’t bother about me.’

The older man was going to press his hospitality further, but as it was obvious from the American's manner that he had come for a special purpose, he merely indicated a chair near the fire.

'You move stiffly,' he said. 'Have you been wounded?'

'Yes,' said Selwyn, continuing to stand; 'but there are no permanent ill effects, luckily. Lord Durwent, I came from London to-day to speak about your son Dick.'

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At the sound of the name Lady Durwent checked a violent sob, which was of double inspiration—grief for her son and pity for her own pride. Her husband showed no sign that he had heard, but ran his hand slowly down the arm of his chair.

And, for the first time, Selwyn became conscious of her presence—Elise had come noiselessly into the room, and was standing in the shadows. She walked slowly towards him.

‘Is it necessary,’ she said, with an imperious tilt of her head, ‘to talk of my brother? We all know what happened.’

By the firelight he saw that, only less noticeably than in her father’s case, she too had been stricken. Her rich-hued beauty, which had become so intense with her spiritual development, bore the marks of silent agony. In her eyes there was pain.

‘Without wishing to appear discourteous,’ said Lord Durwent, ‘I think my daughter is right. My family has been one that always put honour first. My son Malcolm maintained that tradition to the end. My younger son broke it. And it is perhaps as well that our title becomes extinct with my death. If you don’t mind, we would rather not speak of the matter further.’

‘He was such a kind boy—they both were,’ sobbed Lady Durwent in an enveloping hysteria, ‘and so devoted to their mother.’

Putting Elise gently to one side, Selwyn faced her father.

‘Lord Durwent,’ he said, ‘I was with your son when he was killed. In the long line of your family, sir, not one has died more gloriously.’

Lord Durwent’s hands gripped the arms of his chair, and Lady Durwent looked wildly up through her tears. Elise stood pale and motionless.

‘It is true,’ said Selwyn. ‘I tell you’——

‘There is nothing,’ said the older man— ‘there can be nothing for you to tell that would make our shame any the less. My son was shot’——

‘Lord Durwent’——

‘——shot for disgracing his uniform. That he was brave or fearless at the end cannot alter that truth.’

‘Elise!’ Selwyn turned from Lord Durwent, and his clenched hands were stretched supplicatingly towards her. ‘Your brother was not shot by the British. He was killed as he went out alone and in the open against the German machine-guns.’



'What are you saying?' Lord Durwent half rose from his chair. 'Why do you bring such rumours? What proof is there'——

'Would I come here at this time,' said Selwyn desperately, 'with rumours? Do you think I have so little sympathy for what you must feel? I saw your son killed, sir. It was in the early morning, and he went to his death as you would have had him go. As you know he did go, Elise.'

III.

In a voice that shook with feeling he told of the fight for the bridge; how Dick, and Mathews, who had saved him, reached the Americans; of the desperate hand-to-hand fighting; how the groom had guarded his young master; the impending disaster; and the death of Dick.

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'It meant more than just our lives,' he concluded, in a silence so acute that the crackling of the logs startled the air like pistol-shots, 'for as Dick fell we went forward and gained the brushwood. Less than three hours afterwards the French arrived, and largely by the use of that bridge a heavy counter-attack was launched. We buried Dick where he fell—and, Lord Durwent, it is not often that men weep. The French general, to whom the tank officer had made his report, pinned this on your son's breast, and then gave it to me to have it forwarded to you. He asked me to convey his message: "That the soil of France was richer for having taken so brave a man to its heart."' "

He handed a medal of the *Croix de Guerre* to Lord Durwent, who held it for several moments in the palm of his hand. From the distant parts of the house came the noise of singing soldiers, and a gust of wind rattled the windows as it blew about the great old mansion. Elise had not moved, but through her tears an overwhelming triumph was shining.

'And Mathews?' asked Lord Durwent slowly.

'We found him after the attack,' the American answered. 'He must have dragged himself several yards after he had been hit, and was lying unconscious, with his hand stretched out to touch Dick's boot. Have you heard nothing from him, sir?'

'Nothing.'

Again there was a silence fraught with such intensity that Selwyn thought the very beating of his pulses could be heard. At last Lord Durwent rose, and with an air of deepest respect placed the medal in the hands of his wife. Her theatricalism was mute in a sorrow that was free from shame.

'Captain Selwyn,' said Lord Durwent, 'we shall never forget.'

Feeling that his presence was making the situation only the more acute, Selwyn pleaded the excuse of the waiting horse to hasten his departure.

'But you will stay here for the night?' said Lady Durwent.

'No—thank you very much. I have left my haversack at the inn; and, besides, I must catch the 7.45 train to London in the morning to keep an important appointment. Good-night, Lady Durwent.'

Amidst subdued but earnest good wishes from the peer and his wife, he wished them good-bye and turned to Elise.

'Good-night,' he said, his face flaming suddenly red.

'Good-night,' she answered, taking his proffered hand.

'I shall go with you,' said Lord Durwent.

The two men walked through the corridors, which were growing quieter as the night advanced, and, with another exchange of farewells, Selwyn went out into the dark.

He was weak from the ordeal through which he had passed, and both his mind and his body were bordering on exhaustion. He called to the sleeping driver, who in turn roused the horse from a similar condition, but just as the wheels grinding on the gravel were opposite him Selwyn heard the door open and the rustle of skirts.

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'Austin!' cried Elise, running through the dark.

He almost stumbled as he went towards her, and caught her arms in his hands.

'I didn't want you to go,' she said breathlessly, 'without saying thanks. If Boy-blue had really been shot as they said, I—I'——

She did not finish the sentence, but clasping his hand, pressed it twice to her burning lips.

'Elise,' he cried brokenly—but she had freed herself and was making for the door.

No longer weary, but with every artery of his body on fire with uncontrollable love for her, he intercepted the girl. 'Elise,' he cried, 'I thought I could go from here and carry my heart-hunger with me—but now I can't. I can't do it.'

'You went away to America.' Her flashing eyes held his in a burning reproach. 'You did not need me then—and you don't now.'

'But—you didn't care? You never came back to the hospital, and I wrote to you every day. Tell me, Elise, did you really care—a little?'

'Yes, I did—more than I would admit to myself. But you didn't. All you could think of was going back to America.'

'But, my dearest'—his heart was throbbing with a tumultuous joy—'if I had only known. There was so much work for me to do in America'——

'You will always have work to do. You don't need me. I shouldn't have come out to-night. Please let me go.'

'Then you don't care—now?'

'No. You have your work to do still. You said yourself that we come of different worlds'——

'Elise, my darling'—he caught her hands in his and forced her towards him—'what does that matter—what can anything matter when we need each other so much? I have nothing to offer you—not so much as when we first met—but with your help, dear heart, I'll start again. We can do so much together. Elise—I hardly know what I am saying—but you do understand, don't you? I can't live without you. Tell me that you still care a little. Tell me'——

Her hands were pressed against his coat, forcing him away from her, when, with a strange little cry, she nestled into his arms and hid her face against his breast.

For a moment he doubted that it could be true, and then a feeling of infinite tenderness swept everything else aside. It was not a time for words or hot caresses to declare his passion. He stooped down and pressed his lips against her hair in silent reverence. She was his. This woman against his breast, this girl whose being held the mystery and the charm of life, was his. The arms that held her to him pressed more tightly, as if jealous of the years they had been robbed of her.

'I must go in,' she whispered.

He led her to the door, her hand in his, but though he longed to take her in a passionate embrace, he knew instinctively that her surrender was so spiritual a thing that he must accept it as the gift of an unopened spirit-flower.

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'Good-night, dear.' She paused at the door, then raised her face to his.

Their lips met in the first kiss.

IV.

The following Saturday Selwyn met Elise at Waterloo, and with her hand on his arm they walked through London's happy streets.

It was 9th November.

News had come that the Germans had entered the French lines to receive the armistice terms, and hard on that was the official report that the German Emperor had abdicated.

London—great London—whose bosom had sustained the shocks, the hopes, the cruelties of war, was bathed in a noble sunlight. For all its incongruities and jumbled architecture, it has great moments that no other city knows; and as Selwyn and Elise made their way through the crowds, there was an indefinable majesty that lay like a golden robe over the whole metropolis.

Above St. Paul's there floated shining gray airships, escorted by encircling aeroplanes. Hope—dumb hope—was abroad. Not in an abandonment of ecstasy, or of garish vulgarity which was soon to follow, but in a spirit of proud sorrow, Londoners raised their eyes to the skies. Passengers on omnibuses looked with new gratitude at the plucky girls in charge who had carried on so long. People stood aside to let wounded soldiers pass, and old men touched their hats to them. The heart of London beat in unison with the great heart of humanity.

From crowded streets, from domes and spires and open parks, there soared to heaven a mighty *Gloria—gloria in excelsis.*

After a lunch, during which they were both shy and extraordinarily happy, they took a taxi-cab and drove to a house in Bedford Square.

Leaving Elise, Selwyn knocked at the door, and was admitted to a room where a girl in an American nurse's outdoor costume waited for him.

'I got your letter in answer to mine, Austin,' said she, giving him both her hands, 'and I am all ready. Did you see him?'

'I did—yesterday afternoon. But, Marjory, I told him nothing of you, and if you want to withdraw there is yet time. Have you really thought what this means to you?'

Her only answer was a patient smile as she opened the door and led him outside.

'Elise,' said Selwyn, as they entered the cab, 'I want to introduce Miss Marjory Shoreham of New York.'

'Austin has told me all about you,' said Elise, 'and I think you are wonderfully brave.'

She took the nurse's hand and held it tightly in hers as the car drove towards Waterloo.

An hour later they reached a Sussex station, and hiring a conveyance, drove to a charming country home which was owned by a Mr. Redwood, whom Selwyn had met on board ship. A servant told them as they drove up to the door that the master of the house had gone to the village, but that they were to come in and make themselves at home.

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As he helped the girls to alight Selwyn heard the nurse catch her breath with a spasm of pain. He glanced over his shoulder and saw a man standing on the lawn facing the sun, which was reaching the west with the passing of afternoon.

'Please remain here,' said Selwyn, 'and I will motion you when to come.'

He walked towards the solitary figure, who heard him, and turned a little to greet him.

'Is that you, Austin?'

'Yes, Van,' answered Selwyn. 'How could you tell?'

With his old kindly, tired smile the ex-diplomat put out his hand, which Selwyn gripped heartily.

'I suppose it is nature's compensation,' said Van Derwater calmly. 'Now that I cannot see, footsteps and voices seem to mean so much more. I was just thinking before you came that, though I have seen it a thousand times, I have never *felt* the sun in the west before. Look—I can feel it on my face from over there. Sir Redwood tells me that the news from France is excellent.'

'It is,' said Selwyn. 'I think the end is only a matter of hours.'

'A matter of hours; and after that—peace. Austin, I haven't much to live for. It was in my stars, I suppose, that I should walk alone; but there is one fear which haunts me—that all this may be for nothing—for nothing. If I thought that on my blindness and the suffering of all these other men a structure could be built where Britain and America and France would clasp the torch of humanity together, I would welcome this darkness as few men ever welcomed the light. But it is a terrible thought—that people may forget; that civilisation might make no attempt to atone for her murdered dead.'

He smiled again, and fumbling for Selwyn's shoulder, patted it, as if to say he was not to be taken too seriously.

'The world must have looked wonderful to-day in this sunlight,' he went on. 'Do you know, I hardly dare think of the spring at all. I sometimes feel that I could never look upon the green of a meadow again, and live.'

Selwyn had beckoned to the nurse, who was coming across the lawn towards them.

'Van,' he said, taking his friend's arm, 'don't be too surprised, will you? But—but an old friend has come back to you.'

'Who is it?' Van Derwater's form became rigid. 'I can hear a step, Austin! Austin, where are you? What is this you're doing to me? Speak, man—would you drive me mad?'



Without a sound the girl had clutched his hand and had fallen on her knees at his feet.

'Marjory!' With a pitiful joy he felt her hair and face with his hand, and in his weakness he almost fell. Vainly he protested that she must go away, that he could not let her share his tragedy. Her only answer was his name murmured over and over again.

Creeping silently away, Selwyn rejoined Elise. Once they looked back. The girl was in Van Derwater's arms, and his face was raised towards the sun which he was nevermore to see. But on that face was written a happiness that comes to few men in this world.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

A LIGHT ON THE WATER.

I.

A sulky winter came hard upon November, and the war of armies was succeeded by the war of diplomats.

One day in January the same vehicle that had driven Selwyn to Roselawn deposited another visitor there. He was a sturdy, well-set-up fellow, but a thinness and a certain pallor in the cheeks conflicted with their natural weather-beaten texture.

The morose driver helped him to alight, and handed him his crutches, which he took with a snort of disapproval. He made his way at a dignified pace around the drive, pausing *en route* to look at the gables and wings of Roselawn as one who returns to familiar scenes after a long absence.

Without encountering any one he reached the stables, and opening a door, mounted the stairs that led to the dwelling-quarters above.

There was no one in the cosy dining-room, and sitting down, he hammered the floor with his crutch. The homely sound of dishes being washed ceased suddenly in the adjoining room, and Mrs. Mathews threw open the door.

'Who is it?' she cried.

'Me,' said Mathews.

Uttering a pious exclamation that reflected both doubt and confidence in the all-wise workings of Providence, his wife fell heavily upon him, with strong symptoms of hysteria.

'Heavenly hope!' she cried, after her exuberance permitted of speech; 'so you've come home?'

'I hev,' said her husband solemnly; 'and I'm werry pleased to observe you so fit, m'dear. Is the offspring a-takin' his oats reg'lar?'

'Lord!' said Mrs. Mathews irrelevantly, subsiding into a chair, 'I thought you was dead. You never writ.'

'That,' said Mathews, 'was conseckens of a understanding clear and likewise to the point, atwixt me and Mas'r Dick. "Mum's the word," sez he. "Mum's the word," sez I.

And that there was as it should be, no argifyin' provin' contrairiwise. But Milord he found me out, and sez as how he knows it all, and would I come home?—which, bein' free from horspital, I likewise does. Now, m' dear, if you will proceed with any nooz I would be much obliged to draw up a little forrader, as it were.'

'Did Milord tell you about Miss Elise?' said his wife, after much thought. 'She's gone and got herself engaged.'

'To who?'

'Captain Selwyn. Him as was visiting here when the war begun.'

'Now that there,' said Mathews, nodding his head slowly and admiringly, 'is nooz. That there is what a feller likes to hear from his old woman. You're a-doin' fine.'

'The wedding,' went on his wife, her eyes sparkling with the universal feminine excitement about such matters, 'is next week, and Wellington is bespoke for to pump the organ. Ain't that wonderful grand?'

'That,' said Mathews with great dignity, 'is werry gratifyin' to a parent, that is. Pump the organ at a weddin'! I hopes he won't go for to do nothing to give inconwenience to the parties concerned. Where is he, old girl?'

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'Upstairs in bed, daddy, with the whooping-cough something horrid.'

'Wot a infant!' commented the groom proudly. 'I never see such a offspring for his age—never. Whoopin'-cough something horrid? Well, well!'

For a full minute he reflected with such apparent satisfaction on his son and heir's vulnerability to human ailments that there is no telling when he would have left off, if his reverie had not been broken by his wife placing a pipe in his hands and a bowl on the table.

'It was always waiting on you, daddy,' said the good woman. 'I sez to Wellington, "That's his favourite, it is, and we'll always have it ready for him when he comes home."'

Without any display of emotion or undue haste, the old groom filled the pipe, lit it, drew a long breath of smoke, and slowly blew it into the air, regarding his good partner throughout with a look that clearly showed the importance he attached to the experiment.

He took a second puff, raised his eyes from hers to the ceiling, and his broad face crinkled into a grin, the like of which his wife had never seen before on his countenance.

'Old girl,' he said, 'when I sees you first I sez, "There's the filly for my money;" and so you was. And, by Criky! you and me hev'n't reached the last jump yet—no, sir. Give me a kiss. . . . Thar—that's werry "bon," as them queer-spoke Frenchies would say. M' dear, I hev some nooz for *you* now.'

He puffed tantalisingly at the pipe, and surveyed his wife's intense curiosity with studied approbation.

'When Milord come to see me last week,' he said, measuring the words slowly, 'he tells me as how he won't go for to hev no more hosses, and conseckens o' me bein' all bunged up by them sausage-eaters, he sez as how would I like to be the landlord o' "The Hares and Fox" in the village, him havin' bought the same, and would I go for to tell you as a surprise, likewise and sim'lar?'

'Heavenly hope!' cried the good woman, bursting into tears; 'if that ain't marvellous grand!'

'That,' said Mathews, beckoning for her to hand him his crutches, 'is what Milord has done for you and me. And, missus, as long as there's a drop in the cellar none o' the soldier-lads in the village will go for to want a pint o' bitter nohow. Now, old girl, if you'll give a leg up we'll go and see how the infant is lookin'.'

II.

A few days later, in the chapel decked with flowers, the marriage of Selwyn and Elise took place.

In spite of her disappointment that Elise was not marrying a title, Lady Durwent rose superbly to the occasion. She led the weeping and the laughing with the utmost heartiness, and recalled her own wedding so eloquently and vividly that those who didn't know about the Ironmonger supposed she must have been the daughter of a marchioness at least, and was probably related to royalty.

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Just before the ceremony itself the youthful Wellington, who had confounded science by a remarkable recovery from his ailment, was confronted with the offer of half-a-crown if he acquitted himself well, and threatened with corporal punishment if he didn't. With this double stimulus, he pumped without cessation and with such heartiness that the rector's words were at times hardly audible above the sound of air escaping from the bellows—necessitating a punitive expedition on the part of the sexton, and engendering in Wellington a permanent mistrust in the justice of human affairs.

Late in the afternoon bride and groom left for London, on their way to America.

When the train came in and they had entered their compartment, Selwyn, with feelings that left him dumb, looked out at the little group who had come to say farewell.

Lord Durwent stood with his unchangeable air of gentleness and courtesy, but in his eyes there was the look of a man for whom life holds only memories. Lady Durwent alternated dramatically between advice and tears; and Mathews stood proudly beside his wife (whose hat was of most marvellous size and colours), nodding his head sagaciously, and uttering as much philosophy in five minutes as falls to the lot of most men in a decade.

And so, with his wife's hand trembling on his arm, Austin Selwyn leaned from the window and waved good-bye to the little English village.

III.

A year went by, and, with the passing of winter, Selwyn and Elise, in their home at Long Island, watched the budding promise of another spring.

Their home was by the sea, and in the presence of that great majestic force they had lived as man and wife, taking up the broken threads of life, and knitting them together for the future.

The task of resuming his literary work had been next to impossible for Selwyn. He had tried to mould the destinies of nations—and they had fallen back upon him, crushing him. His thoughts cried out for utterance, but self-distrust robbed him of courage. Months went by, and his chafing, restless longing for self-expression grew more intense and more intolerable.

And then the woman who was his wife lost her own yoke of self-restraint in solicitude for him. Timidly, hesitatingly at first, she invaded the precincts of his mind. With subtle persistence, yet never seeming to force her way, she wove her personality about his like a web of silken thread. Her purity of thought, her innate artistry, her depth of feeling, played on his spirit like dew upon the parched earth.



As the passing hours took their course, each nature unconsciously gave to the other the freedom that comes only with surrender. His strength and his care for her liberated her womanhood, and, like a flower that has lived in shadow, her soul blossomed to fullness in that warmth.

And his troubled mind, directionless, yet rebellious of inaction, found again the meaning and the hidden truths of life, then gained the courage to be life's interpreter.

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Once more Austin Selwyn wrote.

One evening towards the summer Elise was sitting on the veranda, when he came from his study and joined her. The first pale stars were shining through a sheen of blue that rose from the horizon in an encircling, shimmering mist.

'Are you through with your writing?' she said.

'Not yet,' he answered, sitting beside her; 'but I could not resist the call of you and this wonderful night.'

'Isn't it glorious?' she said softly, taking his hand in hers. 'I think that blue over the sea must be like the Arabian desert at night when the camel-trains rest on their way. Don't you love the sound of the waves?'

With a little sigh she leaned her head on his shoulder, and he held her close to him.

'Happy, Elise?'

'So happy,' she whispered, 'that I am afraid some day I shall find it isn't true.'

He laughed gently, and for a few moments neither spoke, held by the wonderful intimacy of the spirit that does not need words for understanding.

'Austin dear,' she said at length, 'before you came out I was counting the stars—and playing with dreams. Don't think me silly, will you? But I was planning, if we have a son, what I should like to call him.'

'I think I know,' he said, pressing his lips against her hair. 'Dick?'

'And Gerard for his second name. I should want him to be strong and true like Gerard—but he must have Dick's eyes and Dick's smile. But, then, I want so much for this dream-boy of ours—for, most of all, he must be like my husband.'

With a sudden shyness she hid her face against his breast, and he ran his hand caressingly over her arm, which was like cool velvet to the touch.

The glimmering stars grew stronger, and a breeze from the sea crept murmuringly over the spring-scented fields.

'There are times,' he said, 'when I long for the power to reach out for the great truths that lie hidden in space and in the silence of a night like this—to put them in such simple language that every one could read and understand. If I could only translate the wonder of you and the spirit of the sea into words.'

She looked up into his face, and something of the mystic blue of the skies lay in the depths of her eyes.

IV.

Late that night he resumed work in his study, but a thousand memories and fancies came crowding to his mind. He tried to shake them off, but they clung to him—memories of the war—memories of the times when the world was drunk with passion. He heard, as if afar off, the whine and shriek of shells, and he saw the dead—grotesque, silent, horrible.

That was the great absurdity—*the dead*.

It was hopeless to write. He was no longer pilot of his thoughts.

He rose to his feet and threw open the door with an impatient desire for fresh air. Though the cool breeze refreshed his temples, the restlessness of his mind was only increased by the hush of nature's nocturne, through which the sound of the sea came like a drone.

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Beneath the canopy of that same sky the dead were lying. Across the seas a breeze of spring was stealing about the graves, as now it played about his face.

What was his part towards them—to mourn, and fill his life with useless melancholy? To forget, and turn his face towards the future?

Forget . . . ?

'There are times'—he found himself repeating mechanically the words which, a few hours before, he had spoken to Elise—'when I long for the power to reach out for the great truths—hidden in space—and in the silence of the night.'

Suddenly his brow grew calm. The baffled, questioning look left his eyes, and he smiled strangely.

Closing the door, he turned back to his desk, and taking the pen, looked for a full minute at the paper before him.

'To My Unborn Son.'

He gazed at what he had written as though the words had appeared of their own volition.

'To My Unborn Son.'

With a far-away dreaminess in his eyes he dipped his pen in the ink and commenced to write:

'Somewhere beyond the borders of life you are waiting. I cannot speak to you, nor look on your face, but the love of a father for his child can penetrate the eternal mysteries of the unknown. To those who love there is no death; and in the hearts of parents, children live long before they are born.

'My son, this letter that I write now to you will lie hidden and unseen by other eyes until the time when you alone shall read it. I shall be changed by then: like the world, I may forget; but you, my son, must read these words, and know that they are truth—truth as unchangeable as the tides of the sea, or the hours of dawn and sunset.

'Civilisation has murdered ten million men.

'The human mind cannot encompass that. It is beyond its comprehension, so it is trying to forget.

'Ten million men—murdered.

'Read these words, my son, written in the hush of night, when men's souls stand revealed.

'Nearly six years ago there came the war. History will prove this or that responsibility for it, but the civilisation that made war possible is itself responsible. The nations sprang to arms; but soon, by that strange destiny which seems to guide mankind, the issue was one not of nations against nations, but of Humanity against Germany. Do not ask me how the land of Goethe, Schiller, and Beethoven became so vile. I only know that Germany was the champion of evil, and on Britain and France men's hopes were rested.

'America held aloof. When this is read by you, my son, you will have known the noble thrill of patriotism, the pride of race and citizenship. But it is because of that that you must read what I write now about the country I love best.

'Less than any other nation, America is to be blamed for the war. Her life was separate from the older world, and the spoils of victory made no appeal. Yet this great Republic, born of man's desire for freedom, remained silent even when the whole world saw that the war was one of Justice against Evil. Men, like myself, were blind, and fed the flames of ignorance with ignorance. Others knew we were not ready, and called upon us to prepare; and others made great fortunes while Youth went to its Cross.

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'Month after month passed by, and Britain and her Allies fought Humanity's fight; and the murder of men went on.

'At last we came of age, and our young men stormed across the seas, not to save America—for we had nothing to fear—but to rid the world of an intolerable curse. Look fearlessly at the truth, but do not forget that when we went it was for an ideal—just as years before, when North and South fought the issue of preserving the Union, the impulse that drove our fathers on to their deaths was their souls' demand of freedom for the negro. By her delay was America defamed; by the spirit of her coming was she great.'

Selwyn put down his pen, and rested his head between his hands. Ten minutes passed before he looked up and began to write again.

'The war is over. *America is debtor to the world.* Read this, my son, with both humility and pride—humility that it is so, pride that we yet can pay.

'Those awful years while we stood apart, the homes of Britain gave their sons—the sons for whom their parents yearned, as I am yearning now for you. Through Britain's broken hearts, and through the grief of women throughout the world, the youth of America were saved. I know that we have our thousands of stricken homes and ruined lives, but the end of the war left America debtor to civilisation, even though she gave the strength which brought the war to an end.

'Faced with our indebtedness, what did we do?

'Europe lay stricken. The spectres of ruin, starvation, anarchy, hovered about her form. The world was through with war; men groped for light; and from the peoples of the earth a universal cry went up that these things must not be.

'It was our chance. We still were strong. We held the charter of mankind within our hands, and men looked to us. Over prostrate Europe the conquering nations gathered, and men in all the distant corners of the earth listened for the voice of him who would cry in the wilderness that a new age was born.

'Vital days went by. At last the man who spoke for us outlined his plan that all the Powers of the world should join together in a covenant that war should be no more.

'Men waited, and still waited. The plan was argued, ridiculed, applauded—and sucked of its inspiration by talk. Already the agony of Man was hardening into the cynicism of despair. Nations that had bled together grew wary and drew apart.

'And still men waited, for they knew that only America's voice could allay the clamour. Then we spoke. Angered by the methods of our leader, angered by the spirit of revenge

that was settling over Europe, angered by delay, once more we failed to see the great truths written across the face of the sun.

'America—debtor to the world—America cried out that she alone of all the nations would stand aloof. Let history gloss it over as it will, we held back the hand of succour that Europe craved for.

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'From the land of scented mists came the Japanese; from Greece, that once was first in all the arts; from South America and the countries of Europe, men gathered to the League of Nations, hoping, groping for the light—*and we were not there*.

'As I write to you, my son, the League is an impotent, powerless thing, at which the men who know only nationality and not humanity sneer and make jest. The body is there—America alone could be the heart.

'Bloodless, helpless, it is in semblance a living thing, but all men know it has no life, and already the diplomats who have no other way are using it as a shield for their methods that cannot bear the light.

'My son, in the hush and loneliness of night, ponder over these words. Because of those things, avoidable and unavoidable, that kept us silent; because so many of us were false to the trusteeship that fell on our generation; because we had not learned that America was greater than Americans, but tried to imprison the spirit of the Republic within the little confines of our souls—because of these things thousands of men were foully done to death. How many Miltons, how many Lincolns, were crucified in that army of the young?

'*We must repay*. Our destiny is clear, and no people can thwart its destiny without the gravest danger. Our duty is to restore. Whatever our resources, in things material or of the spirit, this generation and yours and the generation to follow must give unsparingly. Our minds and hearts must turn to Europe, for only in service to mankind can America fulfil that for which she was created.

'Across the seas lies England. She has done much that is unworthy of her in the past; she has much to teach and much to learn; but within the heart of Old England there is majestic grandeur and great mercifulness, and with that heart ours must beat in unison. The solemn splendour of Britain's sacrifice must never be forgotten.

'Believe in life, my son. Believe in men. Take on my charge and fight the flames of Ignorance, not as I did, but with the power of Reason and of Right. The universal mind is still alive. Trust in it as Wagner when he wrote his music, as Shelley when he sang of beauty, as Washington when he founded this great Republic. Men speak through their nationalities, but in every country of the world there is an aristocracy of thought; and if you have the power, I charge you work towards the end when that great aristocracy will flood the earth with splendour and Ignorance will be no more.

'These words I leave with you, my son, on this silent night in May. Perhaps you will never read them. Perhaps you will live only in our two hearts. But on the borders of life we reach out for you, praying that you may come to stay the hunger of our hearts, to be our living son.'

Selwyn dropped his pen and rose slowly from his chair. Passing his hand across his brow, he went to the door, and opening it, looked out.

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From the thin crescent of a waning moon, a narrow path of light was glimmering on the water.