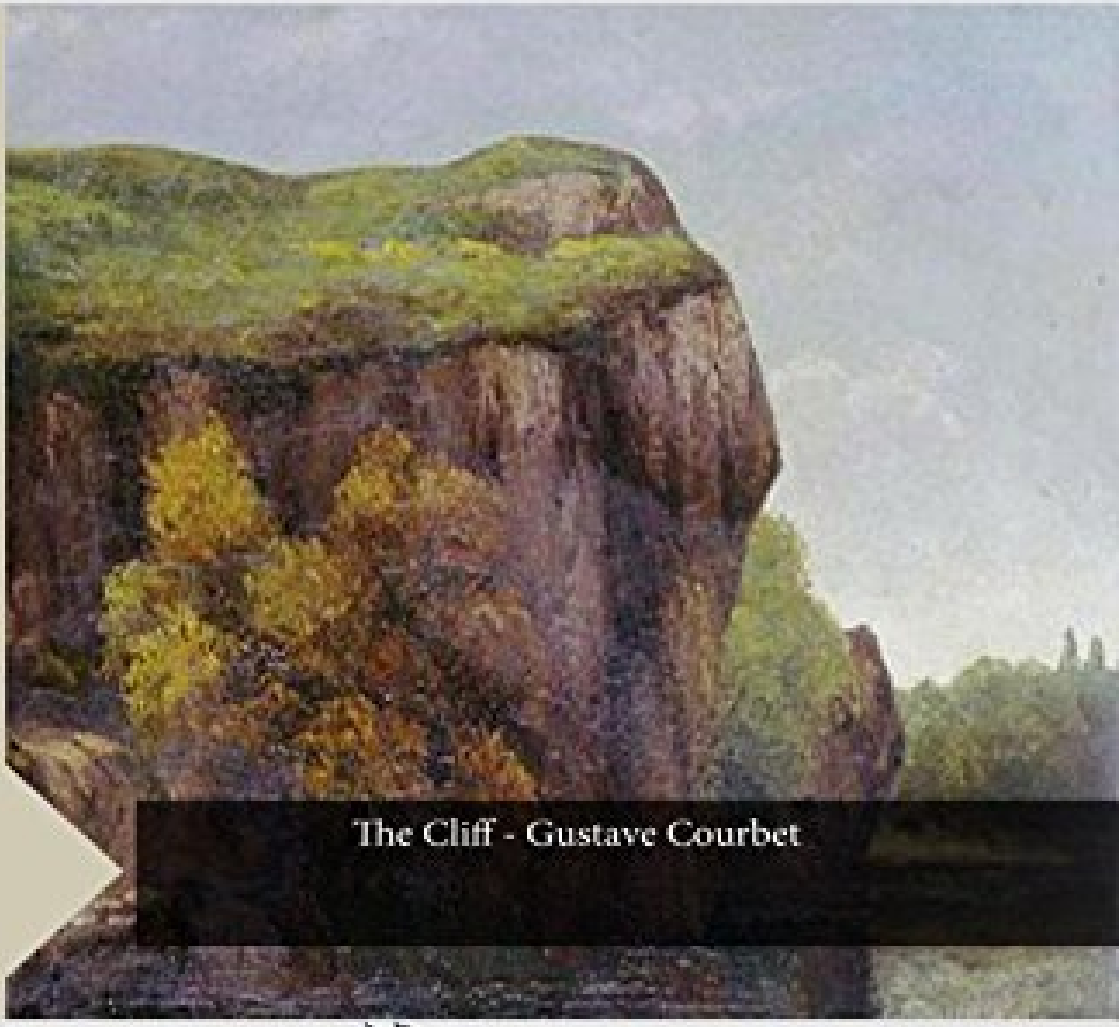
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The Dop Doctor



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The Dop Doctor

By

Richard Dehan

Author of

"Between Two Thieves," "The Headquarter Recruit,"
"The Cost of Wings"

Popular Edition

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TO ONE ACROSS THE SEA

What have the long years brought me since first, with this pen for pickaxe, I bowed my loins to quarry from the living rock of my world about me, bread and a home where Love should smile beside the hearthplace, and chiefly for Love's dear sake, that men should honour you who, above all on earth, I hold most in honour—a name among the writers of books that live!

What have the long years brought me! Well, not the things I hoped. Just bread and clothing, fire, and a little roof-tree; the purchased soil to make a grave, and a

space of leisure, before that grave be needed, to write, myself, this book for me and for you. Hope has spread her iridescent Psyche-wings and left me; Ambition long ago shed hers to become a working-ant. Love never came to sit in the chair beside the ingle. An ocean heaves between us, only for nightly dreams and waking thoughts to span. Were those dear eyes to see me as I am to-day, I wonder whether they would know me? For I grow grey, and furrows deepen in the forehead the dear hand will never smooth again. Remember me, then, only as I used to be; my heart is the same always; in it the long, long years have wrought no change.

But what have the long years brought me? Experience, that savoury salt, left where old tears have dried upon the shores of Time. Knowledge of my fellow men and women, of all sorts and conditions, and the love of them. Patience to bear what may yet have to be borne. Courage to encounter what may yet have to be encountered. Fortitude to meet the end, where faith holds up the Cross. Much have the long years brought me—besides your first smile and your last kiss. For your next, I look past Death, God aiding me, to the Eternal Life beyond....

SOUTH WALES,

April 22, 1909.

I

Upon a day near the end of August, one long, brilliant South African winter, when the old

Vierkleur waved over the Transvaal, and what is now the Orange River Colony was the Orange Free State, with the Dutch canton still showing on the staff-head corner of its tribarred flag, two large, heavily-laden waggons rolled over the grass-veld, only now thinking about changing from yellow into green. Many years previously the wheels of the old voortrekkers had passed that way, bringing from Cape Colony, with the household gods, goods and chattels, language and customs of the Dutch, the slips of the pomegranate and peach and orange trees, whose abundant blossoming dressed the orchards of the farms tucked away here and there in the lap of the veld, with bridal white and pink, and hung their girdling pomegranate hedges with stars of ruby red. But days and days, and nights and nights of billowing, spreading, lonely sky-arched veld intervened between each homestead.

The flat-topped bills were draped and folded in the opal haze of distance; the sky was perfect turquoise; the rounded kopjes shone like pink topaz, unclothed as yet with the young pale green bush. To the south there was a veld fire leaping and dancing, with swirling columns of white smoke edged with flame. But it was many miles away, and the north-west wind blew strongly, driving some puffs of gold cloud before it. Perhaps there would be rain ere long. There had been rain already in the foremost waggon, not from the clouds, but from human eyes.

The broad wheels crashed on, rolling over the yellow grass and the dry bushes. Lizards and other creeping creatures scuttled across their wide tracks. The patient oxen toiled under the yoke, their dappled nostrils widespread, their great dewy eyes strained and dim with weariness. They dumbly wondered

why they must labour in the daytime when all night long they had travelled without rest. The glorious sunrise had flamed in crimson and gold behind the eastern ranges full five hours before. They were weary to death, and no dorp or farm was yet in sight. The Cape boys who tramped, each leading a fore-ox by the green reim bound about the creature's wide horns, had no energy left even to swear at their beasts.

The Boer driver was wearied like the ox-team and the Cape boys. His bestial face was drawn, and his eyes were red-rimmed for lack of sleep. The long whip, with the fourteen-foot stock and the lash of twenty-three feet, had not smacked for a long time; the sjambok had not been used upon the long-suffering wheelers. Huddled up in his ill-fitting clothes of tan cord, he sat on the waggon-box and slept, his head nodding, his elbows on his knees. He was dreaming of the bad Cape brandy that had been in the bottle, and would be, with luck, again, when the waggon reached a tavern or a store.

A Kaffir drove the second waggon. It held stores and goods in bales, and some trunks and other baggage belonging to the Englishman, for you would have set down the tall, thin, high-featured, reddish-bearded, soft-speaking man who owned the waggons as English, even though he had called himself by a Dutch name. The child of three years was his. And his had been the dead body of the woman lying on the waggon-bed, covered with a new white sheet, with a stillborn boy baby lying on her breast.

For this the man who had loved and taken her, and made her his, had wept such bitter, scalding tears. For this his dead love, with Love's blighted bud of

fruit upon her bosom, had given up her world, her friends, her family—her husband, first and last of all. They had played the straight game, and gone away openly together, to the immense scandal of Society that is so willing to wink at things done cleverly under the rose. They were to be married the instant the injured husband obtained his decree absolute. The State sanctioned the re-marriage of the divorced if the Churches did not. Their church should thenceforwards be the State. But there was no *decree nisi* even, the injured husband possessing a legal heir by a previously-deceased wife. Besides, in a cold way it gave him pleasure to think of that purpose foiled. He soon knew that his wife's lover had sold his commission in the Army, and he learned, later, through a communication forwarded through a London firm of solicitors, that although he had chosen to ignore a certain appointment offered upon the opposite side of the Channel, the other man would merely consider it deferred until a suitable opportunity should occur. Meanwhile the writer was travelling in South Africa, not alone.

Never to be alone again, she had promised him that not quite four years ago. And to-day he sat on a box beside the waggon-bed where she lay dead with her dead boy, and the only thing left to him that had the dear living fragrance and sweet warmth of her slept smiling on his knees—their daughter.

The long fine beard that he had grown swept the soft flushed cheek of the little creature, and mingled with her yellow curls. Within the last few hours—hours packed with the anguish of a lifetime for him—there were sprinklings of white upon his high temples, where the hair had grown thin under the pressure of the Hussar's furred busby, the khaki-covered helmet

of foreign service, or the forage-cap, before these had given place to the Colonial smasher of felt, and the silky reddish-brown beard had in it wide, ragged streaks of grey. He had worshipped the woman who had given up all for him; they had lived only for, and in one another during four wonderful years. Hardly a passing twinge of regret, never a scorpion-sting of remorse, spoiled their union.

But they never stayed long in any town or even in any village. Some sound or shape from the old unforgotten world beyond the barrier, some English voice that had the indefinable tone and accent of high breeding, some figure of Englishman or Englishwoman whose rough, careless clothing had the unmistakable cut of Bond Street, some face recognised under the grey felt or the white Panama, would spur them to the desire of leaving it behind them. Then the valises would be repacked, the oxen would be hastily inspanned, and their owners would start again upon that never-ending journey in search of something that the woman was to be the first to find.

At last, when the sun was high and the worn-out beasts were almost sinking, a group of low buildings came in sight a few miles away beyond a kloof edged with a few poplar-like trees and the kameelthorn. A square, one-storey house of corrugated iron, with a mud-walled hovel or two near it, had a sprawling painted board across its front, signifying that the place was the Free State Hotel. Behind it were an orchard and some fields under rude cultivation, and a quarter of a mile to the north were the native kraals.

At the sight the Boer shook himself fully awake, and

sent the long lash cracking over the thin, sweat-drenched backs of the ox-team. They laboured with desperation at the yoke, and the waggon rumbled on.

The Englishman, hidden with his sorrow under the canvas waggon-tilt, roused himself at the accelerated motion. He rose, and, holding the sleeping child upon one arm, pushed back the front flap and looked out. He spoke to the taciturn driver, who shook his head. How did he, Smoots Beste, know whether a minister of the Church of England, or even a Dutch predikant, was to be found at the place beyond? All he hoped for was that he would be able to buy there tobacco and brandy cheap, and sleep drunken, to wake and drink again.

The waggon halted on the brink of the kloof. Little birds of gay and brilliant plumage, blue and crimson and emerald-green, rose in flocks from the bush and grasses that clothed the sides of the coomb; the hollows were full of the tree-fern; the grass had little white and purple flowers in it. At the valley-bottom a little stream, that would be a river after the first rains, wimpled over sandstone boulders, the barbel rose at flies. There was a drift lower down. It was all the goaded, worn-out oxen could do to stay the huge creaking waggons down the steep bank, and drag them over the river-bed of sand and boulders, through the muddied, churned-up water that they were dying for, yet not allowed to taste, and toil with them up the farther side.

The Englishman was not cruel. He was usually humane and merciful to man and beast, but just now he was deaf and blind. Beside him there was her corpse, beyond him was her grave, beyond that....

Both he and she, in that world that lay beyond the

barrier had observed the outward forms of Christianity. They had first met in the Park, one May morning, after a church parade. They sat on a couple of green-painted chairs while Society, conscious of the ever-present newspaper-reporter, paraded past them in plumage as gorgeous as that of the gay-coloured birds that flocked among the tree-fern or rose in frightened clouds as the waggons crashed by. And they discussed—together with the chances of the runners entered for the second Spring Meeting at Newmarket, and the merits of the problem play, and the newest farcical comedy—the Immortality of the Soul.

She wore a brown velvet gown and an ostrich-feather boa in delicate shades of cream and brown, and a cavalier hat with sweeping white plumes. Her hair was the colour of autumn leaves, or a squirrel's back in the sunshine, and she had grey eyes and piquant, irregular features, ears like shells, and a delicate, softly-tinted skin undefiled by cosmetics. She thought it wicked to doubt that one waked up again after dying, Somewhere—a vague Somewhere, with all the nice people of one's set about one. He said that Agnosticism and all that kind of thing was bad form. Men who had religion made the best soldiers. Like the Presbyterian Highlanders of the Black Watch and the "Royal Irish" Catholics—but, of course, she knew that. And she said yes, she knew; meeting his admiring eyes with her own, that were so grey and sweet and friendly, the little gloved hand that held the ivory and gold-bound Church Service lying in her lap. He longed to take that little white, delicate hand. Later on he took it, and a little later the heart that throbbed in its pulses, and the frail, beautiful body out of which the something that had been she had gone with a brief gasping struggle and a long

shuddering sigh....

He kept the beloved husk and shell of her steady on the waggon-bed with one arm thrown over it, and held the awakened, fretting child against his breast with the other, as the sinking oxen floundered up the farther side of the kloof. Amidst the shouting and cursing of the native voor-loopers and the Boer and Kaffir drivers, the rain of blows on tortured, struggling bodies, and the creaking of the teak-built waggon-frames, he only heard her weakly asking to be buried properly in some churchyard, or cemetery, with a clergyman to read the Service for the Dead.

Before his field-glass showed him the sprawling hotel-sign he had hoped that the buildings in sight might prove to mask the outskirts of a native village with an English missionary station, or a Dutch settlement important enough to own a corrugated iron Dopper church and an oak-scrub-hedged or boulder-dyked graveyard, in charge of a pastor whose loathing of the Briton should yield to the mollifying of poured-out gold.

But Fate had brought him to this lonely veld tavern. He watched it growing into ugly, sordid shape as the waggon drew nearer. To this horrible place, miscalled the Free State Hotel—a mere jumble of corrugated-iron buildings, wattle and mud-walled stables for horses, and a barbed-wire waggon-enclosure—he had brought his beloved at the end of their last journey together. He shuddered at the thought.

The waggons were halted and outspanned before the tavern. The drivers went in to get drink, and Bough, the man who sold it, leaving the women to serve them, came forth. He ordinarily gave himself out as

an Afrikander. You see in him a whiskered, dark-complexioned, good-looking man of twenty-six, but looking older, whose regard was either insolent or cringing, according to circumstances, and whose smile was an evil leer. The owner of the waggons stood waiting near the closed-up foremost one, the yellow-haired child on his arm. He looked keenly at the landlord, Bough, and the man's hand went involuntarily up in the salute, to its owner's secret rage. Did he want every English officer to recognise him as an old deserter from the Cape Mounted Police? Not he—and yet the cursed habit stuck. But he looked the stranger squarely in the face with that frank look that masked such depth of guile, and greeted him with the simple manner that concealed so much, and the English officer lifted his left hand, as though it raised a sword, and began to talk. Presently Bough called someone, and a smart, slatternly young woman came out and carried the child, who leaned away from her rouged face, resisting, into the house.

The English traveller would take no refreshment. He needed nothing but to know of a graveyard and men to dig a grave, and a minister or priest to read the Burial Service. He would pay all that was asked. He learned that the nearest village-town might be reached in three days' trek across the veld, and that the landlord did not know whether it had a pastor or not.

Three days' trek! He waved the twinkling-eyed, curious landlord back, and went up into the foremost waggon, drawing the canvas close. He faced the truth in there, and realized with a throe of mortal anguish that the burial must be soon—very soon. To prison what remained of her in a hastily knocked-together

coffin, and drag it over the veld, looking for some plot of consecrated earth to put it in, was desecration, horror. He would bury her, and fetch the minister or clergyman or priest to read prayers. Later, if it cost him all he had, the spot should be consecrated for Christian burial. He came forth from the waggon and held parley with the landlord of the tavern. There was a wire-fenced patch of sandy red earth a hundred yards from the house, a patch wherein the white woman who was mistress at the tavern had tried to grow a few common English flower-seeds out of a gaily-covered packet left by a drummer who had passed that way. She had grown tired of the trouble of watering and tending them, so that some of them had withered, and the lean fowls had flown over the fence and scratched the rest up.

That patch of sandy earth brought a handsome price, paid down in good English sovereigns—the coinage that is welcome in every corner of the earth, save among the scattered islands of the Aleutian Archipelago, where gin, tobacco, and coffee are more willingly taken in exchange for goods or souls.

The Englishman was business-like. He fetched pen and ink and paper out of that jealously closed-up waggon, drew up the deed of sale, and had it witnessed by the Boer driver and the white woman at the hotel.

He had made up his mind. He would bury her, since it must be, and then fetch the clergyman. Knowing him on the road, or returning to the fulfilment of his promise, she would not mind lying there unblessed and waiting for six lonely days and nights. He whispered in her deaf ears how it was going to be, and that she could not doubt him. He swore—not

dreaming how soon he should keep one vow—to visit the grave often, often, with his child and hers, and to lie there beside her when kind Death should call him too.

Then he left her for a moment, and sent for the Kaffir driver and the Boer to come, and, with him, dig her grave....

But Smoots Beste was already in hog-paradise, lying grunting on a bench in the bar, and the Kaffir had gone to the kraals with the Cape boys. The English officer looked at the rowdy landlord and the loafing men about the tavern, and made up his mind. No hands other than his own should prepare a last bed for her, his dearest.

So, all through the remainder of the long day, streaming and drenched with perspiration, which the cold wind dried upon him, he wrought at a grave for her with spade and pick.

It should be deep, because of the wild-cat and the hungry Kaffir dogs. It should be wide, to leave room for him. The ground was hard, with boulders of ironstone embedded in it. What did that matter? All the day through, and all through the night of wind-driven mists and faint moonlight, he wrought like a giant possessed, whilst his child, lulled with the condensed milk and water, in which biscuits had been sopped, lay sleeping in the tavern upon a little iron bed.

He had had the waggon brought close up to the wired enclosure. All the time he worked he kept a

watch upon it. Did claws scrape the wide wheels or scurrying feet patter across the shadows, he left off work until the voracious creatures of the night were driven away.

The pale dawn came, and the east showed a lake of yellow.... When the great South African sun rose and flooded the veld with miraculous liquid ambers and flaming, melted rubies, the deep, wide grave at last was done.

He climbed out of it by the waggon ladder, struggling under the weight of the last great basketful of stones and sandy earth. He dumped that down by the graveside, and went to the waggon and removed all stains of toil, and then set about making the last toilette of the beautiful woman who had so loved that everything that touched her should be pure, and dainty, and sweet.

He had dressed her silken, plentiful, squirrel-brown hair many times, for the sheer love of its loveliness. With what care he now combed and brushed and arranged the perfumed locks! He laid reverent kisses on the sealed eyelids that his own hands had closed for ever; he whispered words of passionate love, vows of undying gratitude and remembrance, in the shell-like ears. He bathed with fresh water and reclad in fragrant linen the exquisite body, upon which faint discolouring patches already heralded the inevitable end. When he had done, he swathed her in a sheet, and fetched a bolt of new white canvas from the store-waggon, and lined the grave with that.

And then he placed a narrow mattress in it, and freshly covered pillows, and brought her from the waggon, and to the grave, and carried her down the light wooden ladder, and laid her in her last earthly

home, with a kiss from the lips that had never been her husband's. It was so cruel to think of that. It was so hard to cover up the cold, sweet face again, but he did it, and lapped the sheet over her and brought the canvas down. Remained now to fill in her grave and fetch the man whose mouth should speak over it the words that are of God.

But first—fill in the grave.

The cold sweat drenched him at the thought of heaping back those tons of earth and stone above her, crushing with a frightful weight of inert matter the bodily beauty that he adored. He felt as though her soul hovered about him, wailing to him not to be so cruel, tugging at his garments with imploring, impalpable hands.

The thing must be done, though, before the sordid life stirred again under the roof of the tavern, before the vulgar faces, with their greedy, prying eyes, should be there to snigger and spy.

He loaded a great basket with fine gravelly sand, and carried it down and laid it on her by handfuls. What were his livid, parched lips muttering? Over and over, only this:

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ..."

Soon the white swathed-up form was hidden with the sandy gravel. That was a terrible pang. It wrenched the first groan from him, but he worked on.

More and more of the sandy gravel, but for precaution the stones must lie above. Should the voracious creatures of the night come, they must find the treasure in impregnable security. That thought

helped him to lay in the first, and the second, and then greater and greater stones. He was spent and breathless, but still he laboured. He tottered, and at times the tavern and the veld, and the waggons on it, and the flat-topped distant mountains that merged in the horizon, swung round him in a wild, mad dance. Then the warm salt taste of blood was in his mouth, and he gasped and panted, but he never rested until the grave was filled in.

Then he built up over it an oblong cairn of the ironstone boulders, made a rude temporary cross out of a spare waggon-pole, working quite methodically with saw and hammer and nails, and set it up, under the curious eyes he hated so, and wedged it fast and sure. Then he knelt down stiffly, and made, with rusty, long unpractised fingers, the sacred sign upon his face and breast. He heard her still, asking him in that nearly extinguished voice of hers, to pray for her.

"Dicky!..."

Ah! the tragedy of the foolish little nickname, faltered by stiffening lips upon the bed of death!

"Catholics pray for the souls of dead people, don't they? Pray for mine by-and-by. It will comfort me to know you are praying, darling, even if God is too angry with us to hear!"

He held her to his bursting heart, groaning.

"If He is angry, it cannot be with you. The sin was mine—all mine. He must know!"

Later she awakened from a troubled sleep to murmur:

"Richard, I dreamed of Bridget-Mary. She was all in black, but there was white linen about her face and neck, and it was dabbled dreadfully with blood." The weak, slight body shuddered in his embrace. "She said our wickedness had brought her death, but that she would plead for us in Heaven."

"She is not dead, my beloved; I heard of her before we left Cape Colony. She has taken the veil. She is well, and will be happy in her religion, as those good women always are."

"I was not one of those good women, Richard——"

He strained her to him in silence. She panted presently:

"You might have been happy—with her—if I had never come between you!"

He found some words to tell her that these things were meant to be. From the beginning ...

"Was it meant that I should die on these wild, wide, desolate plains, and leave you, Richard?"

He cried out frantically that he would die too, and follow her. Her dying whisper fluttered at his lips:

"You cannot! Think!—the child!"

He had forgotten the child, and now, with a great stabbing pang, remembered it. She asked for it, and he brought it, and she tried to kiss it; and even in that Death foiled her, and her head fell back and her eyes rolled up, and she died.

He remembered all this as he tried to say the prayer, without which she could not have borne to have him leave her.

The curious, mocking faces crowded at the tavern door to see him praying—a strange, haggard scarecrow kneeling there in the face of day.

But he was not the kind of scarecrow they would have dared to jeer at openly. Too rich, with all that money in the valise in the locked-up waggon-chest; too strong, with that sharp hunting-knife, the Winchester repeating-rifle, and the revolver he carried at his hip.

"*Our Father Who art in Heaven....*"

He knew, the man who repeated the words, that there was no One beyond the burning blue vault of ether Who heard ... and yet, for her sake, supposing, after all, some great Unseen Ear listened, was listening even now....

"Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come...."

And if it came, should those have any part in it who had lived together unwed in open sin?

"Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven...."

The words stuck in his dried throat. Be done, that Will that left him desolate and laid her away, a still fair, fast-corrupting thing, under the red earth and the great ironstone boulders!

"Give us this day our daily bread...."

Her love, her presence, her voice, her touch, had been the daily bread of life to him, her fellow-sinner. Oh, how many base, sordid, loveless marriages had

not that illicit bond of theirs put to shame! And yet as a boy he had learned the Seventh Commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Had she not believed all along that the price of such sweet sinning must be paid, if not in this life, then in the life hereafter, and could it—could it be that her soul was even now writhing in fires unquenchable, whither he, who would have gladly died in torment to save her from outrage or death, had thrust her?

"Forgive us our trespasses...."

O Man of Sorrows, pitying Son of Mary, before Whom the Scribes and Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery, forgive her, pardon her! If a soul must writhe in those eternal fires they preach of, in justice let it be mine! Thou Who didst pity that woman of old time, standing white and shameful in the midst of the evil, jeering crowd, with the wicked fingers pointing at her, say to this other woman, lifting up Thyself before her terrified, desperate soul, confronted with the awful mystery that lies behind the Veil....

"Neither do I condemn thee...."

And do with me what Thou wilt!

The ragged, wild-eyed man who had been kneeling rigid and immovable before the wooden symbol reared upon the new-raised cairn of boulders swayed a little. His head fell forward heavily upon his breast. His eyes closed in spite of his desperate effort to shake off the deadly, sickening collapse of will and brain and body that was mastering him. He fell sideways, and lay in a heap upon the ground.

II

They went to him, and took up and carried him into the tavern, and laid him down upon a frowzy bed in the room where the child lay upon the iron-framed cot.

He lay there groaning in the fierce clutches of rheumatic fever. They tended him in a rude way. A valise and an iron-bound leather lady's trunk had been brought from the waggon by his orders, and set in the room where he was in his sight. These contained her clothes and jewels, and he guarded them jealously even in delirium. About his wasted body was buckled a heavy money-belt. Bough could feel that when he helped the woman of the tavern to lift the patient. He winked to her pleasantly across the bed. But the time was not ripe yet. They must wait awhile. The English traveller was not always delirious. There were intervals of consciousness, and though he seemed at death's door, who knew? That strong purpose of his might even yet lift him from the soiled and comfortless bed, and send him on the trek again. Meanwhile the oxen were hired out to work for a farmer fifty miles away. That was called sending them to graze and gain strength for more work; and there was the keep of two Cape boys, and the Kaffir and the Boer driver, and the cost of nursing and sick man's diet, and the care of the child. A heavy bill of charges was mounting up against the English traveller. Much of what the belt contained would honestly be Bough's.

There was no doctor and no medicine save the few drugs the sick man had carried, as all travellers do.

The milk for which he asked for himself and the child, which was procured from the native cattle-kraals for a tikkie a pint, and for which Bough charged at the price of champagne, kept him alive. Broth or eggs he sickened at and turned from, and, indeed, the one was greasy and salt, the others of appalling mustiness. He would regularly swallow the tabloids of quinine or lithia, and fall back on the hard, coarse pillow, exhausted by the mere effort of unscrewing the nickel-cap of the little phial, and tell himself that he was getting stronger. Sometimes he really was so, and then the child sat on his wide hollow chest, and played with the beard that was now all grey and unkempt and matted, until some word in her baby prattle, some look of wondering inquiry in the innocent eyes, golden-hazel and black-lashed, like his own, that were almost too beautiful to be a man's, people used to say, like the weak, passionate, gentle mouth under the heavy moustache, would bring back all the anguish of his loss, and waken anew that torturing voice that accused him of being false to his compact with the dead. Then he would call, and send the child away, borne in the arms of the Hottentot chambermaid to breathe the fresh air upon the veld. And, left alone, he would draw up the rough sheets over his head, with gaunt clutching fingers, and weep, though sometimes no tears came to moisten his haggard, staring eyes.

One night, while the flat gold hunting-watch ticked above his head in the little embroidered chamois-leather pouch dead hands had worked, Knowledge came to him with a sudden rigor of the muscles of the wasted body, and a bursting forth from every pore of the dank, dark-hued sweat of coming dissolution.

He was not ever going to get well, and fetch the clergyman to pray over and bless her resting-place. He was going to die and lie beside her there, under the red earth topped by the boulder-cairn. He smiled. What an easy solution of the problem! He had been too intent upon gratifying her last desire to entertain for a moment the thought of suicide. He had always held self-destruction as the last resource of the coward and the criminal, and besides there was the child.

The child!...

With a pang of dread and terror unfelt by him before, he raised his gaunt head with an effort from the uneasy pillow, and looked towards where she lay, with staring, haunted eyes. The window was open a little way at the top, and for fear of the night-chill his fine leopard-skin kaross had been spread over her.... One dimpled, rounded, bare arm lay upon the soft dappled fur, the babyish fingers curled one upon the other. Rosy human tendrils that should never twine again in a mother's hair. Her child, her daughter!... Born of her body, sharing her nature and her sex, soon to be orphaned. For he who could not even lift himself from bed, and drag his body across the floor to cover that lovely babyish arm, would soon be no better protector than the restless ghost that tugged at his heart with its unseen hands. He knew now why it could not rest.

What would become of the child! Another fiery scourge, wielded by the Hand Unseen, bit deep into his shrinking conscience, into his writhing soul. His own act had brought this about. Be a cur, and accuse Destiny, blame Fate, lay the onus upon God, as so many defaulters do—he could not. He lay looking his

deed in the foul face until the dawn crept up the sky, and learning how it may be that the sins of their fathers are visited on the children.

He called for ink and paper as soon as the house was awake, and with infinite labour and many pauses to recover spent strength and breath, for he was greedy of life now, for the reason that we know—he wrote a letter home to England, to a relative who was the head of his family, and bore a great historic title—so great that those who spelled it out upon the envelope were half afraid to slip the heated knife under the crested seal. But Bough did it, and opened, and read.

It was not going to be the soft snap he had thought, but it would be good enough. Wires might be pulled from Downing Street that would set the Government at Cape Town working to trace the tall thin Englishman who had travelled up with two waggons from Cape Colony in the company of a child and the woman now dead, and for whose sake he had given up those almighty swell connections. What a fool—what a thundering, juicy, damned fool the man had been! whose gaunt eyes were even now making out the landfall of Kingdom Come through the gathering mists of death.

The letter worried Bough. To have the English Government smelling at your heels is no joke, thought he. Any moment the mastiff may grip, and then, if you happen to be an ex-convict and deserter from their Colonial Police, and supposing you have one or two other little things against you ... the most honest of speculators being occasionally compelled to dirty his hands, if only to tone down those immaculate extremities to something approaching the colour of other people's—then what becomes of

the risky but profitable business of gun-running from the English ports through to the Transvaal?

For by men like Bough and his associates vast supplies of munitions and engines of war were wormed through. The machine-guns in carefully numbered parts came in cases as "agricultural implements," the big guns travelled in the boilers of locomotives, the empty cases of the shells, large and small, were packed in piano-cases, or in straw-filled crates as "hardware"; the black powder and the cordite and the lyddite came in round wooden American cheese-boxes, with a special mark; and the Mauser cartridges were soldered in tins like preserved meat. How handsomely that business paid only Bough and his merry men, and Oom Paul and his burghers of the Volksraad, knew.

But Her Majesty's Government, bound about with red-tape, hoodwinked by Dutch Assistant-Commissioners of British Colonies, and deceived by traitorous English officials, were blind and deaf to the huge traffic in arms and munitions. Not that there were no warnings. To the very end they were shouted in deaf ears.

What of that letter sent from the Resident Commissioner's office at Gueldersdorp, that little frontier hamlet on the north-east corner of British Baraland, September 4, 1899, little more than a month before the war broke out, the war that was to leave Britain and her Colonies bleeding at every vein?

The Boers were in laager over the Border. A desperate appeal for help had been made to the Powers that were, and the reply received to the now historic telegram, through the Resident

Commissioner, has equally become a matter of history.

"All that was possible" was being done by the Imperial authorities, His Excellency assured the inquirer, to safeguard the lives and property of the inhabitants of the Gold-Reef Town in the event of an attack by a hostile force.

Also the military armament of the place was about to be materially increased.

And yet up to the little frontier town upon which so much depended not a single modern gun had been despatched.

An easy prey had the little town upon the flat-topped hill, set in the middle of a basin, proved to the Boer General and his commandos but for one thing. For weeks after the bursting of the first shell over Gueldersdorp three sides of the beleaguered town were so many open doors for the enemy. Only upon the threshold of each door stood Fear, and guarded and held the citadel.

III

That hard taskmaster, Satan, is sometimes wonderfully indulgent to those who serve him well. While Bough, the keeper of the tavern, was yet turning about the open letter in his thick, short, hairy hands, weighing the chances attending the sending of it against the chances of keeping it back, the woman who served as mistress of the place thrust

her coarsely-waved head of yellow bleached hair and rouge-ruddled face in at the room door, and called to him:

"Boss, the sick toff is doing a croak. Giving up the ghost for all he's worth—he is. Better come and take a look for yourself if you don't believe me."

Bough swore with relief and surprise, delayed only to lock away the letter, and went to take a look. It was as he hoped, a real stroke of luck for a man who knew how to work it.

Richard Mildare—for Bough knew now what had been the name of the Englishman: Captain the Hon. Richard Mildare, late of the Grey Hussars—was dead. No hand made murderous by the lust of gold had helped him to his death. Sudden failure of the heart is common in aggravated cases of rheumatic fever, and with one suffocating struggle, one brief final pang, he had gone to join her he loved. But his dead face did not look at rest. There was some reflection in it of the terror that had come upon him in the watches of that last night.

Bough stayed some time alone in the room of death. When he came out he was extremely affable and gentle. The woman, who knew him, chuckled to herself when he met the Kaffir serving-maid bringing back the child from an airing in the sun, and told her to take it to the mistress. Then he went into the bar-room to speak to the Englishman's Boer driver.

Leaning easily upon the zinc-covered counter he spoke to the man in the Taal, with which he was perfectly familiar:

"Your Baas has gone in, as my wife and I expected."

Smoots Beste growled in his throat:

"He was no Baas of mine, the verdoemte rooinek! I drove for him for pay, that is all. There is wage owing me still, for the matter of that—and where am I to get it now that the heathen has gone to the burning?"

Smoots, who was all of a heathen himself, and regularly got drunk, not only on week days, but on Sabbaths, felt virtuously certain that the Englishman had gone to Hell.

Bough smiled and poured out a four-finger swig of bad Cape brandy, and pushed it across the counter.

"You shall get the money, every tikkie. Only listen to me."

Smoots Beste tossed off the fiery liquid, and returned in a tone less surly:

"I am listening, Baas."

Said Bough, speaking with the thickish lisp and slurring of the consonants that distinguished his utterance when he sought to appear more simple and candid than usual:

"This dead toff, with his flash waggon and fine team, and Winchester repeating-rifles, had very little money. He has died in my debt for the room and the nursing, and the good nourishment, for which I trusted him all these three weeks, and I am a poor man. The dollars I have paid you and the Kaffir and the Cape boys on his account came out of my own pocket. Rotten soft have I behaved over him, that's the God's truth, and when I shall get back my own there's no knowing. But, of course, I shall act square."

The Boer's thick lips parted in a grin, showing his dirty, greenish-yellow teeth. He scratched his shaggy head, and said, his tongue lubricated to incautiousness by the potent liquor:

"The waggons, and the oxen, and the guns and ammunition, and the stores in the second waggon are worth good money. And the woman that is dead had jewels—I have seen them on her—diamonds and rubies in rings and bracelets fit for the vrouw of King Solomon himself. The Englishman did not bury them with her under that verdoemte kopje that he built with his two hands, and they are not in the boxes in the living-waggon."

"Did he not?" asked Bough, looking the Boer driver full in the face with a pleasant smile. "Are they not?"

Smoots Beste's piggish eyes twinkled round the bar-room, looked up at the ceiling, down at the floor, anywhere but into Bough's. He spat, and said in a much more docile tone:

"What do you want me to do?"

Bough leaned over the counter, and said confidentially:

"Just this, friend. I want you to inspan, and take one of the waggons up to Gueldersdorp, with a letter from me to the Civil Commissioner. I will tell him how the man is dead, and he will send down a magistrate's clerk to put a seal on the boxes and cases, and then he will go through the letters and papers in the pocket-book, and write to the people of the dead man over in England, supposing he has any, for I have heard him tell my wife there was not a living soul of his name now, except the child——"

"But what good will all this do you and me, Baas?" asked the Boer subserviently.

Bough spread his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, when the magistrates and lawyers have hunted up the man's family, there will be an order to sell the waggons and oxen and other property to pay the expenses of his burying, and the child's keep here and passage from Cape Town, if she is to be sent to England ... and what is left over, see you, after the law expenses have been paid, will go to the settlement of our just claims. They will never let honest men suffer for behaving square, sure no, they'll not do that!"

But though Bough's words were full of faith in the fair dealing of the lawyers and magistrates, his tone implied doubt.

"Boer lawyers are slim rogues at best, and Engelsch lawyers are duyvels as well as rogues," said Smoots Beste, with a dull flash of originality.

Bough nodded, and pushed another glass of liquor across the bar.

"And that's true enough. I've a score to settle with one or two of 'em. By gum! I call myself lucky to be in this with a square man like you. There's the waggon, brand-new—you know what it cost at Cape Town—and the team, I trust you to take up to Gueldersdorp, and who's to hinder a man who hasn't the fear of the Lord in him from heading north-east instead of north-west, selling the waggon and the beasts at Kreilstad or Schoenbroon, and living on a snug farm of your own for the rest of your life under another man's name, where the English magistrates

and the police will never find you, though their noses were keener than the wild dogs?"

"Alamachtig!" gasped Smoots Beste, rendered breathless by the alluring, tempting prospect. Surely the devil spoke with the voice of the tavern-keeper Bough, when, in human form, he tempted children of men. Sweat glistened on Smoots' flabby features, his thick hands trembled, and his bowels were as water. But his purpose was solidifying in his brain as he said innocently, looking over Bough's left shoulder at the wooden partition that divided off the bar from the landlord's dwelling-room:

"Aye, I am no dirty schelm that cannot be trusted. Therefore would it not be better if I took both teams and waggons, and all the rooinek's goods with me up to Gueldersdorp, and handed it over to the Engelsch landrost there?"

The fish was hooked. Bough said, steadily avoiding those twirling eyes:

"A good notion, but the lawyer chaps at Gueldersdorp will want to look at the Englishman's dead body to be able to satisfy his people that he did not die of a gunshot, or of a knife-thrust; we must bury him, of course, but not too deep for them to dig him up again. And they will want to ferret in all the corners of the room where he died, and make sure that his bags and boxes have not been tampered with —and then there is the child. In a way"—he spoke slowly and apologetically—"the kid and the goods are my security for getting my own back again—if ever I do. So you will inspan one of the waggons—the best if you like, with a team of six beasts, and you will trek up to Gueldersdorp—you will travel light enough with only the grub you will need, and

the Cape boys, and you will hand over the letter to the Resident Magistrate, and bring back the man who will act as his deputy."

But at this point Smoots Beste set down his splay foot. He would undertake to deliver the letter, but he objected to the company of the coloured voor-loopers or the Kaffir driver. He was firm upon that and, finding his most honeyed persuasions of no avail, Bough said no more. He would pay off the niggers and dismiss them, or get rid of them without paying; there were ways and means. He sent up country, and the team came down, six thin, overworked creatures, with new scars upon their slack and baggy hides, and hollow flanks, and ribs that showed painfully. Smoots Beste was about to grumble, but he changed his mind, and took the letter, buttoning it up in the flapped pocket of his tan-cord jacket, and the long whip cracked like a revolver as the lash hissed out over the backs of the wincing oxen, and the white tilt rocked over the veld, heading to the nor'-west.

"When will the Dutchy be back, boss?" asked the woman, with a knowing look.

Bough played the game up to her. He answered quite seriously: "In three weeks' time."

Then he strolled out, smoking a cigar, his hat tilted at an angle that spoke of satisfaction. His walk led him past the oblong cairn of ironstone boulders in the middle of the sandy patch of ground enclosed with zinc wire-netting. At the foot of the cairn was a new grave.

For the lover did not even lie beside his beloved, as he had vowed once, promised and planned, but

couched below her feet, waiting, like some faithful hound that could not live without the touch of the worshipped hand, for the dead to rise again.

Why is it that Failure is the inevitable fate of some men and women? Despite brilliant prospects, positions that seem assured, commanding talents nobly used, splendid opportunities that are multiplied as though in mockery, the result is Nothing from first to last; while the bad flourish and the evil prosper, and the world honours the stealer of the fruit of the brains that have been scattered in frenzied despair, or have become so worn out from the constant effort of creation that the worker has sunk into hopeless apathy and died.

Bough was not one of those men whose plans come to nothing. He had prospered as a rogue of old in England, really his native country, though he called himself an Afrikander. Reared in the gutters of the Irish quarter of Liverpool, he had early learned to pilfer for a living, had prospered in prison as sharp young gaol-birds may prosper, and returned to it again and again, until, having served out part of a sentence for burglary and obtained his ticket-of-leave, he had shifted his convict's skin, and made his way out to Cape Colony under a false name and character. He had made a mistake, it was true, enlisting as a trooper of Colonial Police, but the step had been forced upon him by circumstances. Then he had deserted, and had since been successful as a white-slave dealer at Port Elizabeth, and as a gold-miner in the Transvaal, and he had done better and better still at that ticklish trade of gun-running for Oom Paul. Though, get caught—only once get caught—and the Imperial Government authorities, under whose noses you had been playing the game with

impunity for years, made it as hot as Hell for you. Bough, however, did not mean ever to get caught. There was always another man, a semi-innocent dupe, who would appear to have been responsible for everything, and who would get pinched.

Such a dupe now trudged at the head of the meagre three-span ox-team. When, after a hard day's toil, he at length outspanned, the waggon-pole still faithfully pointed to the north-west. But before it was yet day the waggon began to move again, and it was to the north-east that the waggon-pole pointed thenceforwards, and the letter Bough had given Smoots Beste for the Chief Resident Magistrate at Gueldersdorp was saved from the kindling of the camp-fire by a mere accident.

The cat's-paw could not read, or the illegible, meaningless ink scrawl upon the sheet within the boldly-addressed envelope would have aroused his suspicions at the outset. So well had Bough, that expert in human frailty, understood his subject, that the letter was a bogus letter, a fraud, not elaborate—a mere stage property, nothing more. But yet he gave it in full belief that it would be burned, and that, the boats of Smoots Beste being consumed with it, according to the thick judgment of the said Smoots, it would be as a pillar of fire behind that slim child of the old voortrekkers, hastening his journey north-eastwards. It is typical of the class of Smoots that it never once occurred to him to go north.

But Smoots Beste never bought a farm with the price of the oxen and the high-bulwarked, teak-built, waterproof-canvas tilted waggon that had cost such a good round sum. There was a big rainfall on the third day. It began with the typical African

thunderstorm—deafening, continuous rolls and crashes of heavy cloud-artillery, and lightning that blazed and darted without intermission, and ran zigzagging in a horrible, deadly, playful fashion over the veld, as though looking for dishonest folks to shrivel. One terrible flash struck the wheel-oxen, a thin double tongue of blue flame sped flickering from ridge to ridge of the six gaunt backs ... there was a smell of burning hair—a reek of sulphur. The team lay outstretched dead on the veld, the heavy yoke across their patient necks, the long horns curving, the thin starved bodies already beginning to bloat and swell in the swift decomposition that follows death by the electric fluid.

Smoots Beste crawled under the waggon, and, remembering all he had heard his father spell out from the Dutch Bible about the Judgment Day, and the punishment of sinners in everlasting flame, felt very ill at ease. The storm passed over, and the rain poured all through the night, but dawn brought in a clear blue day; and with it a train of eight transport-waggons, and several wearied, muddy droves of sheep and cattle, the property of the Imperial Government Commissariat Department, Gueldersdorp, being taken from Basutoland East up to Gueldersdorp, under convoy of an escort of B.S.A. Police. To the non-commissioned officer in command Smoots Beste, resigned to the discharge of a trust, handed the letter for the Civil Commissioner.

The sergeant, sitting easily in the saddle, looked at the boldly-written direction on the envelope, and smelt no rats—at least until he coolly opened the supposed letter. The scrawled sheet of paper it contained was a surprise, but he did not let Smoots see that. Then the following brief dialogue took

place:

"You were trekking up to Gueldersdorp," he said to the decidedly nervous Smoots, "to fetch down a Deputy Civil Commissioner to deal with the effects of a dead English traveller, at a house kept by the man who wrote this letter—that is, three days' trek over the veld to the southward, and called the Free State Hotel?"

Smoots nodded heavily. The dapper sergeant cocked his felt smasher hat, and turned between pleasantly smiling lips the cigar he was smoking. Then he pointed with his riding-whip, a neatly varnished sjambok, with a smart silver top, to the north-west.

"There lies Gueldersdorp. Rum that when the lightning killed the ox-team you should have been trekking north-east, isn't it?"

Smoots Beste agreed that it was decidedly rum.

The sergeant said, without a change in his agreeable smile:

"All right; you can inspan six of our drove-bullocks, and drive the waggon with us to Gueldersdorp."

"Thank you, Baas!" said Smoots, without enthusiasm.

"If you like to take the risk," added the sergeant, who had not quite finished. He ended with an irrepressible outburst of honest indignation: "Why, you blasted, thieving Dutch scum, do you think I don't *know* you were stealing that span and waggon?"

And as Smoots, sweating freely, unyoked the dead oxen, he decided in his heavy mind that he would be missing long before the convoy got to Gueldersdorp.

Nine waggons rolled on where only eight had been before. The mounted men hurried on the daubed and wearied droves of Commissariat beasts. Smoots Beste drove the scratch team of bullocks, but his heart was as water within his belly, and there was no resonance in the smack of his whip. When the convoy came to a town, he vanished, and the story thenceforth knows him no more. The discreet sergeant of police did not even notice that he was missing until several days later, when the end of the journey was near at hand. He was a sober, careful man, and a good husband. He shortly afterwards made quite a liberal remittance to his wife, and his troopers pushed Kruger half-sovereigns across most of the bars in Gueldersdorp shortly after the purchase by a Dopper farmer of a teak-built Cape waggon that a particular friend of the sergeant's had got to sell. And they were careful, at first, not to wag loose tongues. But as time went on the story of the English traveller who had brought the body of the woman to the Free State Hotel, so many days' trek to the southwards from Gueldersdorp, trickled from lip to lip. And years later, years too late, it came to the ears of a friend of dead Richard Mildare.

The sergeant maintained silence. He was a careful officer, and a discreet man, and, what is more, religious. In controversial arguments with the godless he would sometimes employ a paraphrase of the story of Smoots Beste to strengthen his side.

"A chap's a blamed fool that doesn't believe in God, I tell you. I was once after a bung-nosed Dutch thief of a transport-driver, that had waltzed away with a brand-new Cape cart and a team of first-class mules. Taking 'em up to Pretoria on the quiet, to sell 'em to Oom Paul's burghers, he was. Ay, they were worth a

tidy lump! A storm came on—a regular Vaal display of sky-fireworks. The rain came down like gun-barrels, the veld turned into a swamp, but we kept on after the Dutchman, who drove like gay old Hell. Presently comes a blue blaze and a splitting crack, as if a comet had come shouldering into the map of South Africa, and knocked its head in. We pushed on, smelling sulphur, burnt flesh, and hair. 'By gum!' said I; 'something's got it'; and I was to rights. The Cape cart stood on the veld, without a scratch on the paintwork. The four mules lay in their traces, deader than pork. The Dutchman sat on the box, holding the lines and his voorslag, and grinning. He was dead, too—struck by the lightning in the act of stealing those mules and that Cape cart. Don't let any fellow waste hot air after that trying to persuade me that there isn't such a thing as an overruling Providence!"

Thus the sergeant: and his audience, whether Free-thinkers, Agnostics, or believers, would break up, feeling that one who has the courage of his opinions is a respectable man.

As for Bough, in whose hands even the astute sergeant had been as a peeled rush, we may go back and find him counting money in gold and notes that had been taken from the belt of the dead English traveller.

Seventeen hundred pounds, hard cash—a pretty windfall for an honest man. The honest man whistled softly, handling the white crackling notes, and feeling the smooth, heavy English sovereigns slip between his fingers.

There were certificates of Rand stock, also a goodly number of Colonial Railway shares, and some foreign bonds, all of which could be realised on, but at a

distance, and by a skilled hand. There were jewels, as the Boer waggon-driver had said, that had belonged to the dead woman—diamond rings, and a bracelet or two; and there were silk dresses of lovely hues and texture, and cambric and linen dresses, and tweed dresses, in the trunks; and a great cloak of sables, trimmed with many tails, and beautiful underclothing of silk and linen, trimmed with real lace, over which the mouth of the woman of the tavern watered. She got some of the dresses and all the undergarments when Bough had dexterously picked out the embroidered initials. He knew diamonds and rubies, but he had never been a judge of lace.

There was a coronet upon one or two handkerchiefs that had been overlooked when the dead woman had burned the others four years previously. Bough picked this out too, working deftly with a needle.

He was clever, very clever. He could take to pieces a steam-engine or a watch, and put it together again. He knew all there is to know about locks, and how they may best be opened without their keys. He could alter plate-marks with graving tools and the jeweller's blow-pipe, and test metals with acids, and make plaster-cast moulds that would turn out dollars and other coins, remarkably like the real thing. He was not a clever forger; he had learned to write somewhat late in life, and the large, bold round hand, with the capital letters that invariably began with the wrong quirk or twirl, was too characteristic, though he wrote anonymous letters sometimes, risking detection in the enjoyment of what was to him a dear delight, only smaller than that other pleasure of moulding bodies to his own purposes, of malice, or gain, or lust.

IV

There was a child in the tavern on the veld; it lay in an old orange-box, half-filled with shavings, covered with a thin, worn blanket, in the daub-and-wattle outhouse, where the Hottentot woman, called the chambermaid, and the Kaffir woman, who was cook, slept together on one filthy pallet. Sometimes they stayed up at the tavern, drinking and carousing with the Dutch travellers who brought the supplies of Hollands and Cape brandy and lager beer, and the American or English gold-miners and German drummers who put up there from time to time. Then the child lay in the outhouse alone. It was a frail, puny creature, always frightened and silent. It lived on a little mealie pap and odd bits of roaster-cakes that were thrown to it as though it were a dog. When the coloured women forgot to feed it, they said: "It does not matter. Anyhow, the thing will die soon!" But it lived on when another child would have died.... There was something uncanny about its great-eyed silence and its tenacious hold on life.

It had only been able to toddle when brought to the tavern. The rains and thunderstorms of spring went by, the summer passed, and it could walk about. It was a weakly little creature, with great frightened eyes, amber-brown, with violet flecks in their black-banded irises, and dark, thick lashes; and the delicately-drawn eyebrows were dark too, though its hair was soft yellow—just the colour of a chicken's down. Many a cuff it got, and many a hard word, when its straying feet brought it into the way of the rough life up at the tavern. But still the scrap of food was tossed to it, and the worn-out petticoat roughly cobbled into a garment for its little body; for Bough

was a charitable man.

It was a poor orphan, he explained to people, the child of a consumptive emigrant Englishman who had worked for the landlord of the tavern, and left this burden for other shoulders when he died. Charitable travellers frequently left benefactions towards the little one's clothing and keep. Bough willingly took charge of the money. The child strayed here, there, and everywhere. It was often lost, but nobody looked for it, and it always came back. It liked to climb the cairn of boulders, or to sit on the long, low hillock at the cairn's foot. The wire fencing had long been removed from the enclosure; it had gone to make a chicken-pen in a more suitable spot. The cross had been taken down when a prop was wanted for the clothes-line.

The child, often beaten by Bough and the woman of the tavern, might have been even worse treated by the coloured servants but for those two graves out on the veld. Black blood flows thick with superstition, and both the Kaffir cook and the snuff-coloured Hottentot chambermaid nourished a wholesome dread of spooks. Who knew but that the white woman's ghost would rise out of the kopje there, some dark night, and pinch and cuff and thump and beat people who had ill-used her bantling? As for the dead man buried at her feet, his dim shape had often been seen by one of the Barala stablemen, keeping guard before the heap of boulders, in the white blaze of the moon-rays, or the paler radiance of a starry night, or more often of a night of mist and rain; not moving as a sentry moves, but upright and still, with shining fiery eyes in his shadowy face, and with teeth that showed, as the dead grin. After that none of the servants would pass near these two graves

later than sundown, and Bough welted the Barala boy with an ox-reim for scaring silly jades of women with lying tales. But then Bough avoided the spot by day as well as by night. Therefore, it became a constant place of refuge for the child, who now slept in the outhouse alone.

In the long, brilliant winter nights she would leave the straw-stuffed sack that had been her bed ever since the orange-box had been broken up, and climb the stone-heaps, and look over the lonely veld, and stare up at the great glowing constellation of the Southern Cross. In spring, when pools and river-beds were full of foaming beer-coloured water, and every kloof and donga was brimmed with flowers and ferns, she would be drawn away by these, would return, trailing after her armfuls of rare blooms, and thenceforward, until these faded, the ridgy grave-mound and the heaped cairn of boulders would be gay with them. She never took them to the house. It might have meant a beating—so many things did.

Late in November, when the apricots and plums and peaches were ripening on the laden, starling-haunted boughs, she would wander in the orchard belonging to the house, while the heavy drenching rains drummed on the leaves overhead, and sudden furious thunderstorms rent the livid-coloured clouds above with jagged scythes and reaping-hooks of white electric fire, or leaping, dancing, playing, vanishing tongues of thin blue. Once this fire struck a krantz, under the lee of which the child was sheltering, and made a black scorched mark all down the cliff-face, but left the child unscathed.

No one had ever taught her anything; no one had ever laid a gentle hand upon her. When she first saw

mother and daughter, friend and friend, sweetheart and sweetheart kiss, it seemed to her that they licked each other, as friendly dogs do. She had no name that she knew of.

"You kid, go there. You kid, fetch this or bring that. You kid, go to the drift for water, or take the besom and sweep the stoep, or scrub out the room there—do you hear, you kid?" These orders came thick and fast when at last she was old enough to work; and she was old enough when she was very young, and did work like a little beast of burden. A real mother's heart—all mothers are not real ones—would have ached to see the dirt and bruises on the delicate childish limbs, and the vermin that crawled under the yellow rings of hair. How to be clean and tidy nobody had ever shown her, though she had learned by instinct other things.

That it was best to bear hunger and pain in silence, lest worse befell. That a truth for which one suffers is not as good as a lie for which one gets a bigger roaster-cake, or the scrapings of the syrup-can. That to little, weak, and feeble creatures of their race grown human beings can be marvellously cruel. That the devil lived down in the kraals with the natives, and that God was a swear. It is a wonder that she had not sunk into idiocy, or hopelessly sickened and died, neglected, ill-used, half-starved as she was. But when the little one might have been six years of age, the Lady began coming. And after the first time, with very brief intervals of absence, she came every night.

V

As soon as you lay down on the sack of straw in the corner of the outhouse, slipping out of the ragged frock if the weather were hot, or pulling the thin old horse-blanket over you if the night were a cold one, keeping your eyes tight shut, for this was quite indispensable, you looked into the thick dark, shot with gleams of lovely colours, sometimes with whirling rings of stars, and gradually, as you looked, all these concentrated into two stars, large and not twinkling, but softly radiant, and you were happy, for you knew that the Lady was coming.

For she always came, even when you had been most wicked: when you were sent to bed without even the supper-crust to gnaw, and when your body and arms and legs were bruised and aching from the beating they told you you deserved. The stars would go a long way off, and while you tingled and trembled and panted with expectation, would come back again as eyes. Looking up into them, you saw them clearly; the rest of the person they belonged to arrived quite a little while after her eyes were there. Such eyes—neither grey, nor brown, nor violet, but a mingling of all these colours, and deepening as you gazed up into them into bottomless lakes of love.

Then her face, framed in a soft darkness, which was hair—the Kid never knew of what colour—her face formed itself out of the darkness that framed those eyes, and a warm, balmy breath came nearer, and you were kissed. No other lips, in your short remembrance, had ever touched you. You had learned the meaning of a kiss only from her, and hers was so long and close that your heart left off beating,

and only began again when it was over. Then arms that were soft and warm, and strong and beautiful, came round you and gathered you in, and you fell asleep folded closely in them, or you lay awake, and the Lady talked to you in a voice that was mellow as honey and soft as velvet, and sounded like the cooing of the wild pigeons that nested in the krantzes, or the sighing of the wind among the high veld grasses, and the murmur of the little river playing among the boulders and gurgling between the roots of the tree-fern. You talked, too, and told her everything. And no matter how bad you had been, though she was sorry, because she hated badness, she loved you just as dearly as she did when you were good. And oh! how you loved her—how you loved her!

"Please," you said that night when she came first—you remember it quite well, though it is so long ago —"please, why did you never come before?"

And she answered, with her cool, sweet, fragrant lips upon your eyelids, and your head upon her breast:

"Because you never wanted me so much as now."

"Please take me back home with you," you begged, holding her fast. And she answered in the voice that is always like the sigh of the wind amongst the tree-tops and the murmur of the river:

"I cannot yet—but I will come again."

And she does come, and again and again. By degrees, though she comes to you only at night, when the outhouse is dark, or lighted only by the stars or the moonshine, you learn exactly what the Lady is like.

She wears a silken, softly-rustling gown that is of any lovely colour you choose. The hue of the blue

overarching sky at midday, or the tender rose of dawn, or of the violet clouds that bar the flaming orange-ruby of the sunset: or the mysterious robe of twilight drapes her, or her garment is sable as the Night. The grand sweep of her shoulders and the splendid pillar of her throat reveal the beauty of her form even to the eyes of an untaught, neglected child. Her face is pale, but as full of sunlight as of shadow, and her eyes are really grey and deep as mountain lakes. The sorrow of all the world and all its joy seem to have rolled over her like many waters, and when she smiles the sweetness of it is always almost more than the Kid can bear.

Who is the Lady!

She has no other name than that. She is very, very good, as well as beautiful, and you can bear to tell her when you have been most wicked, because she is so sorry for you. She can play with you, and laugh so softly and clearly and gaily that you, who have never learned but to dread grown people's cruel merriment, join in and laugh too. When she laughs the corners of her eyes crinkle so like the corners of her lips that you have to kiss them, and there are dimples that come with the laughter, and make her dearer than ever.

Who is the Lady, tall, and strong, and tender? That dead woman lying out there under the Little Kopje was small, and slight, and frail. Who may the Lady be? Is she a dream or a mere illusion born of loneliness and starvation, physical and mental? Or has Mary, the Mother of Pity, laid aside her girdle of decades of golden roses, her mantle of glory, and her diadem of stars, and come stepping fair-footed down the stairway that Night builds between Earth and

Heaven, to comfort a desolate child lying in a stable who never heard the story of the Christ-Babe of Bethlehem?

You ask no questions—you to whom she comes. You call her softly at night, stretching out your arms, and the clasp of her arms answers at once. You whisper how you love her, with your face hidden in her neck. The great kind dark that brings her is your real, real daytime in which you live and are glad. Each morning to which you waken, bringing its stint of hunger and abuse and blows renewed, is only a dreadful dream, you say to yourself, and so can face your world.

Oh, deep beyond fathoming, mysterious beyond comprehension is the hidden heart of a child!

VI

One afternoon when the Kid was quite as tall as the broom she swept the stoep with she had gone to the drift for water. It was a still, bright, hot day. Little puffs of rosy cloud hung motionless under the burning blue sky-arch; small, gaily-plumaged birds twittered in the bushes; the tiny black ants scurried to and fro in the pinkish sand of the river beach. She waded into the now clear, sherry-pale water to cool her hot bare limbs, and, bending over, stared down into the reflected eyes that looked back out of the pool.

Such a dirty little, large-eyed, wistful face, crowned

by a curling tousle of matted, reddish-brown-gold hair. Such a neglected, sordid little figure, with thin drab shoulders sticking out of a ragged calico frock. She was quite startled. She had never seen herself in any glass before, though a cheap, square, wooden-framed mirror hung on the wall of the bar-room, with a dirty clothes-brush on a hook underneath, and there were swing toilet-glasses in the tawdry bedrooms at the inn. Something stirred in her, whispering in the grimy little ear, "*It is good to be clean*," and with the awakening of the maidenly instinct the womanly purpose framed.

She put off her horrible rags, and washed herself from head to foot in the warm clear water. She took fine sand, and scrubbed her head. She dipped and wrung and rinsed her foul tatters of garments, standing naked in the shallows, the hot sunshine drying her red-gold curls, and warming her slight girlish body through and through as she spread her washed rags to dry on the big hot stones.

There was a man's step on the bank above her, there was a rustling sound among the green bushes. She had never heard of modesty, but she cowered down among the boulders, and the heavy footstep passed by. She hid among the fern while her clothes were drying, put them on tidily, and went back with her filled water-bucket to the hotel. How could she know what injury the kind peremptory voice, bidding her be foul no longer, had done her! But thenceforwards a new cruelty, a fresh peril, attended her steps.

Bough and the white woman of the inn had quarrels often. She was no wife of his. He had not brought her from Cape Colony. When the hotel was built he had gone up to Johannesburg on business and on

pleasure, and brought her back with him from an establishment he knew. He was generally not brutal to her except when she was ailing, when he gave her medicine that made her worse, much worse—so very ill that she would lie groaning upon a foul neglected bed for weeks, while Bough caroused with the coloured women and the customers in the bar. Then, still groaning, she would drag herself up and be about her work again. She did not want to go back to the house at Johannesburg. She loved the man Bough in her fashion, poor bought wretch.

She had quarrelled with him many times for many things, and been silenced with blows, or curses, or even caresses, were he in the mood. But she had never quarrelled with him about the Kid before. Now when he bought some coloured print and a Boer sunbonnet, and some shifts and stockings of a traveller in drapery and hosiery, and ordered her thenceforwards to see that the girl went properly clothed, a new terror, a fresh torture, was added to the young life. The woman had ignored, neglected, sometimes ill-used her, but she had never hated her until now.

And Bough, the big, burly, dark-skinned man with the strange light eyes, and the bold, cruel, red mouth, and the bushy brown whiskers, why did he follow her about with those strange eyes, and smile secretly to himself? She was no longer fed on scraps; she must sit and eat at table with the man and his mistress, and learn to use knife and fork.

She outgrew the dress Bough had bought her, and another, and another, and this did not make Bough angry; he only smiled. A man having some secret luxury or treasure locked away in a private cupboard

will smile so. He knows it is there, and he means to go to the hiding-place one day, but in the meantime he waits, licking his lips.

The girl had always feared Bough, and shrunk from his anger with unutterable terror. But the blow of his heavy hand was more bearable than his smile and his jesting amiability. Now, when she went down to the kraals on an errand, or to the orchard or garden for fruit or vegetables, or to the river for water as of old, she heard his light, cautious, padding footsteps coming after her, and would turn and pass him with downcast eyes, and go back to the inn, and take a beating for not having done her errand. Beating she comprehended, but this mysterious change in the man Bough filled her with sick, secret loathing and dread. She did not know why she bolted the door of the outhouse now when she crept to her miserable bed.

Once Bough dropped into her lap a silver dollar, saying with a smile that she was getting to be quite a little woman of late. She leaped to her feet as though a scorpion had stung her, and stood white to the very lips, and speechless, while the big silver coin rolled merrily away into a distant corner, and lay there. The frowzy woman with the bleached hair happened to come in at that moment; or had she been spying through a crack of the door? Bough pretended he had accidentally dropped the coin, picked it up, and went away.

That night he and the woman quarrelled fiercely. She could hear them raging at each other as she lay trembling. Then came shrieks, and the dull sound of

the sjambok cutting soft human flesh. In the morning the woman had a black eye; there were livid weals on her tear-blurred face. She packed her boxes, snivelling. She was going back along up to Johannesburg by the next thither-bound transport-waggon-train that should halt at the hotel—thrown off like an old shoe after all these years. And she was not young enough for the old life, what with hard work and hard usage and worry, and she knew to whom she owed her dismissal....

Ay, and if she could have throttled or poisoned the little sly devil she would have done it! Only—there would have been Bough to reckon with afterwards. For of God she made a jest, and the devil was an old friend of hers, but she was horribly afraid of the man with the brown bushy whiskers and the light, steely eyes. Yet she threw herself upon him to kiss him, blubbering freely, when at the week's end the Johannesburg transport-rider's waggons returning from the district town not yet linked up to the north by the railway came in sight.

Bough poured her out a big glass of liquor, his universal panacea, and another for the transport-rider, with many a jovial word. He would be running up to Johannesburg before she had well shaken down after the journey. Then they would have a rare old time, going round the bars and doing the shows. Though, perhaps if she had got fixed up with a new friend, some flash young fellow with pots of money, she would not be wanting old faces around?

Then he turned aside to pay the transport-rider, and the exile dabbed her swollen face with a rouge-stained, lace-edged handkerchief, and went out to get into the waggon.

The girl stood by the stoep, staring, puzzled, overwhelmed, afraid. A piece of her world was breaking off. As long as she could remember anything she had known this woman. She had never received any kindness from her; of late she had been malignant in her hate, but—she wished she was not going. Instinctively she had felt that her presence was some slight protection. Keeping close in the shadow of this creature's frowzy skirts, she had not so feared and dreaded those light eyes of Bough's, and the padding, following footsteps had kept aloof. As the woman passed her now, a rage of unspeakable, agonising fear rose in her bosom. She cried out to her, and clutched at her shabby gay mantle.

The woman snatched the garment from her hold. Her distorted mouth and blazing eyes were close to the white young face. She could have spat upon it. But she snarled at her three words ... no more, and passed her, and got into the waggon.

"Halloa, there!" said Bough, coming forward threateningly, "what you rowing about, eh?" But no one answered. The girl had fled to the boulder-cairn, and the woman sat silent in the waggon, until the weary, goaded teams moved on, and the transport-train of heavy, broad-beamed vehicles lumbered away.

But the little figure on the cairn of boulders covering the dust of the bosom from whence it had first drunk life sat there immovable until the sun went down, pondering.

"*Missis now, eh!*"

What did those three words mean?

Then Bough called her, and she had to run. She served as waitress of the bar that day, and the men who drove or rode by and stopped for drinks, chatting in the dirty saloon, or sitting in the bare front room, with the Dutch stove, and the wooden forms and tables in it, that they called the coffee-room, to discuss matters relative to the sale of cattle, or sheep, or merchandise, stared at her, and several made her coarse compliments. She refused to touch the loathly-smelling liquor they offered her. Her heart beat like a little terrified bird's. And she was horribly conscious of those light eyes of Bough's following, following her, with that inscrutable look.

When the crowd had thinned he came to her. He caught her arm, and pulled her near him, and said between his teeth:

"You will sleep in the mistress's room to-night."

Then he went away chuckling to himself, thinking of that frightened look in her eyes. Later, he went out on horseback, and did not return.

The slatternly bedchamber, with its red turkey twill window-curtains and cheap gaudy wallpaper, which had belonged to the ruddled woman with the bleached hair, was a palace to the little one. But she could not breathe there. Late that night she rose from the big feather bed, and unfastened the inner window shutters, and drew the cotton blind and opened the window, though the paint had stuck, and looked out upon the veld. The great stars throbbed in the purple velvet darkness overhead. The falling dew wetted the hand she stretched out into the cool night air. She drew back the hand and touched her cheek with it, and started, for the fresh, cool, fragrant touch seemed like that of some other hand whose

touch she once had known. She thought for the first time that if the woman who had been her mother, and who slept out there in the dark under the boulder-cairn, had lived, she might have touched her child so. Then she closed the window quickly, for she heard, afar off, the gallop of a hard-ridden horse drawing nearer—nearer. And she knew that Bough was coming back.

He came.

She heard him dismount before the door, give the horse to the sleepy Barala ostler, and let himself into the bar. She heard him clink among the glasses and bottles. She heard his foot upon the three-step stair, and on the landing. It did not pass by. It stopped at the locked door of the room where she was.

Then his voice bade her rise and open the door. She could not speak or move.

She was dumb and paralysed with deadly terror. She heard his coaxing voice turn angry; she listened in helpless terrified silence to his oaths and threats; then she heard him laugh softly, and the laugh was followed by the jingle of a bunch of skeleton keys. He always carried them; they saved trouble, he used to say.

They saved him trouble now. When the bent wire rattled in the lock, and the key fell out upon the floor, she screamed, and his coarse chuckle answered. She was cowering against the wall in a corner of the room when he came in and picked up the key and locked the door. But when his stretched-out, grasping hand came down upon her slight shoulder, she turned and bit it like some savage, desperate little animal, drawing the blood. Bough

swore at the sudden sting of the sharp white teeth. So the little beast showed fight, eh? Well, he would teach her that the master will have his way.

There was no one else in the house, and if there had been it would have served her not at all. God sat in timeless Eternity beyond these mists of earth, and saw, and made no sign. It was not until the man Bough slept the heavy sleep of liquor and satiety that the thought of flight was born in her with desperate courage to escape him. The shutters had been left unbolted, and the window was yet a little way open. She sprang up and threw it wide, leaped out upon the stoep, and from thence to the ground, and fled blindly, breathlessly over the veld into the night.

VII

Bough, as soon as it was dawn, sent three of the Kaffirs from the kraals, in different directions, to search for her, and, mounted on a fresh pony, took the fourth line of search himself.

He had chosen the right direction for riding down the quarry. At broad high noon he came upon her, in a bare, stony place tufted with milk-bush. She was crouching under a prickly-pear shrub, that threw a distorted blue shadow on the sun-baked, sun-bleached ground, trying to eat the fruit in the native way with two sticks. But she had no knife, and her mouth was bleeding. Bough gave the tired pony both spurs when the prey he hunted came in sight. She leaped up like a wild cat when the mounted man

rode down upon her, and ran, doubling like a hare. When overtaken, she fell upon her face in the sand, and lay still, only shaken by her long pants. Bough dismounted and caught her by the wrist and dragged her up with his bandaged right hand. He beat her about her cheeks with his hard, open left. Then he threw her across his saddle, but she writhed down, and lay under the pony's feet.

He kicked her then, for giving so much trouble, lifted her again, and tried to mount, holding her in one arm. But the frightened pony swerved and backed, and the girl writhed, and struggled, and scratched like a wild cat. She did not know what mercy meant, but she saw by the look that came into those light eyes that this man would have none upon her. She fought and bit and screamed.

Bough took an ox-reim then, that was coiled behind his saddle, and bound her hands. He tied the end of the leather rope to the iron ring behind his saddle, and remounted, and spurred his weary beast into a canter. The little one was forced to run behind. Again and again she fell, and each time she was jerked up and forced to run again upon her bleeding feet, leaving rags of her garments upon the karroo-bushes and blood-marks on the stones. And at last she fell, and rose no more, showing no sign of life under the whip and the spur-rowel. Then Bough bent over and drew his long hunting-knife and cut the reim, leaving her hands still bound. If any spark of life remained in he girl, he could not tell. Her knees were drawn in towards her body; her eyes were open, and rolled upwards; there was foam upon her torn and bleeding mouth. She was as good as dead, anyway, and the wild dogs would be sure to come by-and-by. Already an aasvogel was hovering above;

a mere speck, the great bird poised upon widespread wings, high up in the illimitable blue.

Presently there would be a flock of these carrion feeders, that are not averse to fresh-killed meat when it is to be had.

Bough remounted, and, humming a dance tune that was often on his lips, rode away over the veld.

The great vulture wheeled. Then he dropped like a falling stone for a thousand yards or so, and hovered and dropped again, getting nearer—ever so much nearer—with each descent. And where he had hovered at the first were now a dozen specks of black upon the hot, bright blue.

A wild dog crept down from a cone-topped spitzkop, and stood, sniffing the blood-tainted air eagerly, whining a little in its throat.

The great vulture dropped lower. His comrades of the flock, eagerly following his gyrations and descents, had begun to wheel and drop also. Another wild dog appeared on the cone-shaped kop. Other furry, sharp-eared heads, with eager, sniffing noses, could be seen amongst the grass and bush.

Then suddenly the higher vultures rose. They wheeled and soared and flew, a bevy of winged black specks hurrying to the north. They had seen something approaching over the veld. The great bird hanging motionless, purposeful, lower down, became aware of his comrades' change of tactics. With one downward stroke of his powerful wings, he shot upwards, and with a hoarse, croaking cry took flight after the rest.

The wild dogs stole back, hungry, to covert, as a big

light blue waggon, drawn by a well-fed team of eight span, came lumbering over the veld.

Would the ox-team veer in another direction? Would the big blue waggon with the new white tilt roll by?

The Hottentot driver cracked his giant whip, and, turning on the box-seat, spoke to a figure that sat beside him. It was a woman in loose black garments, with a starched white coif like a Dutchwoman's kapje, covered with a floating black veil. At her side dangled and clashed a long rosary of brown wooden beads, with a copper crucifix attached. There were two other women in the big waggon, dressed in the same way. They were Roman Catholic nuns—Sisters of Mercy coming up from Natal, by the order of the Bishop of Bellmina, Vicar-Apostolic, at the request of the Bishop of Paracos, suffragan to North-East Baraland, to swell the numbers of the Community already established in Gueldersdorp at the Convent of the Holy Way.

The oxen halted some fifty yards from that inanimate ragged little body, lying prone, face downwards, among the scrubby bushes that sprouted in the hot sand. Little crowding tiny ants already blackened the bloodstains on the ground, and the wild dogs would not have stayed long from the feast if the waggon had passed on.

One white-coifed, tall, black-clad figure sprang lightly down from the waggon-box, and hurried across to where the body was lying. A mellow, womanly cry of pity came from under the starched coif. She turned and beckoned. Then she knelt down by the girl's side, opened the torn garments, and felt with compassionate, kindly touches about the still heart.

The other two black figures came hurrying over then, stumbling amongst the stones and karroo-bushes in their haste. Lifting her, they turned the white, bloodless young face to the blue sky. It was cut and scratched, but not otherwise disfigured. Her bound arms, dragged upwards before it, had shielded it from the thorns and the sharp stones. They were raw from the elbows to the wrists.

They listened at the torn childish bosom with anxious ears. They got a few drops of brandy between the clenched little teeth. The sealed lips quivered; the heart fluttered feebly, like a dying bird. They gave her more stimulant, and waited, while the Hottentot driver dozed, and the sleek, well-fed oxen chewed the cud patiently, standing in the sun.

Then the Sisters lifted her, with infinite care, and carried her to the waggon. The twenty-four-foot whip-lash cracked, and the patient beasts moved on. Very soon the big white tilt was a mere retreating speck upon the veld. The ants were still busy when the wild dogs came out and sniffed regretfully at those traces on the ground.

Coincidence, did you say, lifting your eyebrows over the book, as the blue waggon of the Sisters rolled lumberingly into the story? The long arm of coincidence stretched to aching tenuity by the dramatist and the novelist! Nay! but the thing happened, just as I have told.

What is the thing we are agreed to call coincidence?

Once I was passing over one of the bridges that span the unclean London ditch called the Regent's Canal. I had walked all the way from Piccadilly Circus to Gloucester Crescent, haunted by the memory of a

man I had once known. He was the broken-down, drunken, studio-drudge of a great artist, a splendid Bohemian, who had died some years before. Why did the thought of the palette-scraper, the errand-goer, the drunken creature with the cultivated voice and the ingratiating, gentlemanly manners, possess me as I went? I recalled his high, intellectual, pimply forehead, and large benevolent nose, in a chronic state of inflammation, and seedy semi-clerical garb, for the thing had been an ordained clergyman of the Church of England, and I grinned, remembering how, when a Royal visitor was expected at the great man's studio, the factotum had been bidden to wash his face, and had washed one half of it, leaving the other half in drab eclipse, like the picture-restorers' trade-advertisement of a canvas partially cleansed.

Idly I tossed the butt of a finished cigar over the bridge balustrade. Idly my eye followed it down to the filthy, sluggishly-creeping water that flows round the bend, under the damp rear-garden walls below.

A policeman and a bargeman were just taking the body of an old man out of that turbid canal-stream. It was dressed in pauper's garments, and its stiffened knees were bent, and its rigid elbows crooked, and a dishonoured, dripping beard of grey hung over the soulless breast.

The dreadful eyes were open, staring up at the leaden March sky. His face, with the dread pallor of Death upon it, and the mud-stains wiped away by a rough but not unkindly hand, was cleaner than I had ever seen it in life.

Nevertheless, I recognised in the soaked body in its workhouse livery the very man the thought of whom had haunted me, the great Bohemian painter's

drunken studio-drudge.

VIII

School at the Convent of the Holy Way at Gueldersdorp was breaking up, suddenly and without warning, very soon after the beginning of the Christmas term. Many of the pupils had already left in obedience to urgent telegrams from relatives in Cape Colony or in the Transvaal, and every Dutch girl among the sixty knew the reason why, but was too astute to hint of it, and every English girl was at least as wise, but pride kept her silent, and the Americans and the Germans exchanged glances of intelligence, and whispered in corners of impending war between John Bull and Oom Paul.

That deep and festering political hatreds, fierce enthusiasms, inherited pride of race, and instilled pride in nationality, were covered by worked apron-bibs, and even childish pinafores, is anyone likely to doubt? Schoolgirls can be patriots as well as rebels, and the seminary can vie with the college, or possibly outdo it, occasion given. Ask Juliette Adam whether the bread-and-butter misses of France in the year 1847 did not squabble over the obstinacy of King Louis Philippe and the greed of M. Guizot, the claims of Louis Napoleon and the theories of Louis Blanc, of Odilon Barrot, and Ledru-Rollin? And I who write, have I not seen a North Antrim Sunday-school wrecked in a faction-fight between the Orange and the Green? Lord! how the red-edged hymnals and

shiny-covered S.P.G. books hurtled through the air, to burst like hand-grenades upon the texted walls. In vain the panting, crimson clergyman mounted the superintendent's platform, and strove to shed the oil of peace upon those seething waters. Even the class-teachers had broken the rails out of the Windsor chair-backs, and joined the hideous fray, irrespective of age or sex.

"Miss Maloney—Miss Geoghegan—I am shocked—appalled! In the name of decency I command yees to desist!"

"Hit him again, Moggy Lenahan, a taste lower down!"

"Serve you right, Mulcahy! why would you march wid the Green?"

Thirty years ago. As I gaped in affright at the horrid scene of strife, small revengeful fingers twisted themselves viciously in my auburn curls, and wresting from my grasp a "Child's Own Bible Concordance," a birthday outrage received from an Evangelical aunt, Julia Dolan, aged twelve, began to pound me about the face with it. As a snub-nosed urchin, gifted with a marvellous capacity for the cold storage and quick delivery of Scripture genealogies and Hebrew proper and improper names, I had often reduced my mild, long-legged girl-neighbour to tearful confusion. Now meek Julia seemed as though possessed by seven devils. I had been taught the elementary rule that boys must not hurt girls, but the code had no precept helpful in the present instance, when a girl was hurting me. Casting chivalry to the winds, I remember that I kicked Julia's shins, and she fled howling; but not before she had reduced my leading feature to a state of ruin, which created a tremendous sensation when they led me home. Later,

during the election riots, two young women fought in the Market Place, stripped to the waist, and wielding boards wrenched from the side of a packing-case, heavy, jagged, and full of nails. And when the soldiers were called out, we know how many a saddle was emptied by the stones the children threw....

Only a day previously the centipede-like procession of girls of all ages, in charge of nuns and pupil-teachers, in passing over the Gueldersdorp Recreation-Ground, had sustained an experience with which every maiden bosom would have been still vibrating had not an event even more exciting occurred between the early morning roll-call and prayers-muster and breakfast.

Greta Du Taine had had another love-letter!

The news darted from class-room to class-room more quickly than little Monsieur Pilotell, the French literature professor; it spread like the measles, and magnified like the mumps.

The Red Class, composed of the elder girls, "young ladies" who were undergoing the process of finishing, surged with volcanic excitement, hidden, but not in the least repressed. The White Class, their juniors, who were chiefly employed in preparing for Confirmation, should have been immersed in graver things, but were not. They waited on mental tiptoe for details, and a peep at the delicious document. The Blue Class, as became mere infants ranging from six to ten years old, remained phlegmatically indifferent to the missive, yet avid for samples of the chocolates that had accompanied the declaration, made to eighty girls of all ages by one undersized, pasty, freckled young man employed as junior clerk

and chain-assistant in a surveyor's office, and who signed at the end of a long row of symbolistic crosses the unheroic name of Billy Keyse.

He had seen and been helplessly stunned by the vision of Greta Du Taine out walking at the head of the long winding procession of English, German, Dutch, Dutch-French, Dutch-American, and Jewish girls. They are sent now to be taught in Europe, those daughters of the Rand millionaires, the Stock Exchange speculators, the wealthy fruit-farmers, or cereal-growers, or cattle and sheep breeders, who are descended themselves from the old pioneers and voortrekkers, but they do not get a better education than was to be had at the Convent school at Gueldersdorp, where the Sisters of Mercy took in and taught and trained coltish girl-children, born in a strongly stimulating climate, and accustomed to lord it over Kaffir and Hottentot servants to their hearts' content. These they tamed, these they transformed into refined, cultivated, accomplished young women, stamped with the indefinable seal of high breeding, possessed of the tone and manner that belongs to the upper world.

What shall I say of the Sisters of the Convent of the Holy Way at Gueldersdorp, I who know but little of any Order of Religious? They are a Community, chiefly of ladies of high breeding and ancient family, vowed to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, nurse the sick, comfort the dying, and instruct the ignorant. Like the Fathers of the Society of Jesuits, those skilled, patient, wise tillers in the soil of the human mind, their daily task is to hoe and tend, and prune and train, and water the young green things growing in what to them is the Garden of God, and to other good and even holy people, the vineyard of

the devil. Possibly both are right?

I have heard the habit of the Order called ugly. But upon the stately person of the Mother Superior the garb was regal. The sweeping black folds were as imposing as imperial purple, and the starched guimpe framed a beauty that was grave, stern, almost severe until she smiled, and then you caught your breath, because you had seen what great poets write of, and great painters try to render, and only great musicians by their impalpable, mysterious tone-art can come nearest to conveying—the earthly beauty that has been purged of all grosser particles of dross in the white fires of the Divine Love. She was not altogether perfect, or one could not have loved her so. Her scorn of any baseness was bitterly scathing; the point of her sarcasm was keen as any thrusting blade of tempered steel; her will was to be obeyed, and was obeyed as sovereign law, else woe betide the disobedient. Also, though kind and gracious to all, tenderly solicitous for, and incessantly watchful of, the welfare of the least of her charges, she never feigned where she could not feel regard or love. Her rare kiss was coveted in the little world of the Convent school as the jewel of an Imperial Order was coveted in the bigger world outside it, and the most rebellious of the pupils held her in respect mingled with fear. The head-mistresses of the classes had their followers and admirers. It was for the Mother Superior to command enthusiasm, and to sway ambition, and to govern the hearts and minds of children with the personal charm and the intellectual powers that could have ruled a nation from a throne.

Well, she has gone to God. It is good for many souls that she lived upon earth a little. There was nothing sentimental, visionary, or hysterical in her character. Nor, in giving her great heart with her pure soul to her Saviour, did she ever quite learn to despise the sweetness of earthly love. Not all a Saint. Yet the children of those women who most were swayed by her influence in youth are taught to hold her Saint as well as Martyr. And there is One Who knows.

It was not until recess after the midday dinner that Greta Du Taine could exhibit her love-letter. She was a Transvaal Dutch girl with old French blood in her, a vivacious, sparkling Gallic champagne mingling with the Dopper in her dainty blue veins. Nothing could be prettier than Greta in a good temper, unless it might be Greta in a rage. She was in a good temper now, as, tossing back her superb golden hair plait, as thick as a child's arm, and nearly four feet long, she drew a smeary envelope from the front of her black alpaca school-dress, and, delicately withdrawing the epistle enclosed, yielded the envelope for the inspection of the Red Class.

"What niggly writing!" objected Nellie Bliecker, wrinkling her snub nose in the disgust that masks the gnawing tooth of envy.

"And the envelope is all over sticky brown," said another carping critic.

"That's because *he* put the letter inside the chocolate-box," explained Greta, "instead of outside. And the best chocolates—the expensive ones—always go squashy. Only the cheap ones don't melt—because they have got stuff like chalk inside. But wait till I show you as much as the envelope of my next letter —that's all, Julia K. Shaw!"

Julia K. wilted. Greta proceeded:

"It's directed 'To My Fair Addored One,' because, of course, he didn't know my name. I don't object to his putting a d too much in adored; I rather prefer it. His own name is simple, and rather pretty." She made haste to say that, because she felt doubtful about it. "Billy Keyse."

"*Billy?*"

"Billy Keyse?"

"B-i-l-l-y K-e-y-s-e!"

The name went the round of the Red Class. Nobody liked it.

"He must, of course, have been christened William. Shakespeare was a William. The Emperor of Germany," stated Greta loftily, "is a William. Mr. Pitt and Mr. Gladstone were both Williams. Many other great men have been Williams."

"But not Billies," said Christine Silber, provoking a giggle from the greedily-listening White Class.

Greta scorched them into silence with a look, and continued:

"He is by profession a surveyor, not exactly a partner in the firm of Gadd and Saxby, on Market Square, but something very near it." (Do you who read see W. Keyse carrying the chain and spirit-level, and sweeping out the office when the Kaffir boy forgets?). "He saw me walking in the Stad with the Centipede," Greta added.

This was a fanciful name for the whole school of eighty pupils promenading upon its hundred and

sixty legs of various nationalities in search of exercise and fresh air.

"Go on!" said the Red Class in a breath, as the White Class giggled and nudged each other, and the Blue Class opened eyes and ears.

"He was knocked dumb-foolish at once, he says, by my eyes and my figure and my hair. He is not long up from Cape Colony: came out from London through chest-trouble, to catch heart-trouble in Gueldersdorp" (do you hear hectic, coughing Billy Keyse cracking his stupid joke?). "And if I'll only be engaged to him, he promises to get rich, become as big a swell on the Rand as Marks or Du Taine—isn't that funny, his not knowing Du Taine is my father?—and drive me to race-meetings on a first-class English drag, with a team of bays in silver-mounted harness, with rosettes the colour of my eyes."

Greta threw her golden head back and laughed, displaying a double row of enviable pearls.

"But I've got to wait for all these things until Billy Keyse strikes pay-reef. Poor Billy! Hand over those chocolates, you greedy things!"

Somebody wanted to know how the package had been smuggled into the Convent. Those lay-Sisters were so sharp....

"They're perfect needles—Sister Tarsesias particularly, and Sister Tobias. But there's a new Emigration Jane among the housemaids. You've seen her—the sallow thing with the greasy light-coloured fringe in curlers, who walks flat-footed like a wader on the mud. I keep expecting to hear her quack.... Well, Billy got hold of her. She didn't know my

name, being new, but she recognised me by Billy's description, and sympathised with him, having a young man herself, who doesn't speak a word of English, except 'damn' and 'Three of Scotch, please.' I've promised to translate her letters; he writes them in the Taal. And Billy gave her two dollars, and I've given her a hat. It's the big red one mother brought back from Paris—she paid a hundred francs for it at the Maison Cluny—and Emigration Jane thinks, though it's a bit too quiet for her taste, it'll do her a fair old treat when she trims it up with a bit more colour and one or two 'imitation ostridge' tips.... I'd give another hundred francs for the Maison Cluny *modiste* to hear." Again the birdlike laugh rang out. "Now you know everything there is in the letter, girls, except the bit of poetry at the end, which only my most intimate friends may be permitted to read. Lynette Mildare!"

Lynette, bending over a separate table-desk in the light of the north window of the long deal match-boarded class-room, looked up from her work of tooling leather, the delicate steel instrument in her hand, a little gilding-brush between her white teeth, a little fold of concentrated attention between her slender brown eyebrows.

"Yes. Did you want anything?"

Greta jumped up, leaving the rest of the box of chocolates to dissolve among the White Class, and came over, threading her way between the long rows of desk-stalls.

"Of course I want something."

"What is it?" asked Lynette, laying down the little tool.

"What everyone has a right to expect from the person who is her dearest friend—sympathy," said Greta, jumping up and sitting on the corner of the desk, and biting the thick end of her long flaxen pigtail.

"You have it—when there is anything to sympathise about."

Greta tapped the letter, trying to frown.

"Do you call this nothing?"

"You have saved me from doing so."

"Lynette Mildare, have you a heart inside you?"

"Certainly; I can feel it beating, and it does its work very well."

"Am I, then, nothing to you?"

Lynette smiled, looking up at the piquant, charming face.

"You are a great deal to me."

"And I regard you as a bosom-friend. And the duty of a bosom-friend, besides rushing off at once to tell you if she hears anybody say anything nasty of you behind your back—a thing which you never do—is to sympathise with you in all your love-affairs—a thing which you do even seldomer."

Greta stamped with the toe of the dainty little shoe that rested on the beeswaxed boards of the class-room, and kicked the leg of the desk with the heel of the other.

"Please don't spill the white of egg, or upset the gold-leaf. And as I shall be pupil-teacher of the youngest class next term, I suppose I ought to tell you that

'seldomer' isn't in the English dictionary."

"I'm glad of it. I like my own words to belong to me, my own self. I should be ashamed to owe everything I say to silly Nuttall or stupid old Webster. You're artful, Lynette Mildare, trying to change the conversation. I say you don't sympathise with me properly in my affairs of the heart—and you never, never tell me about yours."

The beautiful black-rimmed, golden-tawny eyes laughed as some eyes can, though there was no quiver of a smile about the purely-modelled, close-folded lips.

"Don't tell me you never have, or never had, any," scolded Greta. "You're too lovely by half. Don't try to scowl me down—you are! I'm pretty enough to make the Billy Keyses stand on their silly heads if I told them to, but you're a great deal more. Also, you have style and grace and breeding. Anybody could tell that you came of tremendously swell people over away in England, where the Dukes and Marquesses and Earls began fencing in the veld somewhere about the eleventh century, to keep common people from killing the deer, or carving their vulgar names on the castle walls, and coming between the wind and their nobility. There's a quotation from your dear Shakespeare for you! He does come in handy sometimes."

"Doesn't he!" agreed Lynette, with an ardent flush.

"And you're descended from some of the people he wrote about," pressed Greta. "Own it!"

There was a faint line of sarcasm about the lovely lips.

"Shakespeare wrote of clowns and churls as well as of Kings and noblemen."

"If you were a clown, you wouldn't be what you are. The very shape of your head, and ears, and nails, bespeaks a Princess, disguised as a finished head-pupil, going to take over a class of grubby-fingered little ones—pah!—next term. And don't we all know that an English Duchess sends you your Christmas and Easter and birthday gifts! Come, you might as well speak out, when this is my last term, and we have always been such dear friends, and always will be," coaxed Greta, "because the Duchess lets you out, you know!"

She said it so quaintly that Lynette laughed, though there was a pained contraction between the delicate eyebrows and a vexed and sorrowful shadow on her face. Greta went on:

"We have all of us always known that you were—a mystery. Has it got anything to do with the Duchess?"

The round, shallow blue eyes were too greedily curious to be pretty at the moment. Lynette met them with a full, grave, answering denial.

"No; I am nothing to the Duchess of Broads, or she to me. She is sister to the Mother-Superior, and she sends to me at Christmas and Easter, and on birthdays, by the Mother's wish. Doesn't the Mother's second sister, the Princesse de Dignmont-Veziers, send Katie"—Katie was a little Irish novice —"presents from Paris twice a year?"

Greta's pretty eyebrows went up. Her blue greedy eyes became circular with surprise.

"Yes, of course—out of charity, because Katie was a foundling, picked up in the Irish quarter in Cape Town."

Lynette went on steadily, but, looking out of the window at the great wistaria that climbed upon the angle of the Convent wing in which were the nuns' cells.

"If Katie was a foundling, I am nothing better."

"Lynette Mildare, you're never in earnest?"

The shocked tone and the scandalised disgust on Greta's pretty face stung and hurt. But Lynette went on:

"I speak the truth. The Mother and the Sisters, who have always known it, have kept the secret. In their great considerate kindness, they have never once let me feel there was any difference between me and the other girls—not once in all these years. And I can never thank them enough—never be grateful enough for their great goodness—especially *hers*." The steady voice shook a little.

"We all know that you have always been the Mother's favourite." There was a little cool inflection of contempt in Greta's high, sweet, birdlike tones that had been lacking before. "And she is the niece of a great English Cardinal, and the sister of a Duchess and a Princess, and her step-brother is an Earl." The inflection added for Greta: "*And yet she turns to the charity child!*"

Lynette said in a low voice:

"It is because she is perfect in the way of humility. She is beyond all pride ... greater than all prejudice

... she has been more to me than I can say, since she and Sister Ignatius and Sister Tobias found me on the veld seven years ago, when they were trekking up from Natal to join the Sisters who were already working here."

Greta's face dimpled, and the bright, cold eyes grew greedy again. There was a romance, after all.

"My gracious! How did you get there? Did your people lose you, or had you run away from home?"

The delicate wild-rose colour sank out of Lynette's cheeks. Her eyes sank under those bold, curious, blue ones of Greta's. She said, with a painful effort:

"I—had run away from the place that was called my home. I don't remember ever having lived anywhere else before."

"My! And ...?"

"It was a—dreadful place." A little convulsive shudder rippled through the girl's slight frame. Little points of moisture showed upon the delicate white temples, where clung the little stray rings and tendrils of the red-brown hair. "I wore worse rags than the children at the native kraals, and was worse fed. I scrubbed floors, and fetched water, and was beaten every day. Then"—she drew a deep, quivering breath—"I ran away—and—and ran until I could run no more, and fell down.... I don't remember being picked up. I woke up one day here at the Convent; and I was in bed, and my hair was cut short, and there was ice upon my head. I said, 'Where am I?' and the Mother-Superior stooped down and looked into my eyes, and said, 'You are at home.' And the Convent has been my home ever since, and I hope

with all my heart it always will be!"

Greta descended from the desk. She drew her embroidered cambric skirts primly about her, and said in a shocked voice:

"And I asked you to visit me—to come and stay with us at our place near Johannesburg—you who are not even respectable!"

Lynette grew burning red. One moment her eyes wavered and fell. Then she lifted them and looked back bravely into the pretty, shallow, blue ones.

"That is why I have told you—what you know now."

"Of course," Greta said patronisingly, "if you wish it, I shall not tell the class."

Lynette deliberately put away her tools and the calf-bound volume she had been working on, and shut and locked her desk. Then she rose. Her eyes swept over the long room, its lower end packed with giggling, whispering, squabbling, listening, gossiping, or reading girls. She said very clearly:

"It will be best that you should tell the class. Do it now. The girls can think it over while they are away, and make up their minds whether they will speak to me or not when they come back. Make no delay."

Then she went, moving with the long, smooth, light step and upright, graceful carriage that she had somehow caught from the Mother-Superior, out of the room. Curious eyes followed her; sharp ears, that had caught fragments of the colloquy, wanted the rest; eager tongues plied Greta with questions, as she stood reticent, knowing, bursting with information withheld, in the middle of the class-room, where

honours she coveted had been won and prizes gained by the charity-bred foundling.

You may be sure that Greta told the story. It lost nothing by her telling, be equally sure. But all that heard it did not take it in Greta's way. The stamp of the woman who ruled this place was upon many minds and intellects and hearts here, and her teaching was to bear fruit in bitter, stormy, bloodstained years of days that were waiting at the very threshold.

"I tell you," said Christine Silber, the handsome Jewess, with a fierce flash of her black Oriental eyes, "foundling or charity girl, or whatever else you choose to call her, Lynette Mildare is the pride of the school."

Silber's father was President of the Groenfontein Legislative Council. A hum of assent followed on her utterance, and an English girl got up upon a form. She was the niece of a High Commissioner, daughter of a Secretary of Imperial Government, at Cape Town, who wrote K.C.M.G. after his name.

"Silber speaks the truth. Not a girl here is a patch on the shoes of Lynette Mildare. I am going home to London next winter to be presented, and we shall have a house in Chesterfield Gardens for the season, and if Lynette will come and visit us, I can tell her that she will be treated as an honoured guest. As for you, Greta Du Taine, who are always bragging about your father and his money, tell me which three letters of the alphabet you would find tattooed upon his conscience—if the strongest microscope ever made could find his conscience out? Shall *I* tell you them?" She held up her finger. "Shall I tell you how he bought those orange-groves at Rustenburg—and

the country seat near Johannesburg—and the drag with the silver-mounted harness and the team of blood bays?"

"No, please!" begged Greta, flinching from the torture.

But the English girl was pitiless. She checked the letters off upon her fingers:

"I. D. B."

A shout went up from the Red Class.

Greta turned and ran.

IX

The cell was a large, light, airy room on the first-floor of the big two-storied Convent building that stood in its spacious, tree-shaded, high-fenced gardens beyond the Hospital at the north end of the town. Tall stained-wood presses full of papers and account-files covered the wall upon one side. There also stood a great iron safe, with heavy ledgers piled upon it. Upon the other three sides of the room were bookshelves, doubly and trebly laden, with Latin tomes of the Fathers of the Church, and the works and writings of modern theologians, many of them categorised upon the "Index Expurgatorius." Rows there were of English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish classical authors, and many volumes of recently-published scientific works. It might have been the room of a business man who was at the

same time a priest and a scholar. There were roller maps upon the walls, and two or three engravings, Bougereau's "Virgin of Consolation," the "Madonna dei Ansidei" of Raffaelle, and a "Crucifixion" over the chimneypiece, which had three little statuettes in tinted alabaster—a St. Ignatius at one end, a St. Anthony of Padua at the other; in the middle, the Virgin bearing the Child.

The Mother-Superior sat writing at a bare solid deal table of the kitchen kind, with stained legs to add to its ugliness, and stained black-knobbed fronts to the drawers in it. Her pen flew over the paper.

Seated though she was, you could see her to be of noble figure, tall and finely proportioned. The habit of the nun does not hide everything that makes for beauty and for grace. The pure outlines of the small, perfectly-shaped head showed through the thin black veil that fell over the white starched coif. The small, high-instepped foot could not be hidden in walking; the make of the thick shoe might not disguise its form. The delicate whiteness and smooth, supple beauty of her hands, larger than the hands of ordinary women, their owner being of more heroic build, as of ampler mind and keener intellect, betrayed her to be a woman not yet old, though there were some deep lines and many fine ones on the attentive face that bent over the large square sheet of paper.

It was a curious face; its olive skin bleached to dull whiteness, its expression stern almost to severity. I have heard it likened to a Westmoreland hill-landscape. Lonely tarns lie under the black brows of the precipice; one feels chilly, and a little afraid. But the sun shines out suddenly from behind concealing

mists, and everything is transformed to loveliness. I can in no other words describe the change wrought in her by her rare, sudden, illuminating smile. Her voice was the softest and the clearest I ever heard, a sigh made most audible speech; but in her just anger, only turned to wrath by the baser faults, the fouler vices, it could roll in organ-tones of thunder, or ring like a silver trumpet. And her eye made the lightning for such thunder, and the sword-thrust that followed the clarion-note of war.

She could have ruled an empire or a court, this woman who managed the thronged, buzzing Convent with the lifting of her finger, with the softest tone of her soft West of Ireland voice, devoid of all trace of the unbeautiful brogue, cultured, elegant, refined. As I have said, the lessons that she taught bore great fruit during that red time of war that was coming, and will bear greater fruit hereafter.

A little is known to me of the personal history of Lady Bridget-Mary Bawne—in religion known as Mother Mary of Bethlehem—that may be here set down. Some twenty-three years previously that devout Irish Catholic nobleman, the Right Honourable James Dominic Bawne, tenth Earl of Castleclare, Baron Kilhail, Count of the Holy Roman Empire, and D.L. for West Connemara, not contented with the possession of three very tall, very handsome, very popular daughters—the Right Honourable Ladies Bridget-Mary, Alyse, and Alethea Bawne—consulted his favourite spiritual director, and, as advised, offered his thin white hand and piously regulated affections to Miss Nancy McIleevy, niece and heiress of McIleevy of McIleevystown, the eminent County Down brewer, so celebrated for his old Irish ales and nourishing bottled porter.

This lady, being sufficiently youthful, of good education and manners, and of like faith with her elderly wooer, undertook, in return for an ancient name and the title of Countess of Castleclare, to find the widower in conjugal affection for the rest of his mortified life, and to do her best to supply him with the grievously-needed heir. There was no wicked fairy at Lord Castleclare's wedding, distinguished by the black-browed beauty of the three bridesmaids, his daughters; and two years later saw the beacons at the entrance of Ballybawne Harbour, on the West Connemara coast, illuminated by the Castleclare tenants in honour of the arrival of the desired heir, upon whom before his birth so much wealth had been expended by Lord Castleclare in pilgrimages, donations, foundations, and endowments that, some months after it, his lordship conveyed to his three daughters that, in the interests of the Viscount, to whose swollen gums a gold-set pebble enclosing a pious relic of an early Christian martyr was at that moment affording miraculous relief, he, their father, would be obliged by their providing themselves as soon as possible with husbands of suitable rank, corresponding religion, and sufficient means to dispense with the customary marriage portion.

Lady Alyse saw the justice of her father's views, and married the Duke of Broads, an English Catholic peer; her younger sister, Alethea, went obediently to the altar with the aged and enormously wealthy Prince de Dignmont-Veziers. Lady Bridget-Mary Bawne, eldest and handsomest of the three, pleaded —if a creature so stormy and imperious could be said to plead—a previous engagement to an Ineligible.

"We have all heard of Captain Mildare of the Grey Hussars, my dear child," said Lord Castleclare, going

to the door to make sure that those shrieks that had proceeded from the Viscount's sumptuous suite of apartments, situated at the top of the staircase rising at the end of the corridor leading from his father's library, were stilled at the maternal fountain. Finding that it was so, he ambled back to the centre of the worn Bokhara rug that had been under the *prie-Dieu* in the oratory of James II. at Dublin Castle, and resumed. "We have all heard of Captain Mildare. At the taking of Ali Musjid—arah!—at Futtehabad, with Gough—arah!—and at Ahmed Khel, where Stewart cut up the Afghans so tremendously, Mildare earned great distinction as well as the Victoria Cross, which I am delighted to see, in glancing through the *Army and Navy Gazette*, Her Majesty has been pleased to confer upon him. As a gentleman and a soldier he presents all that is desirable; as a member of an old Catholic family, he certainly commands my suffrages. But as the husband of my eldest daughter I cannot look upon a younger son with—arah!—toleration. Honourable reputation is much, bravery is much, but my son-in-law must possess—arah!—other —other qualifications." The old gentleman stuttered pitiably.

"*One* other qualification, you mean, father, if that term can be given to the possession of a certain amount of money," said Lady Bridget-Mary, standing very straight and looking very proudly at her father. "Will you object to telling me plainly for how much you would be content to sell your stock, with goodwill?"

Lord Castleclare was a thin, courtly old gentleman, who had conquered, he humbly trusted, all his passions, except the passion for early Catholic Theological Fathers and the passion for Spanish

snuff. But he was stung by the irony. He spilt quite a quantity of choice mixture over the long, ivory-yellow nail of his lean, delicate thumb as he looked consciously aside from the great scornful grey eyes that judged and questioned and condemned him as a mercenary old gentleman. And he caught himself wishing that this fine fiery creature had been born a boy. He looked back again at his eldest daughter. Her white arms were folded upon her bosom, her pearl-coloured silk evening gown was swept aside from the fire, to whose warmth she held an arched and exquisite foot. Her noble head, with its rich coronet of silken black coils, was bent; her broad brows had ceased to be stormy. With a half-dreamy smile upon her beautiful firm mouth, she was looking at a green flashing ring she wore on the third finger of her left hand. And the sight of her so sent a sudden pang of remembrance leaping through the old man's heart. He forgot his spoiled pinch of snuff, and stepped over to her, and took the hand, and looked at the emerald ring with her in silence.

"My dear daughter," he said, more simply and more sweetly than Lady Bridget-Mary had ever heard him speak before, "I think you love this brave gentleman sincerely?"

His daughter's large, beautifully-shaped hand closed strongly over the old ivory fingers. The great brilliant dark grey eyes looked at him through a sudden mist of tears, though she lifted her head and held it high. She said in a low, clear voice:

"Father, you remember how my mother loved you? And Richard is as dear to me as you were to her. I want words when it comes to speaking of so great a thing as the love I feel for him. But it is my life.... I

seem to breathe with his breath, and think his thoughts, and speak with his voice, since we found out our secret, and we are each other's for Time and for Eternity." Then she added, with a lovely smile that had a touch of humour in it: "And he will be quite content to take me with only my share of mother's money."

"Tschah!" said the old father. "Nonsense! Of course, St. Barre will be delighted to provide for you. Excuse me ... I must go."

St. Barre, in the Castleclare nursery, had set up another squeal.

Thenceforwards the course of true love might have been expected to run smoothly for Lady Bridget-Mary and her gallant lover. But she had reckoned, not without her host, but without her Grey Hussar. In love there is always one who loves the more, and Lady Bridget-Mary, that fine, enthusiastic, tempestuous creature, was far from realising that she was less to her Richard than he was to her. The reason was not farther to seek than a few doors off in London, when the Ladies Bawne occupied their sombre old corner-house in Grosvenor Square. It was Lady Bridget-Mary's dearest Lucy and bosom-friend, who had married that handsome, grey-moustached martinet, Richard's Colonel. In Lady Lucy Hawting's drawing-room Lord Castleclare's elder daughter had met Captain Mildare, the hero of Futtehabad and Ahmed Khel. The Colonel's wife was a pretty, delicate, graceful creature, some three years older than her black-browed handsome friend, and much more learned, as, of course, befitted a married woman, in the ways of the world. And Lady Lucy saw the budding of young passion in the heart of her

junior ... and it occurred to her that it would furnish a very excellent excuse for the constant presence of Captain Mildare, if ...! the sweetest and most limpid women have their turbid depths, their muddy secrets —and she had confided everything to dearest Bridget-Mary, except the one thing that mattered!

Well! We all know for what reason Le Roi Soleil addressed himself to the wooing of La Vallière. Louis fell genuinely in love with the decoy, not quite so Richard. But sometimes, when those proud lips meekly gave back his kisses, and that lofty beauty humbled itself to obey his will, he almost wished that he had never met the other. A day came when the secret orchard he had joyed in with that other was threaded with a golden clue, and the hidden bower unveiled to the cold-eyed staring day.

Captain Mildare and Lady Lucy Hawting went away together, and from Paris Richard wrote and broke to the girl who loved him, and had been his betrothed wife, the common, vulgar, horrible little truth. Bridget-Mary had been deceived by both of them from the very beginning. Estimate the numbing, overwhelming weight of that blow, delivered by a hand so worshipped, upon so proud a heart. Those who saw her, and should have honoured her great grief with decent reticence, say that she was mad for a while; that she grovelled on the earth in her abandonment, calling upon God and man to be merciful and kill her. Pass over this. I cannot bear to think that the mere love of a Richard Mildare should bring that lofty head so low.

While the scandal lived in the mouths of Society, Lady Bridget-Mary Bawne remained unseen. She was pitied—oh, burning, intolerable shame! She was

commiserated as a catspaw, and sneered at as a dupe. Her sisters and her stepmother, her father and her seven aunts, her relatives, innumerable as stars in the Milky Way, found infinite relish in the comfortable conviction that every one of them had said from the very outset that Bridget-Mary would regret the step she had taken in engaging herself to that Captain Mildare. Sharp claws of steel were added to her scourge of humiliation by a thousand petty liberties taken with this, her great, sacred sorrow, as by letters of sympathy from friends, who wrote as if she had suffered the loss of a pet hunter, or a prize Persian cat.

A suitor ventured to propose for that white rejected hand, addressing himself with stammering diffidence to Lord Castleclare. A young man, the son of an industrious father who had consolidated the sweat of his brow into three millions and a Peerage, hideously conscious of the raw newness of his title, painfully burdened with the bosom-weight of a genuine, if incoherent love, he seemed to Lady Bridget-Mary's family tolerable, almost desirable, nearly quite the thing....

"He has boiled jam into sweetness for the whole civilised world," said the most influential and awful of Lord Castleclare's seven sisters, a Dowager-Duchess who was Lady-in-Waiting, and exhaled the choicest essence of the Middle Victorian era. She still adhered to the mushroom-shaped straw hats of her youth, trimmed with black velvet rosettes, in the centre of each of which reposed a cut jet button. She went always voluminously clad in black or shot-silk gowns, their skirts so swelled out by a multiplicity of starched cambric petticoats, adorned with tambour-work, that she was credited with the existence of a

crinoline. She had, in marrying her now defunct Scots Duke, embraced Presbyterianism, and though her brother believed her, as far as the next world was concerned, to be lost beyond redemption, he entertained for her judgment in the matters of this planet a great esteem.

"He has boiled jam enough to spread over the surface of the civilised globe, and now proposes to hive its concentrated extract for the benefit of our dearest girl, in the shape of a settlement that a Princess of the Blood might envy. I call the whole thing pretty," pronounced the Dowager, "almost romantic, or it might be made to sound so if a person of superior intelligence and tact would undertake to plead for the young man. His terrible title has quite escaped me. Lord Plumbanks? Thank you! It might have been Strawberrybeds, and that would have increased our difficulty. No time should be lost. Therefore, as you, dear Castleclare, with your wife and the boy, who, I am gratified to hear, has cut another, are going to Rome for Holy Week, perhaps you would wish me in your absence to break the ice with Bridget-Mary?"

Lord Castleclare's long, solemn face and arched, lugubrious eyebrows bore no little resemblance to the well-known portrait of the conscientious but unlucky Stuart in whose service his ancestor had shed blood and money, receiving in lieu of both, a great many Royal promises, the Eastern carpet that had belonged to the monarch's Irish oratory, and the fine sard intaglio, brilliant-set, and representing a Calvary, that loyal servant's descendant wore upon his thin ivory middle finger. He twiddled the ring

nervously as he said:

"She has gone into Lenten Retreat at a Convent in Kensington. I—arah!—I do not think it would be advisable to disturb salutary and seasonable meditations with—arah!—worldly matters at this present moment."

"Fiddle-faddle!" said the Dowager-Duchess sharply.

Lord Castleclare lifted his melancholy arched eyebrows.

"'Fiddle-faddle,' my dear Constantia?"

"You have the expression!" said she. "Young women of Bridget-Mary's age and temperament will think of marriage in convents as much as outside them. Further, I dread delay, entertaining as I do the very certain conviction that this weak-minded man who has thrown your daughter over will be back, begging Bridget-Mary to forgive him and reinstate him in the possession of her affections before another two months are over our heads. That little cat-eyed, squirrel-haired woman he has run away with, and against whom I have warned our poor dear girl times out of number"—she really believed this—"is the sort of pussy, purring creature to make a man feel her claws, once she has got him. Therefore, although my family may not thank me for it, I shall continue to repeat, 'No time is to be lost!' Still, in deference to your religious prejudices, and although I never heard that the Catholic Church prohibited jam as an article of Lenten diet, we will defer from offering Bridget-Mary the pot until Easter."

But Easter brought the news that Lady Bridget-Mary had decided upon taking the veil, and begged her father not to oppose her wishes. The Dowager-Duchess rushed to the Kensington Convent.... All the little straw-mats on the slippery floor of the parlour were swept like chaff before the hurricane of her advancing petticoats as she bore down upon the most disappointing, erratic, and self-willed niece that ever brought the grey hairs of a solicitous and devoted aunt in sorrow to the grave, demanding in Heaven's name what Bridget-Mary meant by this maniacal decision? Then she drew back, for at first she hardly credited that this tall, pale, quiet woman in the plain, close-fitting, black woollen gown could be Bridget-Mary at all. Realising that it could be nobody else, she began to cry quite hysterically, subsiding upon a Berlin woolwork covered sofa, while her niece rang the bell for that customary Convent restorative, a teaspoonful of essence of orange-flower in a glass of water, and returning to the side of her agitated relative, took her hand, encased in a tight one-button puce glove, saying:

"Dear Aunt Constantia, what is the use of crying? I have done with it for good."

"You are so dreadfully changed and so awfully composed, and I always was sensitive. And, besides, to find you like this when I expected you to beat your head upon the floor—or was it against the wall, they said?—and pray to be put out of your misery by poison, or revolver, or knife, as though anybody would be wicked enough to do it ..."

A faint stain of colour crept into Lady Bridget-Mary's white cheeks.

"All that is over, Aunt Constantia. Forget it, as I have

done, and drink a little of this. The Sisters believe it to be calming to the nerves."

"To naturally calm nerves, I suppose." The Dowager accepted the tumbler. "What a nice, thick, old-fashioned glass!" She sipped. "You hear how my teeth are chattering against the rim. That is because I have flown here in such a hurry of agitation upon hearing from your father that you have decided to enter the Novitiate at once."

"It is true," said Lady Bridget-Mary, standing very tall and dark and straight against the background of the parlour window, that was filled in with ground-glass, and veiled with snowy curtains of starched thread-lace.

"True! When not ten months ago you declared to me that you would not be a nun for all the world.... You begged me to befriend you in the matter of Captain Mildare. I undertook, alas! that office...."

The Dowager-Duchess blew her nose.

"A little more of the orange-flower water, dear aunt?"

"'Dear aunt,' when you are trampling upon my very heart-strings! And let me tell you, Bridget-Mary, you have always been my favourite niece. '*For all the world,*' you said with your own lips, '*I would not be a nun!*' Three millions will buy, if not the world, at least a good slice of it.... Figuratively, I offer them to you in this outstretched hand!" The Dowager extended a puce kid glove. "The husband who goes with them is a good creature. I have seen and spoken with him, and the dear Queen regards me as a judge of men. 'Consie,' she has said, 'you have perception....' What my Sovereign credits may not

my niece believe?"

Lady Bridget-Mary's black brows were stern over the great joyless eyes that looked out of their sculptured caves upon the world she had bidden good-bye to. But the fine lines of humour about the wings of the sensitive nostrils and the corners of the large finely-modelled mouth quivered a little.

"Drink a little more orange-flower water, dear, and never tell me who the man is. I do not wish to hear. I decline to hear."

The Dowager-Duchess lost her temper.

"That is because you know already, and despise money that is made of jam. Yet coal and beer are swallowed with avidity by young women who have not forfeited the right to be fastidious. That is the last thing I wished to say, but you have wrung it from me. Have you no pride? Do you want Society to say that you have embraced the profession of a Religious, and intend henceforth to employ your talents in teaching sniffy-nosed schoolgirls Greek and Algebra and Mathematics, because this Mildare has jilted you? Again, have you no pride?" She agitated the Britannia-metal teaspoon furiously in the empty tumbler.

Lady Bridget-Mary took the tumbler away. Why should the humble property of the Sisters be broken because this kind, fussy woman chose to upbraid?

"You ask, Have I no pride?" she said. "Why should I have pride when Our Lord is so humble that He does not disdain to take for His bride the woman Richard Mildare has rejected?"

"You are incorrigible, dearest," said the sobbing

Dowager-Duchess, as she kissed her, "and Castleclare must use all his influence with the Holy Father to induce the Comtesse de Lutetia to give you the veil. All of you think I am damned, and possibly I may be, but if so I shall be afforded an opportunity (which will not be mine in this life) of giving Captain Mildare a piece of my mind!"

So the Dowager-Duchess melted out of the story, and Lady Bridget-Mary Bawne became a nun.

X

This is what the Mother-Superior wrote to her kinswoman, with her mobile, eloquent lips folded closely together as she thought, and her grave eyes following the swift journey of the pen as it formed the sentences:

"Now let me speak to you of Lynette Mildare. I have never thought it necessary to make the slightest disguise of my great partiality for this, the dearest of all the many children given me by Our Lord since I resigned my crown of earthly motherhood to Him."

She stopped, remembering what another great lady, also a relative of hers, had remarked when it was first made public that she intended to enter the Novitiate:

"Indeed! It would seem, then, that you are devoid of ambition, my dear, unlike the other people of your house."

She had said, paraphrasing a retort previously made:

"Does it strike you as lack of ambition that one of our family should prefer Christ before any earthly spouse?"

What a base utterance that had seemed to her afterwards! How devoid of the true spirit of the religious, how hateful, petty, profane! But the great lady had been greatly struck by it, and had gone about quoting the words everywhere. She, who had spoken them, repented them with tears, and set the memory of them between her and ill-considered, worldly speech, for ever.

She wrote on now:

"She has no vocation for the life of a religious. I doubt her being happy or successful as a teacher here, were I removed from my post by supreme earthly authority, or by death, either contingency being the expression of the Will of

God. She has a reserved, sensitive nature, quick to feel, and eager to hide what she feels, indifferent to praise or popularity among the many, anxiously desirous to please, passionately devoted where she gives her love...."

The firm mouth quivered, and a mist stole before her eyes. Being human, she took the handkerchief that lay amongst her papers and wiped the crowding tears away, and went on:

"I could wish, in anticipation of either eventuality named, that provision might now be made for her. Those who love me—yourself I know to be among the number—will not, I feel assured, be indifferent to my wish that she should be placed beyond the reach of want."

She wrote on, knowing that the implied wish would be observed as a command:

"We have never been able to trace any persons who might have been her parents—we have never even known her real name.—Those among whom her childhood was spent called her by none. As you know, I gave her in Holy Baptism one that was our dear dead mother's, together with the surname of a lost friend. She is, and must be always, known as Lynette Mildare."

Her eyes were tearless, and her hand quite steady as she continued:

"You must not be at all alarmed or shaken by this letter. I am perfectly well in health, be quite assured; I trust I may be spared to carry on my work here for many long years to come. But in

case it should be otherwise, I write thus:

"The country is greatly disturbed, in spite of the reassuring reports that have been disseminated by the Home Authorities. I do not, and cannot, imagine what the official view may be in London at this moment, but it is certain that the Transvaal and Free State are preparing for war. Every hour the enmity between the Boers and the English deepens in intensity. It will be to many minds a relief when the storm bursts. The War Office may think meanly of the Africanised Dutchman as a fighting force, but the opinion of every loyal Briton in this country is that he is not a foe to be despised, and that he will shed the last drop of his own blood and his children's for the sake of his independence.

"Above the petty interests of greedy capitalists looms the wider question: Shall the Briton or the Dutchman rule in South Africa? Here in this insignificant frontier town we wait the sounding of the tocsin. The Orange Free State has openly allied itself with the Transvaal Government. There are said to be several commandos in laager on the Border. A public meeting of citizens of this town has been held, at which a vote of 'No confidence' in the Dutch Ministers has been passed, and an appeal for help has been made to the Government at Cape Town. It is not yet publicly known what the response has been, if there is any. I think it ominous that all of our Dutch pupils, save one, should have been hurriedly sent for by their parents before the ending of the term. Knowing my responsibility, I am sending all home, except the few who happen to be resident in this town, and the

school will remain closed, at all events, until the outlook assumes a less threatening aspect. It is a relief to many that a Military Commandant has been appointed by the authorities at Cape Town, and that he arrived here a week ago. He is reported to be an officer of energy and decision, and as he has already set the troops under his command to work at putting the town into a condition of defence, and is organising the civil male population into a regiment of armed——"

There was a light knock at the door. She responded with the permission to enter, and a tall, slight girl, with red-brown hair, came in and closed the door, dropping her little curtsy to the Mother-Superior. She wore the plain black alpaca uniform of the Convent, with the ribbon of the Headship of the Red Class, to be resigned when she should become a pupil-teacher at the opening of the next term; and the rare and beautiful smile broke over the face of the elder woman as the younger came to her side.

"Are you busy, Reverend Mother? Do you want me to go away?"

"I shall have finished in another five minutes, and then there will be no more letters to write, my child. Sit where you choose; take a book, and be quiet; I shall not keep you waiting long."

The words were few; the Mother-Superior's manner a little curt in speaking them. But where Lynette chose to sit was on the cheap drugget that covered the beeswaxed boards, with her squirrel-coloured hair and soft cheek pressed against the black serge habit.

The Mother-Superior wrote on, apparently absorbed, and with knitted brows of attention, but her large,

white, beautiful left hand dropped half unconsciously to the silken hair and the velvet cheek, and stayed there.

There is a type of woman the lightest touch of whose hand is subtler and more sweet than the most honeyed kisses of others. And the Mother-Superior was not liberal of caresses. When Lynette turned her lips to the hand, the face that bent over the paper remained as stern and as absorbed as ever. She went on writing, directed, closed, and stamped her letter, and set it aside under a pebble of white quartz, lined and streaked with the faint silvery green of gold.

"Now, my child?"

The girl said, flushing scarlet:

"Reverend Mother, I have told the Red Class the truth about me!"

The Mother-Superior started; dismay was in her face.

"Why, child?"

"I—I mean"—the scarlet flush gave place to paleness —"that I have no name and no family, and no friends except you, dearest, and the Sisters. That you found me, and took me in, and have kept me out of charity."

"Was it necessary to have told—anything whatever?"

"I think so, Mother, and I am glad now that I have done it. There will be no need for deception any more."

"My daughter, there has never been the slightest deception of any kind whatsoever upon your part, or the part of anyone else who knew. No interests

suffered by your keeping your own secret. Who first solicited your confidence in this matter?"

"Greta Du Taine."

"Greta Du Taine." Very cold was the tone of the Mother-Superior. "May I ask how she received the information she had the bad taste to seek?"

"Mother—she took it—not quite as I expected."

"Yet she and you have always been friends, my child."

Lynette rose up upon her knees. The long arm of the Mother-Superior went round the slight figure that leaned against her, and in the sudden gesture was a passion of protecting motherhood.

"Mother, she does not wish to be my friend any longer. She was quite horrified to remember that she had invited me to stay with her at the Du Taine place near Johannesburg. But she said that if I liked she would not tell the class."

"I have no fear of the rest of the class. They have honour, and good feeling, and warm hearts. What was your reply to Greta's obliging proposition?"

"I told her that the sooner everybody knew the better; and I went out of the room, and came to you —as I always do—as I always have done, ever since ——"

Her voice broke in the first sob.

"*Ah!*" cried the voice of the mother-heart she crept to, as the long arms in the loose black serge sleeves went out and folded her close, "*ah, if I might be always here for you to run to! But God knows best!*"

She said aloud, gently putting the girl away:

"Well, the ordeal is over, and will not have to be gone through again. And for the future, bear in mind that every human being has a right to regard his own business—or hers—as private, and to exclude the curious from affairs which do not concern them." She reached out quick tender hands, and framed the wistful, sensitive face in them, and added, in a lower tone: "For a little told may beget in them the desire to know more. And always remember this: that the only just claim to your perfect confidence in all that concerns your past life, and I say *all* with meaning"—the girl's white eyelids fell under her earnest gaze, and the delicate lips began to quiver—"will rest in the man—the honourable and brave and worthy gentleman—who I pray may one day be your husband."

"No!" she cried out sharply as if in terror, and the slight figure was shaken by a sudden spasm of trembling. "Oh, Mother, no! Never, never!"

With a gesture of infinite pity and tenderness the Mother drew her close, and hid the shame-dyed face upon her bosom, and whispered, with her lips upon the red-brown hair:

"My lamb, my dearest, my poor, poor child! It shall be never if you choose, Lynette. But make no rash vows, no determinations that you think irrevocable. Leave the future to God. Now dry these dear eyes, and put old thoughts and memories of sorrow and of wrong most resolutely away from you. Be happy, as Our Lord meant all innocent creatures of His to be. And do not be tempted to magnify Greta's offence against friendship. She has acted according to her lights, and if they are of the kind that shine in

marshy places, a better Light will shine upon her path one day. I know that you have real affection for her ... though I must own I have always wondered in what lay the secret of her popularity in the school?"

"She is so amusing—and so pretty, Mother."

"She is exquisitely pretty. And beauty is one of the most excellent among all the gifts of God. Our sense of what is beautiful and the delight we have in the perception of it must linger with us from those days when Angels walked visibly on earth, and talked with the children of men. A lovely soul in a lovely body, nothing can be more excellent, but such a body does not always cage what St. Columb called 'the bird of beauty.' And we must not be swayed or led by outward and perishable things, that are illusions, and deceits, and snares."

The Mother-Superior reached out a long arm, and took a solid leather-bound, red-edged volume from the table, and opened it at a page marked by a flamingo's feather, whose delicate pink faded at the tip into rosy-white.

"I was reading this a little while before you came in. If you were not a little dunce at Greek, you would be able to construe the classic author for yourself."

"But I am a dunce, dear, and so I leave you to read him to me," said Lynette triumphantly.

"Well, balance this heavy book, and listen."

She read:

> *'"When first the Father of the Immortals fashioned with his divine hands the human shape:*

"'An image first he made of red clay from Idâ, tempered with pure water from the stream of Xanthos, and wine from the golden kylix borne by beautiful Ganymede, and it was godlike to look upon as a thing fashioned by the hands of the god. But the clay was not tempered sufficiently and warped in the drying. Then Zeus Patêr fashioned another shape with more cunning, and this was tempered well and warped not. And he bent down to breathe between its lips the living soul. But as he stooped, Hephaistos, jealous of the divine gift about to be conferred upon the mortal race, sent from his forges smoke and vapour, which obscured the vision of the Almighty Workman. So that the imperfect image received that which was meant for the perfect one.

"'And Zeus Patêr, being angered, said: "See what thy malice has wrought. Behold, a beautiful soul has been set in a body unbeauteous and through thine act, and god though I be, I cannot take back the gift that I have given." Then into the other image of Man the divine maker breathed a soul. But Zeus being wearied with his labours, and angered by the craft of Hephaistos, it was less pure than the first. And so two men came into being.

"'And he whose body had been fashioned perfectly and without flaw by the hands of the divine craftsman, walked the earth with gracious mien. Fair-eyed was he, with locks like clustering vine-tendrils, and cheeks rosy as the apples of Love; but the soul of this man was cunning, and he rejoiced in evils and cruelties, and deceits and mockeries were upon his lips.

"'And he whose image had warped in the drying was unbeautiful in body and swart to look upon, as though blackened by the forge-fires of Hephaistos, but he dealt uprightly and hated evil, and on his lips there was no guile, but faithfulness and truth.

"'And he who was imperfect in body was yet fairer in the eyes of Zeus Patêr than his brother; because there dwelt within him a beauteous soul.'"

"And yet, Mother, if your beautiful soul had not been given beautiful windows to look out at, and a beautiful mouth to kiss me or scold me with, and beautiful hands to hold, it would have been a beastly shame!"

Is there a woman living who can resist such sweet daughterly flatteries? This was very much a woman, and very much a mother, if very much a nun. She kissed the mouth distilling such dear honey.

"This, not for the compliment, but because it is seven years to-day since I found you, lying like some poor little strayed lamb on the veld, under the burning sun."

"That was my real birthday, dearest, dearest...."

The girl pressed closer to her with dumb, vehement affection, as though she would have grown to the bosom that had been her shield since then.

"On that day a little later, when I looked down and you looked up with big eyes that begged for love, I knew that we had found each other. And we have never lost each other since, I think?"

She smiled radiantly into the loving eyes.

"Never, my Mother. But if we did ... if we are ever to be estranged or parted, it would be better ... oh! it would be better if you had passed by in the waggon, and left me lying, and the aasvogels and the wild-dogs had done the rest."

The Mother-Superior said, loosening the clinging arms, and speaking sternly:

"Never, my daughter. You do gravely wrong to say so. Holy Baptism has been yours, and Confirmation, and you have shared with His Faithful in the Body of Christ.... Never let me hear you say that again!"

"Mother, I promise you, you never shall. But I had a dream last night that was most vivid and strange and awful. It has haunted me ever since."

The Mother-Superior started, for she also had had a strange dream. Of that vision had been born the written letter that now lay under the quartz paper-weight—the letter that was to be sent, with others, by the next English mail that should go out from Gueldersdorp, which said mail, being intercepted by the Boers, was not for many months to reach its destination. Supposing it had, this story need never have been written, or else another would have been written in its place.

"Dear heart, I do not think that it is good or useful to brood upon such things, or to relate them. And the Church forbids us to take account of mere dreams, or in any way be swayed by them."

"That has always puzzled me. Because, you know ... supposing St. Joseph had refused to credit a dream?..."

"There are dreams and dreams, my dear. And the heavenly visions of the Saints are not to be confounded with our trivial subconscious memories. Besides, sweets and fruits and pastry consumed in the seniors' dormitory at night are not only an infringement of school rules, but an insult to the digestion."

"Mother, how did you find out?" cried Lynette. There was something very like a dimple in the bleached olive of the sweet worn cheek, lurking near the edge of the close coif, and a twinkle of laughter in the deep grey eyes that you thought were black until you had learned better.

"Well, though you may not find it easy to believe, I was once a girl at a boarding-school, and I possibly remember how we usually celebrated a breaking-up. There is the washing-bell; the pupils' tea-bell will ring directly; you must hurry, or you will be late. One moment. What of this unpleasant incident that took place during the afternoon walk yesterday? Sister Cleophée and Sister Francis-Clare have not given me a very definite account."

Lynette's fair skin flushed poppy-red.

"Mother, they hooted us on the road to the Recreation Ground."

Upon the great brows of the Mother-Superior sat the majesty of coming tempest. Her white hand clenched, her tone was awfully stern:

"Who were 'they'?"

"Some drunken Boers and store-boys—at least, I think they were drunk—and some Dutch railway-men. They cried shame on the Dutch girls for

learning from vile English idolaters. Then more men came up and joined them. They threw stones, and threatened to duck Sister Cleophée and the two other Sisters in the river. And they might have tried to, though we senior girls got round them—at least, some of us did—and said they should try that on us first——"

"That was courageous."

"We"—Lynette laughed a little nervously—"we were awfully frightened, all the same."

"My dear, without fear there would have been no courage. Then I am told an English officer interposed?"

"He was coming from the direction of the Hospital—a tall thin man in Service khâki, with a riding-sjambok under his arm. But it would have been as good as a sword if he had used it on those men. When he lifted it in speaking to them they huddled together like sheep."

"You have no idea who he was, of course?"

"I do not know his name, but I heard one of the Boers say, 'That slim duyvel with the sjambok is the new Military Commandant.' Another officer was with him, much younger, taller, and with fair hair. He ——"

"I hope I shall soon have an opportunity of thanking the Commandant personally. As it is, I shall write. Now go, my dear."

Lynette took her familiar kiss, and dropped her formal curtsy, and went with the red sunset touching her squirrel-coloured hair to flame. The tea-bell rang

as she shut the door behind her, and directly afterwards the gate-bell clanged, sending an iron shout echoing through the whitewashed, tile-paved passages, as if heralding a visitor who would not be denied. An Irish novice who was on duty with the Sister attendant on the gate came shortly afterwards to the room of the Mother-Superior, bringing a card on a little wooden tray.

The Mother, the opening sentences of her note of thanks wet upon the sheet before her, took the card, and knew that the letter need not be sent.

"This gentleman desired to see me?"

"He did so, Reverend Mother," whispered the timid Irish girl, who stood in overwhelming awe of the majestic personality before her. "'Ask the Mother-Superior will she consent to receive me?' says he. 'If she won't, say that she must.' Says I: 'Sir, I'd not drame to presume give Herself a message that bowld, but if you'll please to wait, I'll tell her what you're after saying.'"

"Quite right, Katie. Now go and tell Sister Tobias to show him into the parlour. I will be there directly."

Katie bobbed and vanished. When the Mother-Superior came into the parlour, the visitor was standing near the fireplace, with his hands behind his back. One wore a shabby dogskin riding-glove. The other, lean and brown and knotty, held his riding-cane and the other glove, and a grey "smasher" hat. He was looking up quietly and intently at a framed oil-painting that hung above.

It represented a Syrian desert landscape, pale and ghastly, under the light of a great white moon, with

one lonely Figure standing like a sentinel against a towering fang of rock. Lurking forms of fierce beasts of prey were dimly to be distinguished amongst the shadows, and by the side of the patient, lonely watcher brooded with outspread bat-wings, a Shadow infinitely more terrible than any of these. It was rather a poor copy of a modern picture, but the truth and force and inspiration of the original had made of the copyist an artist for the time. The pure dignity and lofty faith and patience of the Christ-eyes, haggard with bodily sleeplessness and spiritual battle, the indomitable resistance breathing in the lines of the Christ figure, wan and gaunt with physical famine as with the nobler hunger of the soul, were rendered with fidelity and power.

The stranger's keen ear caught the Mother's long, swift step, and the sweep of her woollen draperies over the shiny beeswaxed floor. He wheeled sharply, brought his heels together, and bowed. She returned his salutation with her inimitable dignity and grace. With his eyes on the pure, still calmness of the face framed in the white close coif, the Colonel commented mentally:

"What a noble-looking woman!"

The Mother-Superior thought, as her composed eyes swept over the tall, spare, broad-shouldered figure and the strong, lean, tanned face, with its alert, hazel eyes, nose of the falcon-beak order, and firm straight mouth unconcealed by the short-clipped moustache:

"This is a brave man."

XI

The great of soul are not slow to find each other out. These two recognised each other at meeting. Before he had explained his errand, she had thanked him cordially, directly, and simply, for his timely interference of the previous day.

"One of the lesser reasons of my visit, which I must explain is official in character," he said, "was to advise you that your pupils and the ladies in charge of them will not henceforth be safe from insult except in those parts of the town most frequented by our countrymen, and rarely even there. It would be wise of you under existing circumstances, which I shall explain as fully and as briefly as I may, to send your pupils without delay to their homes."

"All that have not already left," she assured him, "with the exception of those whose parents reside in the town, or who have no living relatives, and therefore do not leave us, go North and South by early trains to-morrow."

"Ma'am," he said, "I am heartily glad to hear it." He added, as she invited him to be seated: "Thank you, but I have been in the saddle since five this morning, and if you have no objection I should prefer to stand. And for another reason, I explain things better on my legs. But you will allow me to find you a seat, if—any of these may be moved?" His glance, with some perturbation in it, reviewed the stiff ranks of chairs severely marshalled in Convent fashion against the varnished skirting-board.

"They are not fixtures," she said, with quiet amusement at his evident relief, and he got her a

chair, the largest and most solid that the room offered, and planted himself opposite her, standing on the hearthrug, with one hand resting on the corner of the high mantelshelf, and the toe of a spurred riding-boot on the plain brick kerb.

"I may as well say ..."—he ran a finger round the inside of the collar that showed above the khâki jacket—"that, though I have often had the pleasure, and I will add, the great advantage, of meeting ladies of—of your religious profession before, this is the first time that I ever was inside a Convent."

"Or a boarding-school?" she asked, and her rare, sudden smile irradiated her. His hand dropped from his collar. He looked at her with a sudden warmth of admiration there was no mistaking. But her beauty went as suddenly as it had come, and her arched, black brows frowned slightly as she said, in tones that were very cold and very clear, and rather ironical:

"Sir, you are good enough to waste valuable time in trying to break, with due consideration for the nerves of a large household of unprotected women, the news we have expected daily for months. You have come here to announce to us the bursting of the cloud of War. Is it not so?"

He was taken aback, but hid it like a diplomat.

"Ma'am, it is so. The public notice was posted in the town this morning. Forces of Boers are massed on the West Natal and East Baraland borders, waiting until the British fire a shot. Their secret orders are to wait that signal, but some unlooked-for event may cause them to anticipate these.... And we shall be wise to prepare for eventualities. For myself, having been

despatched by the British Government on special service to report to the Home Authorities upon our defences in the North—it is an open secret now—I have been sent down here to put the town into a condition to withstand siege. And frankly, without apology for necessary and inevitable bluntness, one of the most important of those conditions is—that the women and children should be got out of it."

The blow had been delivered. The angry blush that he had expected did not invade the pale olive of her cheeks.

He added:

"I hope you will understand that I say this because it is my duty. I am not naturally unsociable, or bearish, or a surly misogynist. Rather the contrary. Quite the contrary."

She remembered a slim, boyish, young lieutenant of Hussars with whom she had danced in a famous London ball-room more than twenty years back. That boy a woman hater! Struggle as she would the Mother-Superior could not keep Lady Bridget-Mary Bawne from coming to the surface for an instant. But she went under directly, and left nothing but a spark of laughter in the beautiful grave eyes.

"I understand," she said. "Woman in time of peace may add a certain welcome pleasantness to life. In time of war she is nothing but a helpless incubus."

"Let me point out, ma'am, that I did not say so. But she possesses a capacity for being killed equal in ratio to that of the human male, without being equally able to defend herself. In addition to this, she eats; and I shall require all the rations that may be

available to keep alive the combatant members of the community."

"Eating is a habit," agreed the Mother-Superior, "which even the most rigid disciplinarians of the body have found difficult to break."

His mouth straightened sternly under the short-clipped brown moustache. Here was a woman who dared to bandy words with the Officer Commanding the Garrison. He drew a shabby notebook from a breast-pocket, and consulted it.

"On the eleventh, the day after to-morrow, a special train, leaving No. 2 platform of the railway-station, will be placed by the British Government at the disposal of those married women, spinsters, and children who wish to follow the example of those who left to-day, and go down to Cape Town. Those who prefer to go North are advised to leave for Malamye Siding or Johnstown, places at a certain distance from the Transvaal Border, where they will be almost certain to find safety. Those who insist upon remaining in the town I cannot, of course, remove by force. I will make all possible arrangements to laager them safely, but this will entail heavy extra labour upon the forces at my command, and inevitable discomfort—possibly severe suffering and privation—upon themselves. To you, madam, I appeal to set a high example. Your Community numbers, unless I am incorrectly informed, twelve religious. Consent to take the step I urge upon you, retreat with your nuns to Cape Town while the opportunity is yours."

He folded his arms, having spoken this curtly and crisply. The Mother-Superior rose up out of her chair. It seemed to him as though she would never

have done rising, but at last she stood before him, very straight and awfully tall, with her great stern eyes an inch above the level of his own, and her white hands folded in her black serge sleeves.

"Sir," she said, "we are here under the episcopal jurisdiction of the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese. We have received no order from His Eminence to quit our post—and until we receive it, give me leave to tell you, with all respect for your high official authority, that we shall remain in Gueldersdorp."

Their looks crossed like swords. He grew crimson over the white unsunburned line upon his forehead, and his moustache straightened like a bar of rusty-red iron across his thin, tanned face. But he respected moral power and determination when he encountered them, and this salient woman provoked his respect.

"Let us keep cool——" he began.

"I assure you that I have never been otherwise," she said, "since the beginning of this interview."

"Ma'am," he said, "you state the fact. Let me keep cool, and point out to you a few of the—peculiarities in which the present situation unfortunately abounds."

He laid down, with a look that asked permission, his hat and cane and the odd glove upon the round, shining walnut-table that stood, adorned with mild little religious works, in the geometrical centre of the Convent parlour, and checked the various points off upon the fingers of the gloved hand with the lean, brown, bare one.

"I anticipate very shortly the outbreak of hostilities."

He had quite forgotten that he was talking to a member of the squeaking sex. "I have begun immediately upon my arrival here to prepare for them. The nucleus of a sand-bag fort-system has been formed already, mines are being laid down far in the front, and every male of the population who has a pair of capable hands has had a rifle put into them."

She looked at him, and approved the male type of energy and action. "If I had been a man," she thought, "I should have wished to be one like this." But she bent her head silently, and he went on.

"We have an armoured train in the railway-yard, with a Maxim and a Hotchkiss. We have a Nordenfeldt, a couple of Maxims more, four seven-pounder guns of almost prehistoric date, slow of fire, uncertain as regards the elevating-gear, and, I tell you plainly, as dangerous, some of 'em, to be behind as to be in front of! One or two more we've got that were grey-headed in the seventies. By the Lord! I wish one or two Whitehall heads I know were mopping 'em out this minute. Ahem! Ahem!"

He coughed, and grew red under his sun-tan. Her eyes were elsewhere.

"Ma'am, you must try to recollect that the Boer forces are armed with the newest Krupps and other guns, and that it is more than possible they may attempt to shell the town. In that case artillery of tremendous range, and a flight almost equal to that of sound itself—I won't be too technical, I assure you!—will be mustered against our crazy pieces, only fit for the scrap-heap, or for gate ornaments. Understand, I tell you what is common knowledge among our friends—common jest among our enemies. And another thing I will tell you, ma'am. Those enemies shall never

enter Gueldersdorp!"

She was radiant now, with that smile upon her lips, and that glow in the great eyes that met his with such frank approval. Confound it, what business had a nun to be anything like so beautiful? Would she pale, would she tremble, when he told her the last truth of all?

"Your Convent, ma'am, unluckily for your Community, happens to be, if not the biggest, at least the most conspicuously situated building in the place, lying as it does at a distance of four hundred yards from the town, on the north-east side. Like the Hospital, of course, it will be under the protection of the Red-Cross Flag. But the Boer is not chivalrous. He does not object to killing women or sick people, nor does he observe with any standing scrupulousness the Geneva Convention. Any object that shows up nicely on the skyline is good enough to pound away at, and the Red-Cross Flag has often helped him to get a satisfactory range. If they bombard us, as I have reason to believe they will, you'll have iron and lead in tons poured through these walls."

She said:

"When they fall about our ears, Colonel, it will be time to leave them!"

He adored a gallant spirit, and here was one indeed.

"Ma'am, I am disarmed, since you take things in this way."

"It is the only way in which to take them," she said. "There should be no panic in the hearts of those who wait on the Divine Will. Moreover, I should wish you to understand in case of siege, and an extra demand

upon the staffs of the Town and Field Hospitals, that we are all—or nearly all—certificated nurses, and would willingly place our services at your disposal. Let me hope that you will call upon us without hesitation if the necessity should arise."

He thanked her, and had taken leave, when he asked with diffidence if he might be permitted to see the Convent chapel. She consented willingly, and passed on before, tall and stately, and moving with long, light, even steps, her flowing serge draperies whispering over the tiled passages. The chapel was at the end of a long whitewashed corridor upon the airy floor above. His keen glance took in every feature of the simple, spotless little sanctuary as the tall, black-clad figure swept noiselessly to the upper end of the aisle between the rows of rush-seated chairs, and knelt for an instant in veneration of the Divine Presence hidden in the Tabernacle.

"Unfortunately situated!" he muttered, standing stiffly by the west door. Then he glanced right and left, a thumb and finger in the breast-pocket of his jacket, feeling for a worn little pigskin purse. As he passed out before her at the motion, and she mechanically dipped her fingers in the holy-water font, and made the Sign of the Cross before she closed the chapel door, she saw that he held out to her a five-pound note.

"Ma'am, I am not a Roman Catholic, but ..."

"There is no box for alms," she said, pausing outside the shut door, while the lay-Sister waited at the passage end, "as this is only a private chapel."

"I observed that, ma'am. I am, as I have said, a Protestant. But in the behalf of a dear friend of mine,

a British officer, of your own faith, who I have reason to believe died without benefit of his clergy, perhaps with this you would arrange that a service should be held in memory of the dead?"

"I understand," said the Mother-Superior. "You suggest that Holy Mass should be offered for the repose of your friend's soul? Well, I will convey your offering to our chaplain, Father Wix, since you desire it."

"I do desire it—or, rather, poor Mildare would."

An awful sensation as of sinking down through the solid floors, through the foundations of the Convent, into unfathomable deeps possessed her. Her eyes closed; she forced them open, and made a desperate rally of her sinking forces. Unseen she put out one hand behind her, and leaned it for support against the iron-studded oak timbers of the chapel door. But his eyes were not upon her as he went on, unconsciously, to deal the last, worst blow.

"I said, ma'am, that my dead friend ... the name is Richard Mildare, Captain, late of the Grey Hussars.... You are ill, ma'am. I have been inconsiderate, and over-tired you." He had become aware that great dark circles had drawn themselves round her eyes, and that even her lips were colourless. She said, with a valiant effort:

"I assure you, with thanks, that you have been most considerate, and that I am perfectly well. Are you at liberty to tell me, sir, the date of Captain Mildare's death? For I know one who was also his friend, and would"—a spasm passed over her face—"take an interest in hearing the particulars."

"Ma'am, you shall know what I know myself. About twenty years ago Captain Mildare, owing to certain unhappy circumstances, social, and not pecuniary ones, sent in his papers, sold his Commission, and left England."

She waited.

"I heard of him in Paris. Then, later, I heard from him. He was with her here in South Africa. She was a woman for whom he had given up everything. They travelled continually, never resting long anywhere, he, and she, and—their child. She died on the trek and he buried her."

"Yes?"

The voice was curiously toneless.

"Where he buried her has only recently come to my knowledge. It was at a kind of veld tavern in the Orange Free State, a shanty in the grass-country between Driepoort and Kroonfontein, where travellers can get a bad lodging, and bad liquor, and worse company. 'Trekkers Plaats' they call the place now. But when my friend was there it was known as the 'Free State Hotel.'"

Her lips shut as if to keep out bitter, drowning waters; her face was white as wax within the starched blue-white of the nun's coif; his slow sentences fell one by one upon her naked heart, and ate their way in like vitriol. Quite well, too well, she knew what was coming.

"He dug her grave with his own hands. He meant to have a clergyman read the Burial Service over it, but before that could be arranged for he also died—of fever, I gather, though nothing is very clear, except

that the two graves are there. I have seen them, and have also ascertained that whatever property he left was appropriated by the scoundrel who kept the hotel, and afterwards sold it, and cleared out of South Africa; and that the child is not to be found. God knows what has become of her! The man who robbed her father may have murdered or sold her—or taken her to England. A man bearing his name was mixed up in a notorious case tried at the Central Criminal Court five years ago. And the case, which ruined a well-known West End surgeon, involved the death of a young woman. I trust the victim may not have been the unhappy girl herself. My solicitors in London have been instructed to make inquiries towards the removal of that doubt...."

If those keen eyes of his had not been averted, he must have seen the strong shuddering that convulsed the woman's frame, and the spasm of agony that wrung the lips she pressed together, and the glistening damps of anguish that broke out upon the broad white forehead. To save her life she could not have said to him, "She whom you seek is here!" But a voice wailed in her heart, more piercingly than Rachel's, and it cried: "Richard's daughter! She is Richard's daughter! The homeless thing, the blighted child I found upon the veld, and nursed back to life and happiness and forgetfulness of a hideous past; whom I took into my empty heart, and taught to call me Mother.... She is the fruit of my own betrayal! the offspring of the friend who deceived and the man who deserted me!"

The visitor was going on, his grave gaze still turned aside. "Of course, the age of the unhappy girl whose death brought about the trial I speak of—everything depends upon that. Mildare's daughter was a child of

three years old when she lost father and mother. If alive to-day she would be nineteen years of age. I wish it had been my great good fortune to trace and find her. She should have had the opportunity of growing up to be a noble woman. In this place, if it might have been, and with an example like yours before her eyes ... ma'am, good-afternoon."

He bowed to her, and went away with short, quick, even steps, following the lay-Sister who was to take him to the gate.

She tottered into the chapel, and sank down before the altar, and strove to pray. Her mind was an eddying blackness shot with the livid glare of electric fires. Her faith rocked like a palm in the tempest; her soul was tossed across raging billows like a vessel in the grip of the cyclone. Being so great, she suffered greatly; being so strong, she had strong passions to wrestle with and to subdue. Awhile, like that other Mary, who, unlike her, was a fleshly sinner, she strove, rent as it seemed to her, by seven devils. And then she fell down prone at her Master's nail-pierced Feet, and found there at last the healing gift of tears.

XII

Emigration Jane, the new under-housemaid on trial at the Convent, had a gathering on the top joint of the first finger of the hand that burned to wear Walt Slabberts' betrothal-ring, and the abscess being ripe for the lancet, she had an extra afternoon in the week to get it attended to. She found Walt waiting at

the street-corner under the lamp-post, and her heart bounded, for by their punctuality at the trysting-place you know whether they are serious in their intentions towards you, or merely carrying on, and her other young men had invariably kept her waiting. This new one was class, and no mistake.

"Watto, Walt!" she hailed joyously.

Her Walt uttered a guttural greeting in the Taal, and displayed uncared-for and moss-grown teeth in the smile that Emigration Jane found strangely fascinating. To the eye that did not survey Walt through the rose-coloured glasses of affection he appeared merely as a high-shouldered, slab-sided young Boer, whose cheap store-clothes bagged where they did not crease, and whose boots curled upwards at the toes with mediæval effect. His cravat, of a lively green, patterned with yellow rockets, warred with his tallowy complexion; his drab-coloured hair hung in clumps; he was growing a beard that sprouted in reddish tufts from the tough hide of his jaws, leaving bare patches between, like the karroo. The Slabberts was an assistant-clerk at the Gueldersdorp Railway-Station Parcels-Office, and his widowed mother, the Tante Slabberts, took in washing from Uitlanders, who are mad enough to change their underwear with frequency, and did the cleaning at the Gerevormed Kerk at Rustenberg, a duty which involves the emptying of spittoons. Her boy was her joy and pride.

Young Walt, the true Boer's son that he was, did not entertain the idea of marrying Emigration Jane. The child of the Amalekite might never be brought home as bride to the Slabberts roof. But all the same, her style, which was that of the Alexandra Crescent,

Kentish Town, London, N.W., and her manners, which were easy, and her taste in dress, which was dazzling, attracted him. As regards their spoken intercourse, it had been hampered by the Slabbertian habit of pretending only a limited acquaintance with the barbarous dialect of England. But a young man who conversed chiefly by grunts, nudges, and signs was infinitely more welcome than no young man at all, and Emigration Jane knew that the language of love is universal. She had sent him a lovely letter in the Taal making this appointment, causing his pachydermatous hide to know the needle-prick of curiosity. For only last Sabbath she had spoken nothing but the English, and a young woman capable of mastering Boer Dutch in a week might be made useful in a variety of ways—some of them tortuous, all of them secret, as the Slabbertian ways were wont to be.

He advanced to her, without the needless ceremony of touching his hat, eagerly asking how she had acquired her new accomplishment?

But the brain crowned by the big red hat that had come from the Maison Cluny, and cost a hundred francs, and had been smartened up with a bunch of pink and yellow artificial roses, and three imitation ostrich-tips of a cheerful blue, did not comprehend. Someone who spoke the Taal had written for her. The bilingual young woman who was to be of such use to Walt had only existed in his dreams. And yet —the disappointing creature was exceeding fair.

"Pity you left your eyes be'ind you, Dutchy!" giggled Emigration Jane, deliciously conscious that those rather muddy orbs were glued on her admiringly.

The hair crowned by the screaming hat was waved

and rolled over the horsehair frame she had learned to call a "Pompydore"; the front locks, usually confined in the iron cages called "curlers," frizzled wonderfully about her moist, crimson face. She had on a "voylet" delaine skirt, with three bias bands round the bottom, and a "blowse" of transparent muslin stamped with floral devices. Her shoes were of white canvas; her stockings pink and open-worked; her gloves were of white thread, and had grown grey in the palms with agitation. One of them firmly grasped a crimson "sunshyde," with green and scarlet cherries growing out of the end of the stick.

The young Dopper warmly grasped the other, provoking a squeal from the enchantress.

"Mind me bad finger! Lumme! you did give us a squeeze an' a' arf."

"If I shall to hurt you I been sorry, Miss!" apologized the Slabbert.

"All righto, Dutchy!" smiled Emigration Jane. "Don't tear your features." She bestowed a glance of almost vocal disdain upon a Kaffir girl in turkey-red cotton twill, with a green hat savagely pinned upon her woolly hair. At another ebony female who advanced along the sidewalk pushing a white baby in a perambulator she tossed her head. "Funny," she observed, "when I was 'ome I used to swaller all the tales what parsons kep' pitchin' about that black lot 'aving souls like me an' you. When I got out 'ere, an' took my fust place at Cape Town, an' 'eard the Missis and the Master continual sayin', 'Don't do this or that, it ain't Englishwomen's work; leave it to the Caffy,' or 'Call the 'Ottintot gal,' I felt quite 'urt for 'em. Upon me natural, I did! But when I knoo these blackies a bit better, I didn't make no more bones.

Monkeys, they are, rigged up in brown 'olland an' red braid, wot 'ave immytated 'uman beings till they've come to talk langwidge wot we can understand, and tumble to our meanings. 'Ow do you like me dress, Walty dear? An' me 'at? That chap what passed with the red mustash said to 'is friend as I looked a bit of fair all right, and no mistake. But I'd rather 'ear you say so nor 'im if you 'ad enough English to do it with. Wot do I care about the perisher along of you?"

It was hard work to talk for two, and keep the ball of courtship rolling after the approved fashion of Kentish Town, when the slouching young Boer would only grunt in reply, or twinkle at her out of his piggish eyes. But Emigration Jane had come out to South Africa, hearing that places at five shillings a day were offered you by employers, literally upon their knees, and that husbands were thick as orange-peel and programmes on the pit-floor of the Britanniar Theayter, 'Oxton, or the Camden Varieties on the morning after a Bank Holiday. She had left her first situation at Cape Town, being a girl of spirit, because her mistress had neglected to introduce her to eligible gentlemen acquaintances, as the pleasant-spoken agent at the Emigrants' Information Office in Cheapside, the young gentleman of Hebrew strain, whose dark eyes, waxed moustache, and diamond tie-pin had made a deep impression upon the susceptible heart of his client, had assured Jane the South African employer would take an early opportunity of doing. The reality had not corresponded with the glowing picture. The employer had failed in duty, the husbands-aspirant had not appeared. Ephemeral flirtations there had been, with a postman, with a trooper of the Cape Mounted Police, with an American bar-tender. But not one of these had breathed of indissoluble union,

though each had wanted to borrow her savings. And Emigration Jane had "bin 'ad" in that way before, and gone with her bleeding heart and depleted Post Office Savings-book before the fat, sallow magistrate at the Regent's Road County Court, and winced and smarted under his brutal waggeries, only to learn that the appropriator of her womanly affections and her fifteen sovereigns had already three wives.

The brute, the 'artless beast! Emigration Jane wondered at herself, she did, as 'ad bin such a reg'ler soft as to be took in by one to whom she never referred in speech except as "That There Green." That she softened to him in her weaker moments, in spite of his remembered appetite for savings and his regrettable multiplicity of wives, gave her the fair hump. That something in the expression of this new one's muddy eyes recalled the loving leer of "That There Green," she admitted to herself. Womanly anxiety throbbed in the bosom, not too coyly hidden by the pneumonia blouse, as the couple passed the gilded portals of a public bar, and the Slabberts' elbow was thrust painfully into her side, as its owner said heavily:

"Have you thirst?"

She coyly owned to aridity, and they entered the saloon, kept by a Dutchman who spoke English. Two ginger-beers with a stick of Hollands were supplied, and the stick of Slabberts was as the rod of Moses to the other stick for strength and power. But as Emigration Jane daintily sipped the cooling beverage, giggling at the soapy bubbles that snapped at her nose, the restless worm of anxiety kept on gnawing under the flowery "blowse." Too well did she know the ways of young men who hospitably ask

you if you're thirsty, and 'ave you in, whether or no, and order drinks as liberal as lords, and then discover that they're short of the bob, and borrow from you in a joking way.... Her heart bounded as the Slabberts put his hand in his pocket, saying:

"Wat kost het?"

The Dutch bar-keeper, who seemed to know Slabberts, answered in English, looking at Emigration Jane:

"Half a dollar."

Half a dollar is South African for eighteenpence. Slabberts rattled something metallic in his trousers-pocket, and said something rapidly in the Taal. The Dutch bar-keeper leaned across the counter, and said to Emigration Jane:

"Your young man has not got the money."

They were all, all alike. A tear rose to her eye. She bravely dried it with a finger of a white cotton glove, and produced her purse, an imitation crocodile-leather and sham-silver affair, bought in Kentish Town, where you may walk through odorous groves of dried haddocks that are really whiting, and Yarmouth bloaters that never were at Yarmouth, and purchase whole Rambler roses, the latest Paris style, for threepence, and try on feather-boas at two-and-eleven-three, plucked from the defunct carcase of the domestic fowl. She paid for the drinks with a florin, and it was quite like old times when Slabberts calmly pocketed the sixpence of change. The bar-keeper leaned over to her again, and said, surrounding her with a confidential atmosphere of tobacco and schnaps:

"He is a good man, that young man of yours, and gets much money. He means to give you a nice present by-and-by."

Her grateful heart overflowed to this friendly patronage. She showed the bar-keeper her gathered finger, and said it did 'urt a treat. She expected it would 'urt worse before Dr. de Boursy-Williams —"'adn't 'e got a toff's name?"—'ad done with it.

"You go to that Engelsch doktor on Harris Street, eh?" said the bar-keeper, spitting dexterously.

"Sister Tobias—that's the nun wot 'ousekeeps at the Convent—give me a order to see 'im, to 'ave me finger larnced," explained Emigration Jane. "Ain't 'e all right?"

"Right enough," said the bar-keeper, winking at the Slabberts, and adding something in the Taal, that provoked chuckles among the bystanders and called forth a fine display of neglected teeth on the part of the personage addressed. "There are plenty other Engelsch will be wishing to be as right, oh, very soon! For De Boursy-Williams, he has sent his wife and his two daughters away on the train for Cape Town yesterday morning, and he has gone after them that same night, and he has left all his patients to the Dop Doctor."

"Some red-necked baboons are wiser than others," said the Slabberts in the Taal, and there was a hoarse laugh, and the humorist turned his big heavy body away, and became one of a crowd of other Dutchmen, who were, in veiled hints and crooked allusions, discussing the situation across the Border. Emigration Jane was not sensitive to the electricity in the atmosphere. She knew no Dutch, and was

perfect in the etiquette of the outing, which, when the young woman has been supplied with the one regulation drink, stands her up in the corner like an umbrella in dry weather as long as her young man is a-talking to 'is pals.

"So," the bar-keeper went on, "if you shall want that bad finger of yours looked to, you will have to wait until the Dop Doctor wakes up. He is a big man, who can drink as much as three Boers.... He came in this morning to get drunk, and you shall not wake him now if you fire off a rifle at his ear. But he will get up presently and shake himself, and then he will be quite steady; you would not guess how drunk he had been unless you had seen.... He is over there, sleeping on that table in the corner, and it will be very bad for the man who shall wake him up. For, look you, that Dop Doctor is a duyvel. I have seen him break a man like a stick between his hands for nothing but cutting up a thieving monkey of a little Kaffir with the sjambok. And he took the verdoemte thing home where he lives, they say, and strapped up its black hide with plaster, and set its arm as if it had been a child of Christians. But every Engelschman is mad. Groot Brittanje breeds a nation of madmen."

The saloon got fuller and fuller. The air solidified with the Taal and the tobacco, and other things less pleasant. It was not the hour for a crowd of customers, but nobody had seemed to be working much of late. They were all Transvaalers and Free Staters, tradesmen of the town, or Boers from outlying farms, and not a man there but was waiting a certain signal to clear out and leave Gueldersdorp to her fate, or remain in the place on a salary paid by the Republics as a spy. The English customer who came in knew at one whiff of the thick atmosphere

that it was unhealthy, and if the man happened to be alone, he ordered, and paid, and drank, and went out quickly. If he happened to be with friends, he pointedly addressed his conversation to his countrymen, and left with a certain degree of swagger, and without the appearance of undue haste.

Once the swing-doors of the saloon opened to admit a short, spare, hollow-chested, dapper young Englishman, whose insignificant Cockney countenance was splashed with orange-coloured freckles of immense size. Between his thin anæmic lips dangled the inevitable cigarette. And Emigration Jane, toying with the dregs of her tumbler, recognized the pert, sharp, sallow face seen over the sleeve of a large burgher's outstretched arm. With some trouble she caught the eye of the short, pale young man, and he instantly became a red one. To reach her was difficult, but he dived and wriggled his way across the saloon, wedging his frail person between the blockish bodies with a cool address that reminded her of the first night of a "noo show" at the Camden "Theayter," and the queue outside the gallery door.

"'Ullo, 'ullo! Thought I reckonised you, Miss." He touched his cheap imitation Panama with swaggering gallantry, and winked. "But seeing you eight sizes more of a toff than what you were when I previously 'ad the pleasure, I 'esitated to tip you the 'Ow Do."

She tossed her imitation ostrich plumes in joyous coquetry.

"As if I didn't know wot you're after. Garn! You only wants to know if I acted on the stryte about ..."

His projecting ears burned crimson.

"Well, an' suppose I do. Did she——"

"Did she wot?"

"You pipe well enough. Did she 'ave it?"

"Ain't you anxious?"

"Tyke it I am anxious. Did she? No cod?"

"Did she git your letter wot you put in the box o' choc's? O' course she did, Mister. Wot do you tyke me for? A silly looney or a sneakin' thief?"

"I'll tell you what I tyke you for. A jolly little bit of English All Right. Say! Do you think ..." The prominent Adam's apple jutting over the edge of the guillotining double collar worked emotionally. "Think she'll send an answer, eh?"

"Reckon she will; you watch out an' see!"

"You fust-clarss little brick!"

"Garn!"

"I mean it. Stryte. Next door to a angel—that's wot you are. She's the angel. Tell 'er I said so—that's if you can, you twig? And say that when I 'eard that nearly all the gay old crowd o' pupils 'ad gone away, day before yesterday, I could 'a blooming well cut me throat, thinkin' she'd gone too. Becos' when I swore in for the Town Guard, it was with the idear—mind you rub that in!—of strikin' a blow for Beauty as well as for Britanniar, twig?" The thin elbow in the tweed sleeve nudged her, provoking a joyous giggle.

"I'm fly, no fear. Are you to 'ave a uniform, an' all like that?"

His face fell. "The kit don't run to much beyond a

smasher 'at an' puttees, but they're the regular Service kind, an' then there's the bandolier—an' the gun. She ain't the newest rifle served out to Her Majesty's Army, not by twenty years. Condemned Martini, a chap says, who's in the know—an' kicks like a mule when I let 'er off—made me nose bleed fust time I tried with blank. But when we gets a bit more used to each other, it 'll be a case of bloomin' Doppers rollin' over in the dust, like rock-rabbits. Don't forget to tell 'er as wot I said so."

"Why ... ain't she a Dutchy 'erself? She wrote a letter for me in their rummy lingo to my young man!"

"Cripps!" He stared in dismay. "Blessed if I 'adn't forgot. But if an Englishman marries a foreigner," he swelled heroic, "that puts 'er in the stryte runnin'. And 'art an' 'and I'm 'ers, whenever she'll 'ave me! Tell 'er THAT—with a double row of crosses from W. Keyse! And—can you remember a bit o' poetry?" He recited with shamefaced rapidity:

> "It is my sentry-go to-night,
> And when I watch the moon so bright,
> Shining o'er South Africa plain,
> I'll think of thee, sweet Greta Du Taine."

Her eyes were full of awe and wonder. "Lor! you don't mean to say you made up that by yourself?"

The poet nodded. "Reckon about as much. Like it?"

"It's perfect lovely! Better than they 'ave in the penny books."

"Where Coralline and the Marquis are playin' the spooney game, and 'im with a Lady Reginer up 'is dirty sleeve. An' there's another thing I want you to

let 'er know." His eyes were on hers, his breath fanned her hot cheeks. "There isn't another woman on the earth but her for me. Dessay there may be others; wot I say is—I don't see 'em!" He waved his hand, dismissing the ardent creatures.

A pang transpierced the conscience hiding under the cheap flowery blouse. Emigration Jane hesitated, biting the dog's-eared finger-ends of a cotton glove. Should she tell this ardent, chivalrous lover that the Convent roof no longer sheltered the magnificent fair hair-plait and the mischievous blue eyes of his adored? That Miss Greta Du Taine had left for Johannesburg with the latest batch of departing pupils! If she told, W. Keyse would vanish out of her life, it might be for ever; or, if by chance encountered on the street, pass by with a casual greeting and a touch of the cheap Panama. Emigration Jane was no heroine, only a daughter of Eve. Arithmetic and what was termed the "tonic sofa" had been more sternly inculcated than the moral virtues at the Board School in Kentish Town. And she was not long in making up her mind that she would not tell him—not just yet, anyway.

What was he saying, in the Cockney that cut like a knife through the thick gutturals of the Taal? "I shall walk past the Convent to-morrer in kit and 'cetras, on the charnce of 'Er seein' me. Two sharp. And, look 'ere, Miss, you've done me a good turn. And—no larks!—if ever I can do you another—trust me. Stryte—I mean it! You ask chaps 'oo know me if Billy Keyse ever went back on a pal?"

She swayed her hips, and disclaimed all obligation. But, garn! he was gittin' at 'er, she knew!

"I ain't; I mean it! You should 'ave 'arf me 'eredittary

estates—if I 'ad any. As I 'aven't, say wot you'll drink? Do, Miss, to oblige yours truly, W. Keyse, Esquire."

W. Keyse plunged a royal, reckless hand into the pocket of his tweed riding-breeches, bought against the time when he should bestride something nobler than a bicycle, and produced a half-sovereign. He owed it to his landlady and the rest, the coin that he threw down so magnificently on the shiny counter, but you do not treat your good angel every day.... Emigration Jane bridled, and swayed her hips still more. His largeness was intoxicating. One had dreamed of meeting such young men.

"Port or sherry? Or a glass of cham, with a lump o' ice in for a cooler? They keep the stuff on draught 'ere, and not bad by 'arf for South Africa. 'Ere, you, Mister! Two chams for self and the young lydy, an' look slippy!"

The brimming glasses of sparkling, creaming fluid, juice of vines that never grew in the historic soil of France, were passed over the bar. A miniature berg clinked in each, the coldness of its contact with the glowing lip forcing slight rapturous shrieks from Emigration Jane.

"We'll drink 'Er 'ealth!" W. Keyse raised his goblet. "And Friends at 'Ome in our Isle across the Sea!"

He drank, pleased with the sentiment, and set down the empty glass.

The Dutch bar-keeper leaned across the counter, and tapped him on the arm with a thick, stubby forefinger.

"Mister Engelschman, I think you shall best go out of

here."

"Me? Go out? 'Oo are you gettin' at, Myn'eer Van Dunck?" swaggered W. Keyse. And he slipped one thin, freckled hand ostentatiously under his coat of shoddy summer tweed. A very cheap revolver lurked in the hip-pocket of which Billy was so proud. In his third-floor back bed-sitting-room in Judd Street, London, W.C., he had promised himself a moment when that hip-pocket should be referred to, just in that way. It was a cheap bit of theatrical swagger, but the saloon was full, not of harmless theatrical pretences, but bitter racial antagonisms, seething animosities, fanged and venomed hatreds, only waiting the prearranged signal to strike and slay.

Emigration Jane tugged at the hero's sleeve, as he felt for an almost invisible moustache, scanning the piled-up, serried faces with pert, pale, hardy eyes.

"'E ain't coddin'. See 'ow black they're lookin'."

"I see 'em, plyne enough. Waxworks only fit for the Chamber of 'Orrors, ain't 'em?"

"It's a young woman wot arsks you to go, not a bloke! Please! For my syke, if you won't for your own!"

Billy Keyse, with a flourish, offered the thin, boyish arm in the tweed sleeve.

"Righto! Will you allow me, Miss?"

She faltered:

"I—I can't, deer. I—I'm wiv my young man."

"Looks after you a proper lot, I don't think. Which is 'im? Where's 'e 'id 'isself? There's only one other English-lookin' feller 'ere, an' 'e's drunk, lyin' over the

table there in the corner. That ain't 'im, is it?"

"Nah, that isn't 'im. That big Dutchy, lookin' this way, showin' 'is teeth as 'e smiles. That's my young man."

She indicated the Slabberts, heavily observant of the couple with the muddy eyes under the tow-coloured thatch.

"'Strewth!" W. Keyse whistled depreciatively between his teeth, and elevated his scanty eyebrows. "That tow-'eaded, bung-nosed, 'ulking, big Dopper. An' you a daughter of the Empire!"

Oh! the thrice-retorted scorn in the sharp-edged Cockney voice! The scorching contempt in the pale, ugly little eyes of W. Keyse! She wilted to her tallest feather, and the tears came crowding, stinging the back of her throat, compelling a miserable sniff. Yet Emigration Jane was not destitute of spirit.

"I ... I took 'im to please meself ... not you, nor the Hempire neither."

"Reckon you was precious 'ard up for a chap. Good-afternoon, Miss."

He touched the cheap Panama, and swung theatrically round on his heel. Between him and the saloon-door there was a solid barricade of heavy Dutch bodies, in moleskin, tan-cord, and greasy homespun, topped by lowering Dutch faces. Brawny right hands that could have choked the reedy crow out of the little bantam gamecock, clenched in the baggy pockets of old shooting-jackets. Others gripped leaded sjamboks, and others crept to hip-pockets, where German army revolvers were. The bar-keeper and the Slabberts exchanged a meaning wink.

"Gents, I'll trouble you. By your leave?..."

Nobody moved. And suddenly W. Keyse became conscious that these were enemies, and that he was alone. A little hooliganism, a few street-fights, one scuffle with the police, some rows in music-halls constituted all his experience. In the midst of these men, burly, brutal, strong, used to shed blood of beast and human, his cheap swagger failed him with his stock of breath. He was no longer the hero in an East End melodrama; his heroic mood had gone, and there was a feel of tragedy in the air. The Boers waited sluggishly for the next move. It would come when there should be a step forward on the part of the little Englishman. Then a clumsy foot in a cow-leather boot or heavy wooden-pegged veldschoen would be thrust out, and the boy would be tripped up and go down, and the crowd would deliberately kick and trample the life out of him, and no one would be able to say how or by whom the thing had been done. And, reading in the hard eyes set in the stolid yellow and drab faces that he was "up against it," and no mistake, W. Keyse felt singularly small and lonely.

Then something happened.

The drunken Englishman who had been lying in a hoggish stupor over the little iron table in the corner of the saloon hiccoughed, and lifted a crimson, puffy face, with bleary eyes in it that were startlingly blue. He drew back the great arms that had been hanging over the edge of his impromptu pillow, and heaved up his massive stooping shoulders, and got slowly upon his feet. Then, lurching in his walk, but not stumbling, he moved across the little space of saw-dusted, hard-beaten earth that divided him from W.

Keyse, and drew up beside that insignificant minority. The action was not purposeless or unimpressive. The alcoholic wastrel had suddenly become protagonist in the common little drama that was veering towards tragedy. Beside the man, Billy Keyse dwindled to a stunted boy, a steam-pinnace bobbing under the quarter of an armoured battle-ship, its huge mailed bulk pregnant with possibilities of destruction, its barbettes full of unseen, watchful eyes, and hands powerful to manipulate the levers of Titanic death-machines.

Let it be understood that the intervener did not present the aspect of a hero. He had been drunk, and would be again, unless some miraculous quickening of the alcohol-drugged brain-centres should rouse and revivify the dormant will. His square face, with the heavy smudge of bushy black eyebrows over the fierce blue eyes, and the short, blunt, hooked nose, and grim-lipped yet tender mouth, from the corner of which an extinct and forgotten cigar-butt absurdly jutted, bore, like his great gaunt frame, the ravaging traces of the consuming drink-lust. His well-cut, loosely-fitting grey morning-coat and trousers were soiled and slovenly; his blue linen shirt was collarless and unbuttoned at the neck. His grey felt smasher hat was crammed on awry. But there was a thick lanyard round the muscular neck, ending in a leather revolver-pouch that was attached to his stout belt of webbing. A boy with a fifteen-and-sixpenny toy revolver you can laugh at and squelch; but, Alamachtig! a big man with a Webley and Scott was another thing. And the frowy barrier of thick, coarsely-clad, bulky bodies and scowling, yellow-tan faces, began to melt away.

When a clear lane showed to the saloon door, the

Dop Doctor took it, walking with a lurch in his long stride, but with the square head held upright on his great gaunt shoulders. W. Keyse, Esquire, moved in the shadow of him, taking two steps to one of his. The swing doors opened, thudded to behind them....

"Outside.... Time, too!"

The wide, thin-lipped Cockney mouth grinned a little consciously as W. Keyse jerked his thumb towards the still vibrating doors of the saloon. "Reg'ler 'ornets' nest o' Dutchies. And I was up agynst it, an' no mistyke, when you rallied up. An', Mister, you're a Fair Old Brick, an' if you've no objection to shykin' 'ands ...?"

But the big man did not seem to see the little Cockney's offered hand. He nodded, looking with the bloodshot and extremely blue eyes that were set under his heavy straight black brows, not at W. Keyse, but over the boy's head, and with a surly noise in his throat that stopped short of being speech, swung heavily round and went down the dusty street, that was grilling in the full blaze of the afternoon heat, lurching a little in his walk.

Then, suddenly, running figures of men came round the corner. Voices shouted, and houses and shops and saloons emptied themselves of their human contents. The news flew from kerb to kerb, and jumped from windows to windows, out of which women, European and coloured, thrust eager, questioning heads.

The Cape Town train that had started at midday had returned to Gueldersdorp, having been held up by a force of armed and mounted Boers twenty miles down the line. And a London newspaper

correspondent had handed in a cable at the post-office, and the operator's instrument, after a futile click or so, had failed to work any more.

The telegraphic wire was cut. Hostilities had commenced in earnest, and Gueldersdorp, severed from the South by this opening act of war, must find her salvation thenceforwards in the cool brains and steady nerves of the handful of defenders behind her sand-bags, when the hour of need should come.

History has it written in her imperishable record, that is not only printed upon paper, and graven upon brass, and cut in marble, but stamped into the minds and hearts of millions of men and women of the British race, how, when that hour came, the hero-spirit in their countrymen rose up to meet it. And for such undying memories as these, and not for the mere word of suzerainty, it is worth while to have paid as Britain has paid, in gold, and blood, and tears.

XIII

"Dop," being the native name for the cheapest and most villainous of Cape brandies, has come to signify alcoholic drinks in general to men of many nations dwelling under the subtropical South African sun. Thus, apple-brandy, and peach liqueur, "Old Squareface," in the squat, four-sided bottles beloved no less by Dutchman and Afrikander, American and Briton, Paddy from Cork, and Heinrich from the German Fatherland, than by John Chinkey—in

default of arrack—and the swart and woolly-headed descendant of Ham, may be signified under the all-embracing designation.

It did not matter what the liquor was, the bar-tenders were aware who served the Dop Doctor, as long as the stuff scorched the throat and stupefied the brain, and you got enough of it for your money.

His eyes were blood-red with brutal debauch now, as he neared the De Boursy-Williams dwelling, a one-storied, soft brick-built, corrugated-iron-roofed house on Harris Street, behind the Market Square. It had been a store, but green and white paint and an iron garden-fence had turned it into a gentlemanly residence for a medical practitioner. Mrs. De Boursy-Williams, a lady of refinement, stamped with the ineffaceable cachet of Bayswater, had hung cheap lace curtains in all the windows, tying them up with silk sashes of Transvaal green. Between the wooden pillars of the stoep dangled curtains yet other, of chopped, dyed, and threaded bamboo, while whitewashed drain-pipes, packed with earth and set on end, overflowed with Indian cress, flowering now in extravagant, gorgeous hues of red and brown, sulphur and orange.

The Dop Doctor, left to maintain the inviolate sanctity of this English Colonial home, hiccoughed as he stumbled up the stately flight of three cement steps that led between white-painted railings, enclosing on the left hand a narrow strip of garden with some dusty mimosa shrubs growing in it, to the green door that bore the brass plate, and had the red lamp fitted in the hall-light above it. The plate bore this comprehensive inscription:

G. DE BOURSY-WILLIAMS, M.D., F.R.C.S. Lond.

CONSULTING-ROOM HOURS: 10 A.M. TO 12 A.M.; 6 P.M. TO 8 P.M.

MODERN DENTISTRY IN ALL ITS BRANCHES.

And, scanning the inscription for perhaps the thousandth time, the grim, tender mouth under the ragged black moustache took a satirical twist at the corners, for nobody knew better than Owen Saxham, called of men in Gueldersdorp the "Dop Doctor," what a brazen lie it proclaimed. He heard the town-clock on the stad square strike five as he pulled out the latchkey from his pocket and let himself in, shouting:

"Koets!"

A glazed door at the end of the passage, advertised in letters of black paint upon the ground-glass as "Dispensary," opened, and a long, thin Dutchman, dressed in respectable black, looked out. He had been hoping that the drunken Englishman had been shot or stabbed in a saloon-brawl, or had fallen down in apoplexy in a liquor-bout, and had been brought home dead on a shutter at last. His long ginger-coloured face showed his cruel disappointment. But he said, as though the question had been asked:

"No, there is no telegram from Cape Town."

Then he shut the glazed door, and returned to the very congenial occupation in which he had been engaged, and Owen Saxham went heavily to the bedroom placed at the disposal of the *locum tenens*. The single window looked out upon a square garden with a tennis-ground, where the De Boursy-Williams girls had been used to play. The apricot on the south

wall was laden with the as yet immature fruit, an abandoned household cat slept, unconscious of impending starvation, upon a bench under a pepper-tree.

It was a small, sordid, shabby chamber, with a fly-spotted paper, a chest of drawers lacking knobs, a greenish swing looking-glass, and a narrow iron bedstead. His scanty belongings were scattered about. There were no medical books or surgical instruments. The Dop Doctor had sold all the tools of his trade years before. He turned to Williams's books, standard works which had been bought at his recommendation, when he wished to refresh his excellent memory; the instruments he used when to the entreaties of a fatherly friend Williams added the alluring chink of gold belonged also to that generous patron. There were some old clothes in the ramshackle deal wardrobe; there was some linen and underclothing in the knobless chest of drawers. With the exception of a Winchester repeating-rifle in excellent condition, a bandolier and ammunition-pouch, a hunting-knife and a Colt's revolver of large calibre, in addition to the weapon he carried, there was not an article of property of any value in the room. Old riding-boots with dusty spurs and a pair of veldschoens stood by the wall; a pair of trodden-down carpet slippers lay beside a big cheap zinc bath that stood there, full of cold water; some well-used pipes were on the chest of drawers, with a tin of Virginia; and an old brown camel's-hair dressing-gown hung over a castorless, shabby, American-cloth-covered armchair. And an empty whisky-bottle stood upon the washstand, melancholy witness to the drunkard's passion.

Yet there were a few poor little toilet articles upon

the dressing-table that betokened the dainty personal habits of cleanliness and care that from lifelong use become instinctive. The hands of the untidy, slovenly, big man with the drink-swollen features were exquisitely kept; and when the dark-red colour should go out of the square face, the skin would show wonderfully unblemished and healthy for a drunkard, and the blue eyes would be steady and clear. Excess had not injured a splendid constitution as yet. But Saxham knew that by-and-by ...

What did he care? He pulled off his soiled, untidy garments, and soused his aching head in the cold, fresh water, and bathed and changed. Six o'clock struck, and found Dr. Owen Saxham reclothed and in his right mind, if a little haggard about the eyes and twitchy about the mouth, and sitting calmly waiting for patients in the respectably-appointed consulting-room of De Boursy-Williams, M.D., F.R.C.S. Lond.

Usually he sat in the adjoining study, near enough to the carefully-curtained door to hear the patient describe in the artless vernacular of the ignorant, or the more cultivated phraseology of the educated, the symptoms, his or hers.

Because the cultured man of science, the real M.D. of Cambridge University and owner of those other letters of attainment, was the drunken wastrel who had sunk low enough to serve as the impostor's ghost. If G. de Boursy-Williams, of all those lying capitals, were a member of the London Pharmaceutical Society and properly-qualified dentist, which perhaps might be the case, he certainly possessed no other claim upon the confidence of his fellow-creatures, sick or well. Yet even before the Dop Doctor brought his great

unhealed sorrow and his quenchless thirst to Gueldersdorp, the smug, plump, grey-haired, pink-faced, neatly-dressed little humbug possessed an enviable practice.

If you got well, he rubbed his hands and chuckled over you; if you died, he bleated about the Will of Providence, and his daughters sent flowery, home-made wreaths to place upon your grave, and it all went down, adding to the python-length of the bill for medical attendance.

This world is thick with De Boursy-Williamses, throwing in bromides with a liberal hand, ungrudging of strychnine, happily at home with quinine and cathartics, ready at a case of simple rubeola; hideously, secretly, helplessly perplexed between the false diphtheria and the true; treating internal cancer and fibrous tumours as digestive derangements for happy, profitable years, until the specialist comes by, and dissipates with a brief examination and with half a dozen trenchant words the victim's faith in the quack.

Three years before, when the Dop Doctor, coming up from Kimberley by transport-waggon, had stumbled in upon Gueldersdorp, the verdict of a specialist consulted by one of his patients, much lacking in the desirable article of faith, had given De Boursy-Williams's self-confidence a considerable shock.

Does it matter how De Boursy, much reduced in bulk by a considerable leakage of conceit, came across the Dop Doctor? In a drink-saloon, in a music-hall, in a gaming-house or an opium-den, at any other of the places of recreation where, after consulting and visiting hours, that exemplary father and serious-minded Established Churchman, was to be found? It

is enough that the bargain was proposed and accepted. Four sovereigns a week secured to De Boursy-Williams the stored and applied knowledge, the wide experience, and the unerring diagnosis of the rising young London practitioner, who had had a brilliant career before him when a Hand had reached forth from the clouds to topple down the castle of his labours and his hopes. For Owen Saxham the money would purchase forgetfulness. You can buy a great deal of his kind of forgetfulness with four pounds, and drink was all the Dop Doctor wanted.

Now, as the red South African sunset burned beyond the flattened western ridge of the semicircle of irregular hills that fence in the unpretending hamlet town that lies on the low central rise, Owen Saxham sat, as for his miserable weekly wage he must sit, twice daily for two hours at a stretch, enduring torments akin to those of the damned in Hell.

For these were the hours when he remembered most all that he had lost.

Remembrance, like the magic carpet of the Eastern story, carried him back to a rambling old grey mansion, clothed with a great magnolia and many roses, standing in old-time gardens, and shrubberies of laurel and ilex and Spanish chestnut, and rhododendron, upon the South Dorset cliffs, that are vanishing so slowly yet so surely in the maw of the rapacious sea.

Boom! In the heart of a still, foggy night, following a day of lashing rain, and the boy Owen Saxham, whom the Dop Doctor remembered, would wake

upon his lavender-scented pillow in the low-pitched room with the heavy ceiling-beams and the shallow diamond-paned casements, and call out to David, dreaming in the other white bed, to plan an excursion with the breaking of the day, to see how much more of their kingdom had toppled over on those wave-smoothed rock-pavements far below, that were studded with great and little fossils, as the schoolroom suet-pudding with the frequent raisin.

More faces came. The boys' father, fair and florid, bluff, handsome, and kindly, an English country gentleman of simple affectionate nature and upright life. He came in weather-stained velveteen and low-crowned felt, with the red setter-bitch at his heels, and the old sporting Manton carried in the crook of his elbow, where the mother used to sew a leather patch, always cut out of the palm-piece of one of the right-hand gloves that were never worn out, never being put on. A dark-eyed, black-haired Welsh mother, hot-tempered, keen-witted, humorous, sarcastic, passionately devoted to her husband and his boys, David and Owen.

David and Owen. David was the elder, fair like the father, destined for Harrow, Sandhurst, and the Army. Owen had dreamed of the Merchant Service, until, having succeeded in giving the Persian kitten, overfed to repletion by an admiring cook, a dose of castor-oil, and being allowed to aid the local veterinary in setting the fox-terrier's broken leg, the revelation of the hidden gift was vouchsafed to this boy. How he begged off Harrow, much to the disgust of the Squire, and went to Westward Ho, faithfully plodded the course laid down by the Council of Medical Education, became a graduate of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and took his degree brilliantly;

registered as a student at St. Stephen's Hospital; won an Entrance Scholarship in Science, and secured the William Brown Exhibition in his second year. Thenceforward the world was an oyster, to be opened with scalpel and with bistoury by Owen Saxham.

Oh, the good days! the delectable years of intellectual development, and arduous study, and high hope, and patient, strenuous endeavour! The man sitting with knitted hands and tense brain and staring eyes there in the darkening room groaned aloud as he looked back. Nobody envied that broad-shouldered, lean-flanked, bright-eyed young fellow his successes. Companions shared his triumphs, lecturers and professors came down from their high pedestals of dignity to help him on. When he obtained his London University diploma with honours for a thesis of exceptional merit, he had already held the post of principal anæsthetist at St. Stephen's Hospital for a year. Now, a vacancy occurring upon the Junior staff of surgeons to the Hospital's in-patient Department, Owen Saxham, M.D., was chosen to fill it. This brought Mildred very near.

For he was very much in love. The hot red blood in his veins had carried him away sometimes upon a mad race for pleasure, but he was clean of soul and free from the taint of vice, inherited or acquired, and the Briton's love of home was strong in him. And wedded love had always seemed to him a beautiful and gracious thing; and fatherhood a glorious privilege. Stern as he seemed, grave and quiet and undemonstrative as he was, the youngest and shyest children did not shrink from him. The pink rose-leaf tongue peeped from between the budding rows of

teeth, and the innocent considering eyes questioned him only a moment before the smile came. To be the father of Mildred's children seemed the lofty end of all desire that was not mere worldly ambition.

Mildred was the elder daughter of a county neighbour down in Dorsetshire. She had known Owen Saxham from her school-days, but never until he took to calling at the house in Pont Street, to which Mildred, with her family—mere satellites revolving in the orbit of that shining star of Love—migrated in the Season. She was tall, slight, and willowy, with a sweet head that drooped a little, and round brown eyes that were extremely pretty and wore a perpetual expression of surprise. She was rather anæmic, preferred croquet to lawn-tennis—then the rage—and kept a journal, after the style of an American model. But the space which Mary McMullins cribbed from Mary McMullins to devote to a description of the bathroom in which the ablutions of her family were performed, and a vivid word-picture of their tooth-brushes ranged in a row, and their recently wrung-out garments in the act of taking the air upon the back-garden clothes-line, was all devoted to Mildred in Mildred's journal. In it Owen found a place. He was described as a blend between "Rochester" in "Jane Eyre" and "Bazarov" in Turgenev's "Fathers and Children." In one specially high-flown passage he was referred to as a grim granite rock, to which the delicate clematis-like nature of Mildred, clinging, was to envelop it with leaf and blossom. She read him the passage one day. Their faces were very close together as they sat upon the sofa in the pretty Pont Street drawing-room, and his newly-bought engagement-ring gleamed on her long white hand.... The remembrance of that day made the Dop Doctor laugh out harshly in the midst

of his anguish. So trivial and so weak a thing had been that love of hers on which he had founded the castle of his hopes and desires.

Now the aspiring young man bought a practice with some thousands advanced by his father out of the younger son's portion that should be his one day. It lay just where Hyde Park merges into Paddington. Here a medical man may feel the pulse of Dives for gold, and look at the tongue of Lazarus for nothing, and supply medicine into the bargain, if he be of kindly soul, and this hopeful, rising surgeon and physician had an open hand and an unsuspecting nature.

God! how much the worse for him. The sweat-drops ran down into the Dop Doctor's eyes as he remembered that.

He set up his bachelor tent in Chilworth Street, furnishing the rooms he meant to inhabit with a certain sober luxury. By-and-by the house could be made pretty, unless Mildred should insist upon his moving to Wigmore Street, or to Harley Street, that Mecca of the ambitious young practitioner. Probably Mildred's people would insist upon Harley Street. They were wealthy; their daughter would be quite an heiress, "another instance of Owen's luck," as David, long ago gazetted to a crack Cavalry regiment, would say, and Owen would laugh, and admit that, though he would have been glad enough to take his young fair love without dower and plenishing, it was pleasant enough to know that his wife would have an independent fortune of her own. It was one of David's best jokes that Owen was marrying Mildred for her money. David's ideas of humour were crude and elemental. On the other hand, his manners were

admirable, and his physical beauty perfect of its type, though men and women turned oftenest to look at the younger brother, whom the women called "plain, but so interesting," and the men "an uncommonly attractive sort of fellow, and as clever as they make them." When the great crash came Owen Saxham, M.D., F.R.C.S., was about twenty-nine.

Do you care for a description of the man at his prime?

He was probably five feet ten in height, but his scholar's stoop robbed him of an inch or more. The great breadth of the slightly-bowed shoulders, the immense depth and thickness of the chest, gave his upper figure a false air of clumsiness. His arms were long and powerful, terminating in strong, supple, white hands, the hands of the skilled surgical operator; his thick, smooth, opaque, white skin covered an admirable structure of bone, knit with tough muscles, clothed with healthful flesh. One noticed, seeing him walk, that his legs were bowed a little, because he had been accustomed to the saddle from earliest childhood, though he rode but seldom now, and one saw also that his small muscular feet gripped the ground vigorously, through the glove-thin boots he liked to wear. He showed no tendency to dandyism. His loosely-cut suits of fine, silky black cloth were invariably of the same fashion. In abhorring jewellery, in preferring white cashmere shirts, and strictly limiting the amount of starch in the thin linen cuffs and collars, perhaps he showed a tendency to faddism. David told him that he dressed himself like a septuagenarian Professor. Mildred would have preferred dear Owen to pay a little more attention to style and cut, and all that, though one

did not, of course, expect a man of science to look like a man of fashion. One couldn't have everything, at least, not in this world....

She said that one day, standing beside the writing-table in the Chilworth Street study, with David's portrait in her hand. It usually stood there, in a silver frame—a coloured photograph of a young man of thirty, stupid, and beautiful as the Praxitelean Hermes, resplendent in the gold and blue and scarlet of a crack Dragoon Regiment. Owen stood upon the hearthrug, for once in Mildred's company, and not thinking of Mildred. And with tears rising in her round, pretty, foolish eyes the girl looked from the face and figure enclosed within the silver frame, to the face and bust that had for background the high mantel-mirror in its carved frame of Spanish oak.

There was the square black head bending forwards —"poking," she termed it—upon the massive, bowed shoulders; the white face, square too, with its short, blunt, hooked nose and grim, determined mouth and jaws, showing the bluish grain of the strong beard and moustache that Owen kept closely shaven. The heavy forehead, the smutty brows overshadowing eyes of clear, vivid, startling Alpine blue, the close small ears, the thick white throat, were very, very unattractive in Mildred's eyes—at least, in comparison with the three-volume-novel charms of the grey-eyed, golden-moustached, classically-featured, swaggering young military dandy in the coloured photograph. David had been with his regiment in India when Owen had first seemed to be a good deal attracted to Pont Street. He had wooed Mildred with dogged persistency, and won her without perceptible triumph, and Mildred had been immensely flattered at first by the conquest of this

man, whom everybody said was going to be famous, great, distinguished ... and now ... the wedding-day was coming awfully near. And how on earth was it possible for a girl to tell a man with Owen's dreadfully grim, sarcastic mouth, and those terrible blue eyes that sometimes looked through and through you—that she preferred his brother?

Poor, dear, beautiful, devoted David! so honourable, so shocked at the discovery that his passion was reciprocated, so very romantically in love. Only the day previously, calling in at Pont Street at an hour unusual for him, Owen had found them together, Mildred and David, who, having been unexpectedly relieved of duty by an accommodating brother-officer, had, as he rather laboriously explained, run up from Spurhambury for the day. It was an awfully near thing, the guilty ones agreed afterwards, but Owen had suspected nothing. These swell scientific men were often a little bit slow in the uptake....

But to-day—to-day their dupe saw clearly. He recalled the Pont Street incident, and the flushed faces of the couple. He saw once more the silver-framed photograph in the girl's hand, he felt the mute disparagement of her glance, and was conscious of the relief with which it left him to settle on the portrait again. Ah, how unsuspicious he had been whom they were duping! Doubtless Mildred would not have had the courage to own the truth, doubtless she would have married him but for the scandal of the Trial. He wrenched his knitted hands together until the joints cracked. She would have married him, and forgotten David. He, the man of will, and power, and patience would have possessed her, stamped himself like a seal upon her heart and mind, given her other interests, other hopes, other

desires, children, and happiness. But for the Trial the little germinating seed of treachery would never have grown up and borne fruit.

Had it been treachery, after all? Far, far too grand the word. Who would expect a modern woman to practise the obsolete virtue of Fidelity? Fool, do you expect your miniature French bulldog or your toy-terrier to dive in and swim out to you, and hold your drowning carcase up, should you happen to become cramped while bathing in the sea? The little, feeble, pretty, feather-brained thing, what can it do but whimper on the shore while you are sinking, perhaps be consoled upon a friendly stranger's lap while your last bubbles are taking upward flight, and your knees are drawing inwards in the final contraction? Happy for the little creature if the kindly stranger carry it away!

Poor, pretty, foolish Mildred, whose gentle predilections were as threads of gossamer compared with the cable-ropes of stronger women's passions! She had nestled into the strong protecting arm, and dried her tears for the old master on the sleeve of the new one, whimpering a little, gently, just like the toy-terrier bitch or the miniature bull.

And yet he had once seen a creature tinier and feebler than either of these, a mere handful of yellow floss-silk curls, defend its insensible master with frenzy, as the sick man lay in the deadly stupor of cerebral congestion, from those who sought to aid. Valet and nurse and doctor were held at bay until that snapping, foaming, raging speck of love and devotion and fidelity had been whelmed in a travelling-rug, and borne away to a distant room, from whence its shrill, defiant, imploring barks and

yelps could be heard night and day until, its owner being at last conscious and out of danger, the tiny creature was set free.

Ergo, there are small things and small things. Beside that epic atom Mildred dwindled inconceivably.

And David ... David, who had shaken his handsome head sorrowfully over his brother's ruined career, who had been horribly sick at the scandal, shudderingly alive to the disgrace, sorrowfully, regretfully compelled to admit that the evidence of guilt was overwhelming ... he did not trust himself to think of David overmuch. That way of thought led to Cain's portion in the very pit of Hell. For six months subsequently to the finding of the Jury in the well-known criminal case, The Crown *v.* Saxham, David had married Mildred. If she had been innocent of actual treachery, here was the smooth, brotherly betrayer, unmasked and loathly in the sight of the betrayed.

How quietly the storm-clouds had piled up on his bright horizon at the close of his second year of active, brilliant, successful work!

The first lightning-flash, the first faint mutter of thunder, had passed almost unnoticed. Then the tempest broke, and the building wrought by a strong man's labours, and toils, and hopes, and joys, and dolours had been lifted, and torn, and rent, and scattered as a hill-bothy of poles and straw-bundles, or a moorland shelter of heather and bushes is scattered by the fury of a northern mountain-blast.

His practice had become a large and, despite the many claims of Lazarus at the gates, a lucrative one by the commencement of his third year of residence

in Chilworth Street. It was the end of April. He was to be married to Mildred in July. That move to Harley Street had been decided upon, the house taken and beautified. Though his love for her was not demonstrative or romantic, it was deep, and tender, and strong, and hopeful, and Life to this man had seemed very sweet—five years ago. He was successful professionally and socially. He had been chosen to assist a surgeon of great eminence in the performance of a critical operation upon a semi-Royalty. He had written, and publishers had published, a remarkable work. "The Diseases of Civilisation" had been greeted by the scientific reviewers with a chorus of praise, passed through four or five editions—had been translated into several European languages; and his "Text-Book of Clinical Surgery" had been recommended to advanced students by the leading professors of the Medical Schools when the horrible thing befell.

XIV

It was in '94, when even the electro-motor was not in general use, and the petrol-driven machine was slowly convincing Paris and New York of its magnificent possibilities. Saxham used a smart, well-horsed, hired brougham for day-visits, and for night work a motor-tricycle. There were no stables to the house in Chilworth Street. He left the motor-tricycle at the place where he had bought it second-hand. The machine was cleaned and kept in order, and brought to his door by one of the employés at a

certain hour, for a fixed weekly sum paid to the proprietor of the establishment, Bough by name, an Englishman born in the Transvaal, who had quite recently, or so he gave out, emigrated from South Africa, and set up in London as a cycle-seller and repairer, though there were not many cycles at the shop. Heavy packing-cases and crates were always being delivered there, and always being despatched from thence, via Cape Town and Port Elizabeth and Delagoa Bay to the Transvaal, Bough being agent, or so he said, for several South African firms engaged in the transport of agricultural machines. Bough had a wife, a large-eyed, delicate-looking, pretty little woman, who seemed afraid of the big, muscular, tanned fellow of thirty-eight or so, with the odd light eyes, and the smooth manner, and the ready smile, and the short, expert, hairy, cruel-looking hands. He had seen life, had Bough, at the goldfields and at the diamond-mines, and as a trooper through the Zulu and Matabele campaigns, and he was ready to talk about what he had seen. Still there were reservations about Bough, and mysteries. The Doctor suspected him of being brutal to his wife, and would not have been surprised any morning upon receiving the news of the man's arrest as one of a gang of forgers, or coiners, or burglars. But he lived and let live, and whatever else the big Afrikander may have been, he was an excellent workman at his trade.

One evening Bough rode round on the motor-tricycle himself, and mentioned casually that his wife was ailing. The Doctor, in the act of mounting the machine, put a brief question or two, registered the replies in the automatic sub-memory he kept for business, and told the man to send her round at ten o'clock upon the following morning.

She came, punctual to the hour, and was shown into Owen's consulting-room—a little woman with beautiful, melancholy eyes and a pretty figure. Illiterate, common, affected, and vain to a degree, hideously misusing the English language in that low, dulcet voice of hers, ludicrous in her application of the debatable aspirate to words in the spelling of which it has no part.

Rather an absurd little person, Mrs. Bough. Yet, a tragic little person, in Saxham's eyes at least, by the time she had made her errand plain.

He heard her tell the tale that was not new to him. Cultured, highly-bred women had made such appeals to him before, and without shame. How should this little vulgar creature be expected to have more conscience than they?

They beat about the bush longer, they put the thing more prettily. They spoke of their frail physical health and their husbands' great anxiety, and quoted the long-ago expressed opinion of ancient family physicians, who possibly turned uneasily in their decent graves. But the gist of the whole was, that they did not want children, and Dr. Saxham had such a great and justly-earned reputation in skilful and delicate operations ... and, in short, would he not be compliant and oblige? They would pay anything. Money was positively no object.

How many such tempting sirens sing in the ears of young, rising professional men, who are hampered by honourable debts which threaten to impede and drag them down; who are possessed of high ideals and moral scruples, which, not being essentially, fundamentally embedded and ingrained in the conscience of the man, may possibly be argued away;

who have not implanted in their souls and hearts the high reverence for motherhood and the deep tenderness for helpless infancy that distinguished Owen Saxham!

He heard this woman out, as he had heard all the others. He began as he had begun with every one of them—the delicate, titled aristocrats, the ambitious Society beauties, the popular actresses, the women who envied these and read about them in the illustrated interviews published in the fashion-papers, and sighed to be interviewed also—to not one of these had he weighed out one drachm less of the bitter salutary medicine that he now administered to Mrs. Bough.

He invariably began with the personal peril and the inevitable risk. Strange how they ignored it, blinded themselves to it, thrust it, the grinning, threatening Death's-head, on one side. Of course, he talked like that! It was most candid of him, and most conscientious. But if they were willing to take the risk—and antiseptic surgery had made such *huge* strides in these days that the risk was a mere nothing.... Besides, there was not really need for anything like an operation, was there? He could prescribe the kind of dose that ought to be taken, and everything would then be all right.

He would open that grim mouth of his yet again, and speak even more to the purpose. To these mothers who did not wish to be mothers, who threw the gift of Heaven back in the face of Heaven, preferring artificial barrenness to natural fecundity, and who made of their bodies, that should have brought forth healthy, wholesome sons and daughters of their race, tombs and sepulchres—to these he told the truth, in

swift, sharp, trenchant sentences, that, like the keen sterilised blade of the surgical knife, cut to heal. When they argued with him, saying that the thing was done, that everybody knew it was done, and that it always would be done, by other men as brilliant as, and less scrupulous than, the homilist; he admitted the force of their arguments. Let other men of his great calling pile up and amass wealth, if they chose, by tampering with the unclean thing. Owen Saxham would none of it. At this juncture the woman would have hysterics of the weeping or the scolding kind, or would be convinced of the righteousness of the forlorn cause he championed, or would pretend the hysterics or the conviction. Generally she pretended to the latter, and swam or stumbled out, pulling down her veil to mask the rage and hatred in her haggard eyes, and went to that other man. Then, after a brief absence accounted for as a "rest cure," she would shine forth again upon her world, smiling, triumphant, prettier than ever, since she had begun to make up a little more. Or, as a woman who had passed through the Valley of the Shadow, with only her own rod and staff of vanity and pride to comfort her, she would emerge from that seclusion a nervous wreck, and take to pegging or chloral or spiritualism. Most rarely she would not emerge at all, and then her women friends would send wreaths for the coffin and carriages to the funeral, and would whisper mysteriously together in their boudoirs, and look askance upon the doctor who had attended her. For of course he had bungled shockingly, or everything would have gone off as right as rain for that poor dear thing!

Little Mrs. Bough was of the type of woman that pretends to be convinced. She had cried bitterly in the beginning, as she confessed to Saxham that she

was not really married to Bough, and that the said Bough, whom Saxham had always suspected of being a scoundrel, would certainly go off with "one of them other women and leave her if she went and 'ad a byby." She cried even more bitterly afterwards, as she wondered how she ever could 'a dreamed o' being that wicked! Bough might kill her—that he might!—or go back to South Africa without her; she never would give in, not now. Never now—the Doctor might depend upon that, she assured him, drying her swollen eyes with a cheap lace-edged handkerchief loaded with patchouli. She was shaken and nervous, and in need of a sedative, and Saxham, having the drugs at hand, made her up a simple draught, unluckily omitting to make a memorandum of the prescription in his pocket-book, and gave her the first dose of it before she went away, profuse in thanks, and carrying the bottle.

And he saw his waiting patients, and stepped into his waiting brougham, and, having for once no urgent call upon his professional attention, dined with Mildred at Pont Street, and was coaxed into promising to take her to the opening performance of a classic play which was to be revived three nights later at a fashionable West End theatre. Mildred had set her heart upon being seen in a box at this particular function, and Saxham had had some trouble to gratify her wish.

He remembered with startling clearness every remote detail of that night at the theatre. Mildred had looked exquisitely fair and girlish in her white dress, with a necklace of pearls he had given her rising and falling on the lovely virginal bosom, where the lover's eyes dwelt and lingered in the masterful hunger of his heart. Soon, soon, that hunger of his

for possession would be gratified! It was April, and at the end of July, when work was growing slack, they would be married. They were going North for the honeymoon. A wealthy and grateful patient of Saxham's had placed at his disposal a grey, historic Scotch turret-mansion, standing upon mossy lawns, with woods of larch and birch and ancient Spanish chestnuts all about it, looking over the silver Tweed. In the heat and hurry of his daily round of work, Saxham, who had spent an autumn holiday at this place, would find himself dreaming about it. The smell of the heather would spice the air that was no longer hot and sickly with the effluvia of the city, and the hum of the drowsy black bees, and the cooing of the wood-pigeons would replace the din of the London traffic, and Mildred's eyes would be looking into his, and her cool, fragrant lips would be freely yielded, and her arms would be about his neck, and all those secret aspirations and yearnings and dreams of wedded joy would be realised at last.

He grinned to himself sitting there in the hot darkness of the South African night, the great white stars and the vast purple dome they throbbed in shut out of sight by the miserable little gaily-papered ceiling with its cornice of gilt wood, remembering that everything had ended there. Thenceforth no more hopes, no dreams, for the man whom Fate and Destiny, hitherto propitious and obliging, had conspired to lash with scourges, and drive with goads, and hound with despairs and horrors to the sheer brink where Madness waits to hurl the desperate over upon the jagged rocks below.

He supped with them at Pont Street. Mildred came down to say good-night at the door.

"Have you been happy?" he had asked, framing the sweet young face in tender hands, and looking in the pretty, gentle brown eyes.

"You have been so very dear and kind to-night," she had answered, "how could I have helped being happy? And He"—she meant the Semitic actor-manager, whom she romantically adored; whose thick, flabby features and pale gooseberry orbs, thickly outlined in blue pencil, eyebrowed with brown grease-paint; whose long, shapeless body, eloquent, expressive hands, and legs that were very good as legs go, taking them separately, but did not match, had been that night, his admirers declared, moved and possessed by the very spirit of Shakespearean Tragedy—"He was so great! Don't you agree with me—marvellously great?"

Saxham had laughed and kissed the enthusiast. It had appeared to him a dreary performance enough, or it would have, had it not been for Mildred and the dear glamour with which her presence had invested the great gilded auditorium, with its rows of bored, familiar, notable faces in the stalls, representing Society, Art, Literature, Music, and Finance; its pit and gallery crowded with organised bodies of theatre-goers, one party certain to boo where the other applauded, riot and disorder the inevitable result, unless by a coincidence rare as snow at Midsummer the rival associations might be won upon to display a unanimity of approval, upon which the dramatic Press-critics would rapturously descant in the newspapers next morning.

XV

Saxham said his lingering sweet good-night, and shut Mildred into the warm, lighted hall, and ran down the steps, and hailed a passing hansom, and was driven back to Chilworth Street. It had rained, and the heat, excessive for April, had abated, and the wise, experienced stars looked down between drifting veils of greyish vapour upon the little human lives passing below.

As he jumped down at his door and paid his cabman, his quick eye noticed a bicycle leaning against the area-railings. One of his poorer patients was waiting for the Doctor. Or a messenger had been sent to summon him. He let himself into the lighted hall, whistling the pretty plaintive melody of Ophelia's song.

A woman sat on the oak bench under the electric globe, her little huddled-up figure making rather a sordid blotch of drab against the strong, rich background of the wall, coloured Pompeian red, and hung with fine old prints in black frames. Her tawdry hat lay beside her, her haggard eyes were set, staring at the opposite wall; her lower jaw hung lax; the saliva dribbled from the corner of her underlip; her yellow, rigid hands gripped the edge of the bench. It was the woman who passed as the wife of the man Bough. And in instant, vivid, wrathful realisation of the desperate reason of her being there, Saxham cried out so loudly that the servant who had let her in and was waiting up for his master in the basement heard the words:

"Are you mad? What do you mean by coming here? Haven't I told you that I will have nothing to do with

you and your affairs...."

The voice that issued from her blue lips might have been a scream, judging by the wrung anguish of the awful face she turned upon him; but it was no more than a dry, clicking whisper that the now listening servant could barely hear:

"Don't be 'ard on a woman ... hin trouble, Doctor."

"Hard on you.... On the contrary, I have been too considerate," he said, steeling his heart against pity. "You must go home to your husband, Mrs. Bough, or apply elsewhere for medical advice. I have none to give you."

His square face was very stern as he took the cab-whistle from the hall-salver, that was packed with cards and notes, and letters that had come by the last post, and a telegram or two. She moaned as he laid his hand on the knob of the hall-door.

"It wasn't my doings, Doctor.... Hi told Bough what you said. Hi did, faithful ... an' 'e swore if you wasn't the man to do what 'e wanted, 'e'd be damned but 'e'd find a woman as would! And she come next night —a little, shabby, white-faced, rat-nosed hold thing, shiverin' an' shakin'. Five pounds she 'ad of Bough, shakin' an' shiverin'. An' he wasn't to send no more to the haddress he knew, because she wouldn't be there. Always move hout ... she says, after a fresh job! Oh, my Gawd! An' Bough, he hordered me, an' Hi 'ad to give in. An' to-night Hi reckoned Hi was dyin' an' 'e said Hi best harsk you, 'e was about fed up with women an' their blooming sicknesses. So Hi biked 'ere because Hi couldn't walk. An' now!..." She groaned: "Hi *ham* dyin', aren't Hi?"

Even to an observation less skilled than that of the expert medical practitioner the signs of swift and speedy dissolution were written on the insignificant, once pretty, little face. Dying, the miserable little creature had ridden to Chilworth Street, hastening her own inevitable end by the stupendous act of folly, and ensuring Saxham's. That certainty had pierced him, even as the first horrible convulsion seized her and wrenched her sideways off the bench. He caught her, and shouted for his man, and they carried her into the consulting-room, and laid her on a sofa, and he did what might be done, knowing that his mercy on her involved swift and pitiless retribution upon himself. Mrs. Bough died three hours later, as the grey dawn straggled through the blinds, and the men with the district ambulance waited at the door, and Dr. Owen Saxham went about his work that day with a strange sensation of expecting some heavy blow that was about to fall. It fell upon the day following the Coroner's Inquest. He was sitting down to breakfast when a Superintendent of Police arrested him upon a warrant from Scotland Yard.

His servant, very pale, had announced that the Superintendent wished to see the Doctor. The Superintendent was in the room, courteously saluting Saxham, before the man had fairly got out the words.

"Good-morning, sir. A pleasant day!"

"Unlike the business that brings you here, I think, Mr. Superintendent?" said Saxham, with his square jaw set. His man spilt the coffee and hot milk over the cloth in trying to fill his master's cup. "You are nervous, Tait. You had better go downstairs, I think, unless——" Saxham looked interrogatively at the

burly, officially-clad figure of the Law.

"No, sir, thank you. We do not at present require your man, but it is my duty to tell him that he had better not be out of the way, in case his testimony is wanted."

"You hear?" said Saxham; and as white-faced Tait fled, trembling, to the lower regions: "Of course, you are here," he went on, pouring out the coffee himself with a firm hand, and looking steadily at the Superintendent, "with regard to the case of Mrs. Bough? I have expected that a magistrate's inquiry would follow the Inquest. It seemed only natural ——"

The Superintendent interrupted, holding up a large hand.

"It is my duty to tell you, Dr. Saxham, that everything you say will be taken down and used against you in evidence."

"Naturally," said Saxham, putting sugar in his coffee. The sugar was used against him. It amused him now to remember that. The Superintendent had never seen a gentleman more cool, he told the magistrate.

"You see, sir, this Case has been fully considered by the authorities, and it has an ugly look; and it has therefore been decided to charge you with causing the death of the woman Bough by an illegal act, performed here, in your consulting-room, on the twentieth instant, when she visited you ..."

"For the first time," put in Saxham quietly.

"That may be or may not be," said the Superintendent. "You were often at her husband's

place of business, you know, and may have seen her or not seen her."

"As she used to be in Bough's shop, it is possible that a great many of the man's customers besides myself did see her," Saxham went on, eating his breakfast.

"One of my men out there in the hall—I've noticed you looking towards the door——" began the Superintendent.

"Wondering what the shuffling and breathing at the keyhole meant?" said Saxham quietly. "Thank you for explaining."

"One of my men will fetch a cab when you have finished breakfast, and then, sir," said the Superintendent, "I am afraid I must trouble you to come with me to Paddington Police Station."

"Very well," said Saxham, frowning, "unless you object to using my brougham, which will be at the door"—he looked at his silver table-clock, a present from a grateful patient—"in ten minutes' time."

"I don't at all mind that, sir," agreed the obliging Superintendent; "and the men can follow in the cab. Any objection?"

Saxham had winced and flushed scarlet to the hair.

"For God's sake, don't make a procession of it! Let things be kept as quiet as possible for the sake of my —family—and—my friends." He thought with agony of Mildred. They were to be married in July, unless ——

The Superintendent coughed behind his glove. "The question of Bail will rest with the magistrate, of course," he said. "But I should expect that it would be

admitted, upon responsible persons entering into the customary recognisances."

Saxham rose. He had drunk the coffee, but he could not eat. "Like all the rest of them, in spite of his show of coolness," thought the Superintendent.

"I will ask you for time to telephone to some friends who will, I have no doubt, be willing to give the required undertaking, and arrange for a colleague to visit my patients. You will take a glass of wine while I step into the next room? The telephone is there, on the writing-table."

"And a loaded revolver in the drawer underneath, and poisons of all kinds handy on the shelves of a neat little cabinet," thought the Superintendent. But he said: "With pleasure, sir, only I must trouble you to put up with my company."

A tingling thrill of revulsion ran through Saxham. He set his teeth, and conquered the furious, momentary impulse to knock down this big, burly, smooth-spoken blue-uniformed official.

"Ah, very well. The usual procedure in cases of this kind. Please come this way. But take a glass of wine first. There are glasses on the sideboard there, and claret and port in those decanters."

"To your very good health, Dr. Saxham, sir, and a speedy and favourable ending to—the present—difficulty." The Superintendent emptied a bumper neatly, and with discreet relish, and followed Saxham into the consulting-room, and once more, at the sound of the measured footfall padding behind him over the thick carpet, the suspect's blood surged madly to his temples, and his hands clenched until

the nails drove deep into the palms. For from that moment began the long, slow torture of watching and following, and dogging by the suspicious, vigilant, observant Man In Blue.

A Treasury Prosecution succeeded the Police-Court Inquiry, and the accused was formally arrested upon the criminal charge, and committed to Holloway pending the Trial. The Trial took place before Mr. Justice Bodmin in the following July, occupying five days of oppressive heat in the thrashing out of that vexed question, the guilt or innocence of Owen Saxham, M.D., F.R.C.S. who for airless, stifling years of weeks had eaten and drunk and slept and waked in the Valley of the Shadow of Penal Servitude. Who was conveyed from the dock to the cell and from the cell to the dock by warders and policemen, rumbling through back streets and unfrequented ways in a shiny prison-van. Who came at last to look upon the Owen Saxham of this hideous prison nightmare, the man of whom the Counsel for the Crown reared up, day by day, a monstrously-distorted figure, as quite a different person from the other innocent man whom the defending advocate described in flowery, pathetic sentences as a martyr and the victim of an unheard-of combination of adverse circumstances.

Things went badly. The case against the prisoner looked extremely black. That monstrous figure of Owen Saxham, based upon an ingenious hypothesis of guilt, and plastered over with a marvellous mixture of truths and falsities, facts and conjectures, grew uglier and more sinister every day.

The principal witness, the bereaved husband of the hapless victim, dressed in deep mourning and neatly handled by Counsel, evoked a display of

handkerchiefs upon his every appearance in the witness-box, from the smart Society women seated near the Bench. Many of them had been Saxham's patients. Several had made love to him, nearly all of them had made much of him, and quite an appreciable number of them had asked him to be accommodating, and render them temporarily immune against the menace of Maternity. These had received a curt refusal, accompanied with wholesome advice, for which they revenged themselves now, in graceful womanly fashion, by being quite sure the wretched man was guilty. More than possible, was it not? they whispered behind their palm-leaf fans: it was sultry weather, and the vendors of these made little fortunes, hawking them outside. Was it not more than possible that he had been the dead woman's lover? The Crown Counsel improved on this idea. Wretched little Mrs. Bough, of infinitesimal account in Life, had become through Death a person of importance. Much was made out of the fact that she had gone to Chilworth Street some days previously to her deplorable ending, and remained closeted with Dr. Saxham for some time. He had supplied her with a bottle of medicine upon her leaving—medicine of which no memorandum was to be found in his notes for the day. She had taken the first dose then and there. According to the testimony of the Accused, the bottle had contained a harmless bromide sedative. Upon the oath of the Public Analyst, the same bottle, handed by the husband of the deceased woman to the Police upon the night of her death, and now produced in Court with two or three doses of dark liquid remaining in it, contained a powerful solution of ergotoxine—a much less innocent drug. Who should presume to doubt its administration by the Prisoner, when the

label bore directions in his own characteristic handwriting? Who should dare to affirm his innocence, seeing that to him his victim had hastened, almost in the act of death, begging him, with her expiring breath, "not to be hard on a woman," who had ignorantly trusted him, Gentlemen of the Jury! only to find, too late, the deceptive nature of his specious promises? A whip, cried the Bard of Avon, England's glorious, immortal Shakespeare, should be placed in every honest hand to lash such scoundrels naked through the world! Let that whip, in the honest hands of twelve good Britons, be—the verdict of guilt! The Counsel for the Crown, red-hot and perspiring, sat down mopping his streaming face, for it was tropical weather, with the white handkerchief of a blameless life. Irrepressible applause followed, round upon round thudding against the dingy yellow-white walls, beating against the dirty barred skylight of the stifling, close-packed Court. Then the Judge interposed, and the clapping of hands and thumping of stick and sunshade ferrules upon the dirty floor died down, and the Counsel for the Defence got up to plead for his man, who, by the way, he firmly believed to be guilty.

That remembrance made the Dop Doctor merry again, this scorching night in Gueldersdorp, five years later. But it was ugly mirth, especially when he recalled his agony of sympathy upon hearing, through her mother, that Mildred was ill in bed. Ah! how he hated the simpering, whispering, sneering, giggling women in Court when he pictured her, his innocent darling, his sweet girl, suffering for love of him and sorrow for him. David, detained by onerous duties at Regimental Headquarters throughout the whole of the Case, wrote chilly but fraternally expressed letters on blue official paper. Of his

mother, of his father, Owen dared not think. Innocent as he was, the shame of his position, the obloquy of the Trial, must be a branding shame to them for ever.

It had killed them, the Dop Doctor remembered, within a few years of each other—the hale old Squire and Madam, his Welsh wife, feared by the South Dorset village folks for her caustic tongue, beloved for her generous heart, her liberal nature. It was Mildred who he had believed would die if the Verdict went against him—Mildred, who had consoled herself so quickly and so well—Mildred, whom he had held a spotless blossom of Paradise, a young saint in purity and singleness of heart, in comparison with those other women.

Bah! what a besotted idiot he had been! She was as they were. The nodding of their towering hats was before his eyes; the subdued titter that accompanied their whispered comments was in his ears; the lavender, white rose, and violet essences with which they perfumed their baths and sprinkled their clothes were in his nostrils; suffocatingly, as his Counsel went on pleading. The intention of his trenchant cross-questioning of Bough, who had lied from the beginning, like a true son of the Devil, his father, showed plainly now. Little by little the evidence accumulated.

Here, free and unsuspect and doing his best to send another man to Penal Servitude, was the man who had all to gain by fixing the guilt upon the Accused. He had sent the woman, his mistress, to the prisoner; he had resented the prisoner's refusal to commit or to abet a dangerous and illegal operation. He had compelled his hapless victim to submit herself to the

hands of a wretch who lived by such deeds. Possibly he had sickened of his poor toy—he had told her as much. Possibly he had determined, by a bold and daring stroke, to free himself of a wearisome burden, and let another man pay the penalty for his own crime. The substitution of the lethal drug found in the bottle for the harmless bromide mixture given to Mrs. Bough by Dr. Saxham would naturally suggest itself to such a wretch, whose calculating cleverness had been crowned with success by the culminating masterstroke, admirable in its simplicity, damnable in its fiendish cunning, of sending the unhappy woman whose deliberate murder he had really planned and carried out, to die upon the threshold of the innocent victim of this diabolical plot. Let those who heard hesitate before they played into the hands of a villain by condemning the blameless to suffer! Let them look at the young man before them, whose hard work had won him, early in life, his brilliant position as one of the recognised pioneers of the new School of Surgery, as an admitted authority on Clinical Medicine, whose wedding-bells—the handkerchiefs came out at this—had rung to-morrow but for this harrowing and bitter stroke of adverse Destiny. Which would they have? Let the Jury decide for Christ or Barabbas! He spoke in all reverence, because the upright, innocent, charitable, self-denying life of a diligent healer of men would support the analogy of Christ-likeness beside that of the principal witness in this Case, the evil liver, the slanderer, the ex-thief and burglar, the English ticket-of-leave man who had emigrated to South Africa eighteen years previously, had enlisted under a false name in the Cape Mounted Police, had deserted, been traced to Kimberley, and there lost sight of, and who, under the name of Bough, had

recently returned to England, giving himself out as an Afrikander, and setting up in business in London upon the accumulated savings of a career most probably in keeping with his abominable record.

Warders from Wormwood Scrubbs and Portland Prisons were there to swear to the identity of Abraham Brake, *alias* Lister, *alias* Bough, whose photographs, thumb-prints, and measurements an official from the Criminal Identification Department of Scotland Yard was prepared to place before the Court, for whose re-arrest, as a ticket-of-leave man who had failed to keep in proper touch with the Police, an officer with a warrant waited. What, then, was to be the Verdict of the Jury? Was Dr. Owen Saxham innocent or guilty? If innocent, then, in the name of God, let him go forth from bondage, to the unutterable relief of those who waited in anguish for the Verdict. His father, his mother, and the fair young girl—the Court was drowned in tears at this last touching reference, even his Lordship the Judge being observed to remove and wipe eyeglasses that were gemmy with emotion, as Counsel dwelt upon the touching picture of the sorrowing bride-elect, whose orange-blossoms had been blighted by the breath of this hideous, this unbearable, this most unfounded charge....

XVI

The Judge summed up, with an evident bias in favour of the Accused. An old advocate in criminal

causes, his Lordship had formed his own opinion of the principal witness for the Crown, though there was no evidence to prove the guilt of the astute Mr. Abraham Brake, *alias* Lister, *alias* Bough.

The Jury retired, to return immediately. The Verdict "Not Guilty" was received with applause and cheers. Bough departed, to pay the prison penalty of not keeping in touch with the Police.... More cheers, strongly deprecated by the Judge. The Dop Doctor could hear that ironical clapping and braying five years off. It was over, over! He was free! Oh, the mockery of the word!

His Counsel shook his hand warmly, and several old friends and colleagues pressed round him with hearty congratulations. Then a telegram was handed to him.

"No bad news, I hope," said the advocate who had defended, seeing Saxham's lips blanch. "You have had enough trouble to last for some time, I imagine?"

"It appears as if my measure was not quite full enough," said Saxham quietly. "My father died suddenly last night, down at our place in South Dorset. The wire says, 'An attack of cerebral hæmorrhage,' probably brought on by worry and distress of mind over this damned affair of mine." He ground his teeth together, and went on: "I must go to my mother without delay. How soon can I get away from here?"

It was oddly difficult to realise that all the doors were open, and that the following shadow of the Man In Blue would no longer dog his footsteps. It was strange to drive home in the brougham of a friend to Chilworth Street, and let himself into the

dusty, neglected, close-smelling, shut-up house. All the servants were out; probably they had been making holiday through all the weeks that had preceded the Trial. His man returned as the master finished packing a portmanteau for that journey down to Dorsetshire. Saxham left him to finish while he changed his clothes and scrawled a letter to Mildred. Nothing else but this death could have kept him from hurrying to the embrace of those dear arms. As it was, he half expected her to rush in upon him, stammering, weeping, clinging to him in her overwhelming relief and gladness.... At every rumble and stoppage of wheels in the street, at every ring, he made sure that she was coming. But she did not come, and he sent his man to Pont Street with his letter, and went down into Dorsetshire by special train from Waterloo, and found the dead man's dogcart waiting for him, with the old bay cob in harness, and the old coachman who had taught him to ride his pony, waiting, with a band of crape about his sleeve, and drove through the deep, ferny lanes to the old home standing in its mantle of midsummer leafage and blossom in the wide gardens whose myrtle and lavender hedges overhung the beach below. There was a little, old, bent, white-haired woman in a shabby black gown and white India shawl waiting for him on the threshold, and only by the indomitable, unquailing spirit that looked out of her bright black eyes did Owen Saxham recognise his mother. She called him her David's dearest son, and her own boy, and took both his hands, and drew his head down, and kissed him solemnly upon the forehead.

"That is for your father, my dear," she said. "He never doubted you for one moment, Owen. And this is for myself. We have both believed in you implicitly

throughout. We would not even write and tell you so. It would have seemed, your father thought, like admitting, tacitly, that we doubted our son. But other people believed you guilty, and oh! Owen, I think it killed him!"

"I know that it has killed him," Owen Saxham said simply. The early morning light showed to the mother's eyes the ravages wrought in her son's face by the mental anguish and the physical strain of those terrible weeks that were over, and Mrs. Saxham, for the first time since the Squire's death, burst into a passion of weeping. Owen's eyes were dry, even when he stooped to kiss the high, broad forehead of the grand old grey head that lay upon the snowy, lavender-scented pillow in the cool, airy death-chamber, where the perfume of the climbing roses that flowered about the open casements came in drifts across the sharp, clean odour of disinfectant.

Captain Saxham arrived late that night. His greeting of his brother was stiff and constrained; his grey eyes avoided Owen's blue ones; he did not refer to the events of the past ten weeks. He had always had a habit of twisting and biting at one of the short, thick ends of his frizzy light brown moustache. Now he wrenched and gnawed at it incessantly, and his usually florid complexion had deteriorated to a muddy pallor. Black mufti did not suit the handsome martial figure, and there is no dwelling so wearisome as a house of mourning, when the servants move about on tiptoe, wearing faces of funereal solemnity, and the afternoon tea-tray is carried in in state, like the corpse of a domestic usage on its way to the cemetery, with the silver spirit-kettle bubbling behind it as chief mourner. But, as the elder son, there was plenty to occupy Captain Saxham. There

was business to be transacted with the Squire's solicitor, with his bailiff, with one or two of the principal tenants. There were the arrangements to be made for the Funeral, and for the extension of hospitality to relatives and friends who came from a distance to attend it. When it was over and the long string of County carriages had driven home to their respective coach-houses, Owen Saxham returned to town.

"Give my dear love to Mildred. Tell her, if she grudged the first sight of you to me, she will forgive me when she has a son of her own," his mother said.

"You talk as though she were my wife!" he said, the bitter lines about his set mouth softening in a smile.

"She would be but for what is past," said Mrs. Saxham. "She must be soon, for your sake. Your father would have wished that there should be as little delay as possible. Marry quietly at once, and take her abroad. If she loves you, as I know she does, and must, she will not regret the wedding-gown from Paquin's and the six bridesmaids in Directoire hats."

For that deferred wedding was to have been a gorgeous and impressive function at St. George's, Hanover Square, with a Bishop in lawn sleeves to pronounce the nuptial benediction, palms, Japanese lilies, smilax, and white Rambler roses everywhere, while the celebrated "Non Angli sed Angeli" choir of boy-choristers had been specially engaged to render the anthem with proper fervour and give due effect to "The Voice that Breathed."

Owen promised and went back to London. There were cards and envelopes upon the salver in the hall, but not one from Mildred. That stabbed him to the heart.... Not a line, O God!—not a written line, in answer to that letter in which he told her of the acquittal, and of his father's death, and of his own anguish at having to answer the stern call of filial duty, and leave dear Love uncomforted by even one kiss after all these weeks of famine, and hurry away to lay that grand grey head in the vault that covered so many Saxhams. Not a line. But here was the letter, which his idiot of a servant, demoralised by the recent catastrophe, had forgotten to send on lying waiting upon the writing-table in his study. He snatched at it in desperate haste, and tore the envelope open.

Her letter bore the date of that day. She said she had written before and torn the confession up ... it was so difficult to be just to him and true to herself.... It was a roundabout, involved, youthfully grandiloquent epistle in which Mildred announced that her love for Owen was dead, that nothing could ever resuscitate it; that she could not, would not, ever marry him, and that she had returned in an accompanying packet his ring, and presents, and letters, and would ever remain *his friend* (underlined) Mildred. In a rather wobbly postscript, she begged him not to write or to attempt to see her, because her decision was irrevocable. She spelt the word with only one *r*.

Saxham read the letter three times deliberately. The walls of the castle he had built, and fondly believed to be a work of Cyclopean masonry, had come

tumbling about his ears, and lo! the huge blocks were only bits of painted card, and the Lady of the Castle, his true love, was the false Queen, after all. He folded up the letter and put it away in his pocket-book, and went over to the mantel-glass and looked steadily at the reflection of his own square face, haggard and drawn and ghastly, with eyes of startling blue flaring out from under a scowling smudge of meeting black eyebrows. He laughed harshly, and a mocking devil looked out of those desperate eyes, and laughed back. He unlocked an oak-carved, silver-mounted cellaret, and got out a decanter of brandy, and filled a tumbler, and drank the liquor off. It numbed the unbearable mental agony, though it had apparently no other effect. But probably he was drunk when he rang the bell and said quietly to his man:

"Tait, do you believe there is a God?"

Tait's smooth, waxy countenance did not easily express surprise. He answered, as though the question had been the most commonplace and ordinary of queries:

"Can't say I do, sir. I reckon the parsons are responsible for floating 'Im, and that they made a precious good thing out of bearin' stock in Heaven until the purchasers began to ask for delivery, and after that...." He chuckled dryly. "I've lived with one or two of 'em, and, if I may say so, sir—I know the breed!"

"He knows ... the breed ..." repeated Saxham heavily.

He asked another question, in the same thick, hesitating way, as he moved across the carpet to the oak-and-silver cellaret.

"Tait, when things went damned badly with you, when that other man let you in for the bill you backed for him, and that girl you were to have married went off with someone else, what did you do to keep yourself from brooding? Because you must have done something, man, as you're alive to-day!"

Tait looked at his master dubiously as he poured out more brandy, and went over and stood upon the hearthrug with his back to the empty fireplace, drinking it in gulps. "I did what you're doing now, sir: I took a sight of drink to keep the trouble down. And——" He hesitated.

"Go on," said Saxham, nodding over the tumbler.

"You're not like other gentlemen in your ways, sir," said smooth Tait, "and that makes me 'esitate in saying it. But I took on a gay, agreeable young woman of the free-and-easy sort, and went in for a bit o' pleasure, and more drink along with it. One nail drives out another, you know, sir. And if the young lady have thrown you hover——"

"Why, you damned, white-gilled, prying brute! you must have been reading my correspondence," said Saxham thickly, as he lifted the tumbler to his mouth.

Tait grinned. He could venture to tell his master, drunk, what he would not have dared to tell him sober.

"No need for that, sir. I've come and gone between this house and Pont Street too often not to know what was in the wind. Why, Captain Saxham was there with her often and often when you never suspected...."

The tumbler fell from Saxham's hand, and struck the fender, and smashed into a hundred glittering bits.

"Go!" said Tait's master, perfectly, suddenly, dangerously sober, and pointing to the door. The man delayed to finish his sentence.

"While you were in Holloway, sir, and all through the Trial...."

The door, contrary to Tait's discreet, usual habit, had been left open. He vanished through it with harlequin-like agility as a terrible, white-faced black figure seemed to leap upon him....

"I've 'ad an escape for my life!" he said, having reached in a series of bounds the safer regions below stairs.

"Of the Doctor?... Go on with your rubbishing nonsense!" said the cook.

"What did you go and do to upset 'im, pore dear?" demanded the housemaid, who was more imaginative, and cherished the buddings of a romantic passion for one who should be for ever nameless:

"Her at Pont Street has wrote to give 'im the go-by—that's what she've done," said pale-faced Tait, wiping his dewy brow. "And seeing the Doctor for the first time since I've been in his service a bit overtook with liquor, and more free and easy like than customary—being a gentleman you or me would 'esitate to take a liberty with in the ordinary way o' things—I thought I'd let 'im know about the Goings On."

"Of them two...." interpolated the cook—"Her and the Captain?"

"Shameless, I call 'em!" exclaimed the incandescent housemaid as Tait signified assent.

"'Aven't they kep' it dark, though!" wondered the cook.

"They're what I call," stated Tait, who had not quite got over the desertion of the young woman he was to have married, and who had gone off with somebody else, "a precious downy couple. And what I say is—it's a Riddance!"

"How did 'e take it, pore dear?" gulped the housemaid.

"Like he's took everythink—that is, up to the present moment," admitted Tait. "But this is about the last straw."

The housemaid dissolved in tears.

"He'll get another young lady," said the cook confidently. "And him so 'andsome an' so clever, an' with such heaps of carriage-swells for patients."

Tait shook his prim, respectable head.

"The swells'll show their tongues to another man now, my gal, who 'asn't the dirt of the Old Bailey on his coat-sleeve. Whistle for patients now, that's what the doctor may. Why, every one of 'em has paid their bills, and them that haven't have asked for their accounts to be sent in. And it's 'Lady So-and-so presents her compliments,' instead of 'Dear Dr. Saxham.' Done for, he is, at least as far as the West End's concerned.... Mind, I don't set up to be infallible, but experience justifies a certain amount of cocksureness, and what I say is—Done for! Best he can do is—sell the practice, and lease, and plate, and

pictures, furniture, and so on, for whatever he can get—the movables would have provoked spirited biddin' at auction if the verdict had been Guilty, but, under the circumstances, they won't bring a twentieth part of their valoo—and go Abroad." Tait's gesture was large and vague.

"Foreign parts. Pore dear, it do seem cruel!" sighed the cook.

"And 'is young lady false to 'im, and all. I wonder he don't do away with hisself," sobbed the housemaid. "I do, reely!"

"With all them wicked knives and deadly bottles handy," added the cook.

"Not him!" said Tait. "I'm ready to lay any man the sporting odd against him committing sooicide. He's not the sort. Lord! what was that?"

That was only the oversetting of a chair upstairs.

XVII

While the servants talked in the kitchen the master had been sitting quietly in the darkening study. All without and within the man was eddying, swirling blackness. Heat beat and glowed upon his forehead, like the radiation from molten metal; there was a winnowing and fanning as of giant wings or leaping of furnace-fires. The blood in his throbbing temples sang a dull, tuneless song. But presently he became aware of another kind of singing.

It was a little hissing voice that came from the inside of the oak-and-silver cellaret. And it sang a song that the man who sat near had never heard before.

"Why think of the sharp lancet or the keen razor, why long for the swift dismissing pang of the fragrant acid, or the leap down upon the railway-track under the crushing, pulping iron wheels?" sang the little voice. "I can give you Forgetfulness. I can bring you Death. Not that death of the body which, for all you know, may mean a keener, more perfect capability to live and suffer on the part of the Soul, stripped from the earthly husk that has burdened and deadened it. The Death that is Death in Life.... Here am I, ready to be your minister. Drink deep, and die!"

The man who heard lifted his white, wild, desperate face. The song came more clearly.

"Wronged, outraged, betrayed of the God you blindly believed in and the man and the woman who had your passionate love, your absolute faith, have your revenge upon the One—as upon those two others. Degrade, cast down, deface, the image of your Maker in you. Hurl back every gift of His, prostitute and debase every faculty. Cease to believe, denying His Being with the Will He forged and freed. Your Body, is it not your own, to do with as you choose? Your Soul, is it not your helpless prisoner, while you keep it in its cage of clay? Revenge, revenge, through the body and the soul, upon Him who has mocked you! Do you not hear Him laugh as you sit there desolate in the darkness—poor, broken reed that thought itself an oak of might—alone, while your brother kisses the sweet lips that were yours. David and Mildred are laughing too, at you. Hasten to efface

every memory of the lying kisses she has given you upon the bosoms of the Daughters of Pleasure! Love, revel, drink! Drink, I say, and you will be able to laugh at the One and the two...."

The little hissing voice drove Saxham mad. He leaped up, frenzied, oversetting the chair. He tore open and threw wide the doors of the oak-and-silver cellaret, and sought in it with shaking hands. He found a bottle of champagne and the brandy-decanter, and a long tumbler, and knocked off the wired neck of the bottle against the chimneypiece, and crashed the foaming wine into the crystal, and filled up the glass with brandy, and tossed off the stinging, bubbling, hissing mixture, and laughed as he set the tumbler down.

The thing inside the oak-and-silver cellaret laughed too.

* * * * *

The hall-door shut heavily as Tait and the women in the kitchen sat and listened. They had not spoken since the crash of the falling chair in the room overhead. The area-door was open to the hot, sickly night air of London in midsummer. Tait slid noiselessly out and listened as his master hailed a passing hansom and jumped lightly in. The flaps banged together, the driver pulled open the roof-trap and leaned down to catch the shouted address. Tait's sharp ear caught it too, and the knowing grin that decorated the features of the cabman was reflected upon his decent smug countenance. His tongue was in his cheek as he returned to the kitchen. For his master had given the direction of a house of ill-fame.

Thenceforwards the door would have shut for ever

upon the strenuous, honourable, cleanly, useful life of Owen Saxham, were it not that the For Ever of humanity means only a little space of years with God —sometimes only a little space of hours. Saxham did not need the evidence of the shower of cheques from people who hated paying, the request from the Committee of his Club that he would resign membership, the averted faces of his acquaintances, the elaborate cordiality of his friends, to tell him what he knew already. As the astute Tait had said, as Society knew already, he was a ruined man. He had made money, but the enormous expenses of the Defence swallowed up thousands. By bringing an action against the Treasury he might have recovered a portion of the costs—so he was told, but he had had enough of Law. He resigned his post at the Hospital, in spite of a thinly-worded remonstrance from the Senior Physician. He dismissed his servants generously. He disposed of his lease and furniture and other property through a firm of auctioneers who robbed him, and sold what stocks he had not realised upon, and wrote a farewell letter to his mother, and sailed for South Africa. Thenceforwards he was to build his nest with the birds of night, and rise from the stertorous sleep that is born of drunkenness only to drink himself drunk again.

From assiduous letter-writing friends David heard reports of his brother that grieved him deeply. He told these things to Mildred, and they shook their heads over them and sighed together. Poor Owen! It was most fortunate for his family that the Jury had taken so lenient a view of the case ... otherwise ...! They were quite certain in their own minds that poor Owen had been culpable, if not guilty. They were married six months later. The Directoire hats were out of date, of course, but Louis Quinze, with

Watteau trimmings suited the six bridesmaids marvellously, and the "Non Angli sed Angeli" choir rendered the Anthem and the "Voice that Breathed" to perfection.

And Mildred, who never omitted her nightly prayers, made a special petition for the reformation of poor misguided Owen upon her wedding-night.

"Because we are so happy," she told David, who had found her kneeling, white and exquisitely virginal in her lace and cambric draperies by the bedside. "And *he* must be so miserable. And you know, though I never *really* cared for him, he was perfectly devoted to me."

"Who could help it?" cooed enamoured David, and knelt and kissed his bride's white feet. The white feet would show no ugly stains, although to reach the bridal bed, towards which her husband now drew her, they must tread upon his brother's bleeding heart.

XVIII

The Dop Doctor lifted his head as the bell of the front door rang loudly at the back passage-end. Two mounted officers of the Military Staff at Gueldersdorp had trotted up the street with an orderly behind them a moment before. The elder of the two had pulled sharply up in front of the green door whose brass-plate flamed in the last rays of sunset. He had dismounted lightly and gone up the

steps and rung, saying something to his companion. The other officer had saluted and ridden on, as though to carry out some order: the orderly had come up and got off his horse and taken the bridle of the officer's, as the Dutch dispensary-attendant, Koets, had plodded heavily along the passage and opened the door, and now slouched heavily back, ushering in a presumable patient.

"Light the lamp," said the Dop Doctor in Dutch to the factotum, as he rose up heavily out of his chair. "It will be dark directly."

"There is no need of more light, I am obliged to you," said the stranger, cool, alert, brown of face as of dress: a thin man, distinct of speech, quiet of manner, and with singularly vivid eyes of light hazel. "In the actual dark I can see quite clearly. A matter of training and habit, because I began life as a short-sighted lad. Do we need your assistant further?"

In indirect answer to the pointed question, the Dop Doctor turned to the Dutch dispensary-assistant, and said curtly:

"Ga uit!"

Koets went, not without a scowl at the visitor.

"A sulky man and a surly master," thought the stranger, scanning with those observant eyes of his the gaunt figure in the shabby tweed suit. "Has seen trouble and lived hard," he added, mentally noting the haggard lines of the square face under the massive forehead, over which a plume of badly-brushed hair, black with threads of grey in it, fell awkwardly.

"English and a University man, I should say. Those

clothes were cut by a Bond Street tailor in the height of fashion about five years ago. And the man is in the second stage of recovery from a bout of drunkenness —unless he drugs?" But even while the visitor was taking these memoranda, he was saying in the customary tone of polite inquiry:

"I have, I think, the pleasure of speaking to Dr. Williams?"

"Sir, you have not. Dr. De Boursy-Williams has left for Cape Town with his family. You are speaking to his temporary substitute." The bloodshot blue eyes met his own indifferently.

"Indeed! Well, I do not grudge the family if, as I believe is the case, it chiefly ranks upon the distaff side. But the Doctor will miss a good deal of interesting practice. As to yourself, you will allow the inquiry.... Are you a surgeon as well as a medical practitioner?"

"If I were not, I should not be here."

"I will put my question differently. I trust you will not consider its repetition offensive. Have you an extensive experience in dealing with gunshot wounds?"

Saxham said roughly:

"I have experience to a certain extent. I will go no further than to say so. I am not undergoing examination as to my professional capabilities that I am aware of, and if you doubt them you are perfectly at liberty to seek medical advice elsewhere."

"My good sir, I *have* been elsewhere, and the other doctor, when he learned the purport of my visit,

relished it as little as your principal is likely to do. With the imminent prospect of a siege before us, we are making ..." The speaker, slipping one hand behind him, moved a step backwards and nearer to the room-door. "As I said, sir, with the imminent prospect of a siege before us, we are making a house-to-house requisition.... Ah, I thought as much!"

The door-knob had been quietly turned, the door suddenly pulled open, bringing with it Koets, the Dutch dispensary-attendant, whose large red ear had been glued to the outer keyhole.

"Your Dutch factotum has been listening. Pick yourself off the mat, Jan, and take yourself out of earshot." The stranger whistled the beginning of a pleasant little tune, with a flavour of Savoy Opera about it.

"Ik heb not the neem of Jan," snarled the detected Koets, retiring in disorder.

The whistler left off in the middle of a deftly-executed embellishment to say: "Unfortunate; because I don't know the Dutch word for spy." The keen hazel eyes and the haggard blue ones met, and there was the faint semblance of a smile on the grim mouth of the Dop Doctor. Keeping the door open, the visitor went on:

"I have some notes here—entries copied from the Railway freight-books. Three weeks ago twenty carboys of carbolic acid, with a considerable consignment of other antiseptics, surgical necessaries, drugs, and so forth were delivered to Dr. Williams' order at this address. Frankly, as the officer commanding Her Majesty's troops on this border, I am here to make a sequestration of the things I have

mentioned, with all other medical and surgical requisites stored upon the premises, that are likely to be of use to us at the Hospital. In the name of the Imperial Government."

The smile died out on the grim mouth. A sombre anger burned in the blue eyes of the haggard man in shabby tweeds.

"Damn the Imperial Government!" said the Dop Doctor.

The stranger nodded in serious assent. "Certainly, damn it! It is your privilege and mine, shared in common with all other Britons, to damn our Government, as long as we remain loyal to our Queen and country."

The other man quivered with a sudden uncontrollable spasm of hate, rage, and loathing. He clenched his hand and shook it in the air as he cried:

"You employ the stock phrases of your profession. They have long ceased to mean anything to me. I have been the victim and the sacrifice of British laws. I have been formally pardoned by the State for a crime I never committed. I have been robbed, plundered, ruined, betrayed, by the monstrous thing that bears the name of British Justice. And as I loathe and hate it, so do I cast off and repudiate the name of Englishman. You speak of the imminent prospect of a siege. What other causes have operated to bring it about but British greed, and the British lust for paramountcy and suzerainty and possession? Liberal, or Conservative, or Radical, or Unionist, the diplomats and lawyers and financiers who urge on your political machinery by bombast and bribes and catchwords and lying promises, are swayed by one

motive—governed by one desire—lands and diamonds and gold. Wealth that is the property of other men, soil that has been fertilised by the sweat of a nation of agriculturists, whom Great Britain despised until she learned that gold lay under their orchards and cornfields." He broke into a jarring laugh. "And it is for these, the robbers and desperadoes, that the British Army is to do its duty, and for them that De Boursy-Williams is to help pay the piper. As for his property, which you are about to commandeer in the name of the British Imperial Government, I suppose I am legally responsible, being left here in charge. Well, be it so!... I can only protest against what I am free to regard as an act of brigandage, reflecting small credit upon your Service, and leave you, sir, to discover the whereabouts of the carboys for yourself!"

He waved his hand contemptuously, and swung towards the door.

"A moment," said the other man, "in which to assure you that the fullest acknowledgments will be given in the case of the stores, and that their owner will be paid for them liberally and ungrudgingly. And, granting that much of what you have said is true, and that the leaven of self-seeking is to be found in every man's nature, and that greed is the predominating motive with those men who, more than others, work for the building-up of an Empire and the profitable union of Britain with her Colonies, don't you think that there may be something in the good old footballer's motto, 'Play the game, that your side may win'?"

The Dop Doctor made a slight sound that might have been of indifferent assent or of contradiction. The

other chose to take it as assent.

"Take the present situation, purely as football. They have picked me as a forward player. And I mean—to play the game!"

The Dop Doctor might or might not have heard. His square, impassive face looked as if carved in stone.

"To play the game, Doctor. Perhaps I have my bone or two to pick with—several of the Institutions of my country. Possibly, but I mean to play the game. Fate has ridden me on a saddle-gall or two, and mixed too much chopped straw in proportion to the beans, but—there's the game, and I'm going to play it for all I'm worth. As an old University man, that way of looking at things ought to appeal to you."

Still no answer from the big, sullen, black-haired man in the shabby worn clothes. But his breathing was a little quickened, and a faint, smouldering glow of something not yet quenched in him showed in the haggard blue eyes.

"It's a confoundedly handicapped game, too, on the defending side. Doesn't that fact rather appeal to the sportsman in you, Doctor?"

The other said slowly:

"I gather that the struggle will be unequal. It was stated in my hearing yesterday afternoon that a considerable force of Boers were advancing on Gueldersdorp from the direction of Geitfontein, and, later, that another large body of them were on the march along the river-valley from the west. I did not attempt to verify what I had heard from my own observation. I was—otherwise engaged." The half-incredulous surprise that the other man could not

keep out of his eyes stung him into adding: "Frankly, I did not care to trouble. It did not interest me."

The Colonel said, with a dry chuckle:

"No? But it will presently, though! And, seen through the glass even now, it's an instructive spectacle. Masses of Dutchmen, well-weaponed and thoroughly fed if insufficiently washed, gathering in all quarters —marching to the assembly points, dismounting, unlimbering, going into laager. Ten thousand Boers, at a rough estimate, not counting the blacks they have armed against us.... And, behind our railway-sleepers and sand-bags, eight hundred fighting European units, twenty per cent, of them raw civilians; and seven thousand neutral Barala and Kaffirs and Zulus in the native Stad—an element of danger lying dormant, waiting the spark that may hurry us all sky-high.... By God, Doctor, the game's worth playing, except by cowards and curs!"

The smouldering glow in the Dop Doctor's eyes had been fanned into a fire. The visitor saw the flame leap, and went on:

"There's a native proverb—I wonder whether you know it?—a kind of Zulu version of the regimental motto, *Vestigia nulla retrorsum*. It runs like this: '*If we go forward, we die; if we go backward, we die. Better go forward and die.*'" He reached out a long, lean, brown right hand. "Come forward with us, Doctor. We can do with a man like you!"

The impassive face broke up. Saxham gripped the offered hand as a drowning man might have done. He cried out hoarsely:

"You don't know the sort of man I am, Colonel. But

everybody else in this cursed place knows, or should know. They call me the Dop Doctor. You understand what that nickname implies?" He held out his shaking hands. "Look at these! They would tell you the truth, even if I lied. What use can a man like me be to you, or men like you? I am a drunkard, sir. I have not gone to bed sober one night in the last five years!"

There was a pause before the Colonel answered, filled up in the odd way characteristic of the man by a softly-whistled repetition of the opening bars of the pleasant little tune. Then he said quietly and dryly:

"There is another proverb, not Latin nor Zulu, but English, which impresses on us that it is never too late to mend!" He looked at a tarnished Waterbury watch, worn on a horse's lip-strap. "I am due to inspect the Hospital tomorrow at ten o'clock sharp. If you will meet me there punctually at the half-hour, I shall have the pleasure of introducing you to—your Colleagues of the Medical Staff. And now, if you please, as I have just five minutes left to spare, we will have a look at those carboys of carbolic."

"They are in the old Chinese godown at the bottom of the garden," said Saxham. He felt in one of the baggy pockets of the old tweed coat, pulled out a key, and offered it silently to the conqueror, who motioned it back.

"Keep it, if you'll be so good. We'll send a waggon and a careful man or two round from the Army Service Stores Department within an hour; for that stuff in your friend's carboys is more precious than

rubies to us just now—a man's life in every teaspoonful. And if, as you tell me, there is some mercurial perchloride, Taggart and the Medical Staff will jump for joy. What we owe to Lister, Koch, and those fellows! You'd say so if you'd ever seen gangrene on War Hospital scale—in Afghanistan, in 1880, even as recently as the Zululand Campaign of 1888. The Pathan and the Zulu are slim, and the Boer is even slimmer, but the wiliest customer of 'em all is the Microbe. No wonder Wellington's old campaigners used to slit the throats of badly-wounded soldiers, or that the ambulance-men of Soult and Bonaparte were merciful enough to knock on the head every poor beggar who had been bayonetted in the body. They knew there was not the atom of a chance. But to-day we know how to deal with the invisible enemy. Thanks to Antiseptic Surgery, that younger daughter of Science and Genius, as some smart fellow puts it in the *National Review*."

And the pleasant little tune was whistled through to its final grace-note as the two men went down the house-passage and crossed the garden. Verily, to some other men that have lived since Peter of the Nets has it been given to be fishers of their kind! This man said that night to an officer of the Staff:

XIX

"I landed twenty carboys of carbolic to-day, and a lot of other Hospital stores, by talking football to a man

who knows the game, chiefly from the ball's point of view."

"That counts to you, Colonel," called out Beauvayse, the Chief's fair, boyish junior aide-de-camp, from the bottom of the table, "against the awful failure you were grousing about this morning."

"Ah! you mean when I tried to frighten some Sisters of Mercy into leaving the town by painting them a luridly-coloured verbal picture of the perils of the present situation," said the Colonel. His keen hazel eyes twinkled, though his mouth was grave. "I ought to have remembered that you can't scare a religious, be he or she Roman Catholic, Buddhist, or Mohammedan, by pointing to the King of Terrors. He does to frighten lay-folk, but for the others Death's grisly skeleton-hand holds out the Keys of Heaven."

"What will it hold for some of us others, I wonder," said one of the dinner-guests, a moody-looking civilian, of Semitic features, whose evening clothes made a dull contrast with the mess-dress of the Staff officers gathered about their Chief's table in his quarters at Nixey's Hotel on the Market Square, "before this month is out?"

The host leaned forward to reply:

"My dear Mr. Levison ... special mention in Despatches Above, with honours and promotion for those of us who have been approved worthy. For others, who have tried and failed, a merciful overlooking of blunders, a generous acceptance of the intention where the performance came short.... And for the rest ... a grave on the yellow veld in the shadow of a rock or thorn-bush, with the turquoise sky of day overhead, shimmering in the white-hot

sunshine; or an ocean of purple ether, ridden by what old Lucian called 'the golden galley of the regnant Moon.' That in South Africa; and at home in England, one's memory kept warm and living in, say, three hearts that recognised the best in one, and loved it. A mother's heart, the heart of a friend—and *hers*!"

There was no insincerity of flattery in the hum of applauding comment that ensued. All earnest original thought has beauty; and this man could not only think, but clothe his thoughts in direct and simple language, and add to it the charm of well-modulated and musical utterance.

"I call that good enough," said the senior Staff Officer, a dark, handsome, eagle-faced Guardsman, who bore a great historic name, "for you or me or any other fellow here—we're not taking into account the living dead ones."

The Chief leaned forward in his characteristic attitude, and spoke, a long, lean brown forefinger emphasising the sentences, his hawk-keen glance driving them home. "I tell you, Leighbury, that some of those, the rottenest corpses among 'em, will shed their grave-clothes, and rise up and do the deeds of living men before, to quote Levison, this month is out. Never take it for granted that a man is dead until the grass is growing high over his bare bones, and don't make too sure even then! Because to-day I saw such dry bones move—and it's an instructive if an uncanny sight."

"Whose were the bones, Colonel?" called out the handsome young aide at the bottom of the table.

The host, his thin, brown fingers busy at the clipped

moustache, was listening to the Mayor of Gueldersdorp, who sat upon his right. He withdrew his attentive eyes from that stalwart sportsman's broad, ruddy countenance, to glance smilingly at the fair, handsome face, and reply:

"Whose? Well, up to the present they have belonged to the Dop Doctor."

"That man!" The Mayor, in the act of taking another slice of the roast, looked round as at the mention of a name familiar, shrugging his portly shoulders. "Surely you know who the fellow is, Colonel? He drifted up here from Cape Colony three years ago. A capable—confoundedly capable man, handicapped by a severe muscular strain," the Mayor's twinkling eye heralded the resurrection of an ancient jest —"contracted in lifting a cask of whisky—a glass at a time!"

White teeth flashed in alert tanned faces. The schoolboy laugh went round the table; then the Babel of talk rose up again. Most of these men were quite young ... their seniors barely middle-aged, not a man but was what they themselves would have termed both "fit" and "keen." They had wrought for many days in the erection of sand-bag defences, in the digging of trenches, in the drilling of Baraland Irregulars and Rifle Volunteers and the newly-enrolled Town Guard. This was the pleasant social time of lull before the storm, and they were not to get many more good dinners or peaceful nights in bed for a long siege to come. They did not show outwardly the tension of strung nerves that waited, as the whole world waited, for the echo of the first shot, rattling amongst the low hills to the south. Nor did it occur to them that there was anything heroic

or dramatic in their quiet unaffected pose. Gathered together upon one little spot of border earth destined to be the vital, tragic, throbbing centre of great events and tremendous issues, actions glorious, and deeds scarce paralleled upon the page of History, let us look upon them, well-groomed, well-bred, easy-mannered, cheery, demolishing the good dishes furnished by the *chef* of Nixey's Hotel, with the hungry zest of schoolboys, exchanging fusillades of not very brilliant chaff.

Scraps of scientific and technical conversation with reference to telephonic and telegraphic installations between outlying forts and headquarters, electric communication with mines, automatic warning-apparatus, the most effective methods of constructing bomb-proof shelters, the comparative merits of Maxim and Nordenfeldt, crossed in the air like fragments of bursting projectiles, impelled by those admirable engines of destruction. Mingled with reminiscences of cricket, golf, tennis, polo, and motoring, then in its infancy; anecdotes new and old, and conjectures as to what the fellows at home were doing? Hurlingham and Ranelagh, Maidenhead and Henley, Eton and Oxford, Sandhurst and Aldershot, Piccadilly in the season, Simla in the heats, the results for Kempton Park and Newmarket Races—of all these they talked, with rhino and elephant shooting and the big battues of pheasants now taking place in the Home Midlands and up North. But though the watch-fires of their pickets burned upon the veld, and though the Boer lay in laager over the Border, of him they said not one word. That reticence upon the vital point was characteristically English. The excitable Gaul would have wept, kneaded his manly bosom, and alluded to his mother; the stolid Muscovite would have wept also,

referring to his Little Father, the Czar; the Teuton would have poured forth oceans of turgid sentiment about the Fatherland; the dignified Spaniard would have recognised himself as a warrior upon the verge of a Homeric struggle, and said so candidly; the hysterical American would have sung "Hail, Columbia!" and waved pocket-handkerchief-sized replicas of the Star-Spangled Banner until too exhausted to agitate or vocalise. But to these men indulgence in sentiment was "bad form," and unrestrained patriotic utterance merely "gas," tainting the air with an odour as of election-eggs or sulphuretted hydrogen. Therefore were many words to be avoided.

A pose, if you will, an affectation, this studied avoidance of all appearance of enthusiasm or excitement; showing the weak spot in the armour of these heroes, henceforth to be of epic fame. But Man is essentially a weak being. It is only when the immortal spirit of him nerves the frame of perishable bone and muscle that he rises to heights that are sublime. Such souls of fire burned within these men, that when the Wind of Death blew coldest and the lead-and-iron hail beat hardest, they only glowed more fiercely radiant; and Want and Privation, instead of weakening, only seemed to make them more strong;—strong to endure, strong to foresee plots and avert perils and oppose wit to cunning, and strategy to deceit; so strong that, by reason of their strength, that little frontier town became a fortress of Titans. And their names, other than those I have given them in this story, shall go ringing down the grooves of Time, until Time itself shall be no more.

XX

While they ate and drank, laughed, and chatted, the man who was to be their comrade, sharer in all those perils and privations yet to come, was tramping up and down the bare boards of the dingy bedchamber in Harris Street, wrestling desperately with his tragic thirst.

"Why did he come and look at me, and take me by the hand, and awaken my deadened senses to the sting of anguish that has no name? Why could he not have left me alone in this living death I had attained!" he cried. "When first I took to the infernal, blessed liquor, it was for the sake of respite from mental pain, torture unbearable. Then I was a man, only unhappy. Now I am lower than the lowest of the sensible, cleanly, decent brutes, because I desire the drink for its own sake, and find gratification in physical degradation. O God, if Thou indeed art, and I must perforce return to live the life of a man amongst men, help to burst the chains that fetter me! Help me to be free!"

He swallowed a great draught of water, and stumbled to the unused bed, and threw himself across it, raging and panting, and defiant of the very Power he invoked. And then, against hope, sleep came to him, drowning memory and obliterating thought, and relieving physical suffering. The lines smoothed out of the heavy forehead, and the grim mouth relaxed in the smile that his dead mother had kissed, coming in with the shaded candle to look at

her sleeping boy.

Just as the Mayor of Gueldersdorp, that stalwart Yorkshireman, mighty hunter of elephant, rhino, giraffe, and lion in the reckless days of bloodshed that were before the introduction of the Game Laws into South Africa, was saying to the Colonel:

"Irreclaimable, sir. Hopeless! A confirmed drunkard, who has soaked away all self-respect, who has been cautioned and warned and fined a score of times, by myself and other magistrates. Dr. de Boursy-Williams, our leading practitioner here, has taken the fellow under his wing, in a manner—bails him out when it is necessary, and, I believe, when the man is sober enough, gives him work in his dispensary and allows him to administer the anæsthetic when it's a question of a surgical operation. Wonder he trusts him, for my part! Yet De Boursy-Williams is a remarkably successful operator, and hardly ever loses a case. It is unfortunate that he should have been called away to Cape Town at this juncture."

"He has left Dr. Saxham as *locum tenens*, I understand."

The Mayor shrugged his portly shoulders

"As to his qualifications, there's no doubt. Ranked high at one time as a London West End specialist. I have seen his name myself in a British Medical Directory of some years back as principal visiting-surgeon to St. Stephen's and the Ludgate Hospital for Diseases of the Chest. Has written books—scientific works that are quoted now. Must have been making money hand-over-hand when the collapse came. The usual thing—one slip—and a Police-court Inquiry follows, and down goes the unlucky wretch with the

Crown on top of him, and all the Press pack yelping for soft snaps. True, the finding of the Jury was 'Not Guilty,' but the fact of there having been a prosecution was enough to ruin Saxham professionally. Ah, I thought you must have heard the name!"

For the listener had moved suddenly. He did remember the name of the distinguished London practitioner who had been discreditably mixed up in the case of Mrs. Bough, the young, miserable, murdered creature, who might possibly have been the daughter of Richard Mildare. Tough and cool as his tried nerves were, he shuddered at the thought, and a sickly heat made the points of perspiration stand out upon his forehead. But the Mayor, good man, was prosing on:

"I can't say the facts of the case are very clear in my recollection, but I have a file of the *Daily Wire* at home, extending over six years back, so the Criminal Court proceedings must be reported in it. The woman's name, I do remember, was Bough. As regards her age, now you ask me"—for the Colonel had put a quick question—"I fancy she must have been twenty-two or three. Indeed, I am almost certain that was the age as stated by the Medical Witness for the Prosecution.... However, I'll go into the reports and let you know for certain."

"Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And, in case those *Daily Wire* files are bomb-proof, possibly it would be better to take the family with you—and stop until times improve."

"Not bad, not half bad, Colonel! But to tell the truth, I wouldn't miss what we used to call the shindy, and these boys of yours term the 'scrap' for a pile of

Kruger sovereigns. And—I can shoot better than most men, if I am in the sere and yellow sixties." The Mayor was slightly ruffled; the diplomatic touch smoothed him down.

"My money is on you, Mr. Mayor, when it comes to stopping a Boer with a rifle-bullet at four hundred yards. By the way, I have a little confidence to repose in you. When you meet—as I am convinced you will meet—Dr. Saxham at the Hospital or elsewhere, metaphorically clothed and in his right mind, and in the active discharge of duties which no man, judging by your own testimony, is better fitted to perform, let him down gently."

The Mayor, conscious of civic dignity and magisterial warnings from the Bench ignored, swelled obviously.

"My dear sir, you can't let the Dop Doctor down anyhow. He is—just about as low as a man can get—short of being underground."

"Lend him a hand up—in the first instance—by forgetting that confounded nickname which I was clumsy enough to blurt out just now. Be oblivious of what he is, because of what he has been in the past, and will be in the future. For there is tremendous stuff in the fellow even now—or I am a bad judge of men."

"Colonel, you're a thundering bad judge of drunkards, from the Bench's point of view, but you'd be a damned good special pleader for a client in need of all the excuses that could be trumped up for him."

"We all have something we'd like to have an excuse for, Mr. Mayor." The keen hawk-eyes held a twinkle in reserve. "There was a man I knew, a mighty

hunter before the Lord—and before the Game Laws." The thin brown fingers of the muscular hard-palmed hand played with the stem of a wineglass as the sentences came out, crisp and pointed. "Well, this is the story of a mistake, and an old *shikari* of your experience can find even more excuses for it than I can ... but perhaps I bore you?"

"On the contrary—on the contrary, sir."

The fish had taken the bait, remained to play the quivering captive until his last swirling struggle brought him within reach of the skilful dip and lift of the angler's net.

"It was about four years ago, in the Portuguese coast-lands, South of the Zambesi, where elephants are to be had, and rhino, particularly the Keitloa variety with the long posterior horn, and a bad habit of charging the man behind the 600 bore...."

Mr. Mayor's capacious white waistcoat was agitated by a subterranean chuckle. His double chin shook merrily. "A side shot through the head—solid bullet—is the best cure for that, Colonel. But you had to wait in the high swamp-grass and keep the wind of him, and make sure of your aim."

"Quite so. This man, from the shelter of a rock, waited to make sure of his aim. The rhino was feeding tsetse as he dozed in the high swamp-grass. His biggest horn showed, and a bit of his shiny black skin. One forward lunge of the brute's head—and the hunter could get that side-shot. For that he waited, patience being, as we know, a virtue to be cultivated by the successful stalker of big game——"

The Mayor, boiled prawn-pink to the receding

boundary-line of his upright white hair, coughed awkwardly.

"The man waited two hours. Then the unclad and obese native lady, carrying a long pointed grass-basket on her back, who had squatted down in the high grass to smoke a pipe and administer maternal refreshment to a shiny black piccannin of three or four——!"

The Mayor, purple now, burst out:

"Got up and went on! And, if these boys of yours get wind of that story, I shall be roasted within an inch of my life. Whoever told you? For the love of Heaven, don't give me away!"

The keen eyes, were dancing now—the big fish had fairly got the gaff.

"I promise, Mr. Mayor, upon the understanding that you don't give away my man.... It's a compact? Thanks tremendously! And here comes the Manager to be congratulated upon the haunch. I never tasted better venison, Mr. Nixey, though, as you say, this is rather far North for koodoo. And the quail were beyond praise. Waiter, a glass for Mr. Nixey.... Port—and we're going to ask you to join us in drinking a toast...."

The beautiful, flushed boy rose solemnly, glass in hand. About the long board, adorned with a fine epergne full of roses, Cape jessamine and purple bougainvillea, spread with Nixey's best plate and linen, crystal, and dishes of Staffordshire china piled with golden mandarins, and loquats, the fruit of October; there was a great uprising of those phlegmatic, self-contained Britons. Straight as the

flames of unblown torches, they burned about the table. And with a simultaneous movement all those eyes of varied colours turned to the lean brown face of the Chief, as the sweet young clarion rang out:

"Gentlemen—the Queen!"

The brimming glasses rose high,—one crystal wave with the crimson of blood in it. The resonant English and the thinner Colonial voices answered together with a crash. As of the wave breaking on white cliffs northwards, and a great surge of love and loyalty went out from all those hearts to England, throbbing to the steps of the Throne where She sat, bowed with great griefs and great joys and great triumphs and glories, and white-haired with the full burden of her venerable years.

"The Queen!"

XXI

They lingered not long over wine and cigars. Lady Hannah Wrynche, entertaining what she disdainfully termed a "hen party" in her private rooms at Nixey's, vacated in her honour by the landlord's wife—expected them to coffee. Much to the relief of the military authorities at Cape Town, Milady, most erratic of Society meteors, had quitted that centre of painstaking official misinformation, for the throbbing spot of debatable land whence events might be gathered as they sprang. Shooting across the orbit of the reddening, low-hanging War-planet, she had

descended upon Gueldersdorp in a shower of baggage-trunks, fox-terriers, and interrogations. For one thing, she explained to everybody, she had undertaken to supply a London Daily with a series of articles, written from the Seat of Hostilities, and for another, Bingo was on the Staff, and it would be so nice for him, poor dear, to have his wife near him in case he happened to get ... was "chipped" the proper technical term, or "potted"? The articles were intended to be the real thing—racy of the soil, don't you know? and full of "go" and atmosphere. Let it be said here that they achieved raciness. The London print in which they appeared came to be christened by the scoffer and the incredulous the *Daily Whale*—it swallowed and disgorged so many of the Jonahs rejected by other editors. But the profits increased, and the proprietors could afford to smile at envy.

Just now the insatiable gold fountain-pen from whence our indefatigable Lady Correspondent derived her literary pseudonym, was employed in recording merest gossip, in the absence of the longed-for opportunity for its wielder to prove herself the equal, if not the superior, of Dora Corr. Dora was the woman Lady Hannah admired and envied above all others. Colonial Editor to *The Thunderbolt*, War Correspondent, financial expert, political leader-writer, and diplomatic go-between when Cabinet Ministers and Empire-builders would arrive at understandings, the serfdom of sex, the trammels of the petticoat, may have been said to weigh as lightly upon this thrice-fortunate spinster as though it were no drawback to be a daughter of Eve.

Oh! prayed Lady Hannah, for the chance of proving that another woman can equal this brilliant feminine Phœnix! Meanwhile her bright eyes and quick sense

of humour took note of the toilettes of some of her guests, wives and daughters of notable citizens who had not hurried South at the first mutterings of the storm. The purple satin worn by the Mayoress tickled her no less than the unfeigned horror of its wearer when offered from her hostess's châtelaine cigarette-case the choicest of Sobranies. Lady Hannah's laugh was the rattling of a mischievous boy's stick across his sister's piano-wires, and the metallic jangle preceded her assurance that everybody did it—all women in Society, at least, and you were thought odd if you didn't. After dinner, in the most exclusive houses, the most rigid of hostesses invariably allowed their women guests to smoke. They knew people worth having wouldn't come if they weren't allowed to.

"Never beneath my roof!" gasped the shocked and scandalised wearer of the purple splendours demanded of the wife of a Chief Magistrate. "Never at my table!" Of course, the agitated Mayoress went on to say, one had heard of the doings of the Smart Set. But one had hoped it wasn't true, or, at least, had been very much exaggerated by "writing-people." The Mayoress, though a mild woman, had her sting.

Lady Hannah, immensely tickled to find the morals of Bayswater rampant, as she afterwards expressed it, in the centre of South Africa, cackled as she helped herself to a second liqueur-glass of Nixey's excellent apricot-brandy. Small, thin, restless, she presented a parched appearance, with bright, round, beady eyes continually roving in search of information from beneath the straggling fringe of a crumpled Pompadour transformation, for those horrors had recently become fashionable, and the whole world of women were vying with one another in the

simulation of the criminal type of skull, with the Dolichocephalic Bulge.

"My dear lady, tobacco-ash is an excellent thing for killing moth in carpets, and Time,—when one is compelled to bestow it upon dull people; and a perfectly healthy, Nonconformist conscience must be a comfortable lodger. But as regards the sacred roof, and the defended table, it's a question how long both British institutions remain intact, with those big guns getting into position round us...." She waved her small hand, its once well-tended nails superbly ignored, its sun-cracks neglected, its load of South African diamonds coruscating magnificently in the light of Nixey's electric bulbs, and shrugged her thin, vivacious shoulders.

The entrance of the gentlemen relieved the situation. Lady Hannah jumped up and rushed at the Colonel. "As if she meant to eat the man," the Mayoress said afterwards, in the shadow of that threatened roof. But, impervious to the entreaty of the bright black eyes and the glittering hand that gesticulated with the urgent fan, he bowed, smiled, said a few pleasant words to his hostess, and walked "straight across"—as the Mayoress afterwards confided to the Mayor—to take a seat beside the large, placid, matronly figure palpitating in purple satin on an imported Maple sofa.

Pleased and flattered, she made room for him, while Lady Hannah became the gossip-centre of a knot of Mess uniforms....

"Both babies well?" It would have been unlike him not to have remembered that he had seen children at her house. "Hammy and Berta made great friends with me the other day.... Tell them I haven't

forgotten the promise to rummage up some odd native toys I picked up in Rhodesia—made of mud and feathers and bits of fur and queerly-shaped seed-pods—the most enchanting collection of birds and beasts that ever came out of the Ark. And the Makalaka have a legend about a big flood and a wise old man who built a house of reeds and skins that floated.... The North American Indians will tell you that it was a Big Medicine Canoe, and amongst the tribes of the Nilghiri Hills you find exactly the same story that the Chaldean scribes wrote on their tablets of clay. To-day in Eastern Kurdistan they'll point you out the peak on which the Ark grounded. The Armenians hold it was Ararat.... It's curious how the root-legend crops up everywhere...."

"But of course it must." Her good, calm eyes showed surprise, and her broad, white, matronly bosom was a little fluttered. "Doesn't the Bible teach us that the Deluge covered the whole earth? Even Hammy and Berta can tell you the whole story about Noah, and the raven—and the dove."

He smoothed his moustache with a palm that wiped the smile out.

"I must get them to tell it me one of these days." The twinkle in his eye was not to be repressed. "It would save such a deal of trouble to believe there was only one Noah, and only one Ark, don't you know?"

Her motherly bosom panted.

"*My* children shall *never* believe anything else!"

He was grave and sympathetic, though a muscle in his thin cheek twitched.

"I believe the toy Ark of our happy childish memories

is built, if not of gopher-wood, at least upon the lines laid down in Scripture. Has Hammy ever tried to get his to float? Mine invariably used to sink—straight to the bottom of the bath. Perhaps that continually-recurrent catastrophe had something to do with the sapping of my infant faith, or the establishment of a sinking-fund of doubt regarding the veracity of the Noachian reporter?"

She leaned towards him, her placid grey eyes dilating with pity for this man.

"You ought to come and sit under our minister Mr. Oddris, on Sundays. Pray do. He would convince you if anybody could. Such an eloquent, able, well-informed man, and so *truly pious* and *brave*!"

The laugh perforce escaped him. The convincing Apostle Oddris had called on him at official headquarters that day, to inquire whether, as the said Oddris's wife and children were going to the Women's Laager, his place as a husband and father was not by their side? Being informed that able-bodied male beings were not included in the list of the defenceless, he had become importunate in the matter of at least a bomb-proof shelter to be erected in his back-yard.

"I had rather sit under Hammy and hear about Noah, with Berta on the other knee."

Her heart went out wholly to him.... 'Out of the mouths of babes.' ... Wasn't *that* one of the texts with promise?...

"You love children?"

"Bless the little beggars!" he said heartily, "they're the jolliest company in the world."

She leaned towards him, palpitating between her shyness of the Commander of the Garrison and her womanly curiosity to know more about the man.

"Hammond—the Mayor has told me—I hope it is not indiscreet to mention it—that the first thing you did, on joining your regiment in India as a young subaltern, was to gather all the European children in cantonments together and march them through the place, playing 'The Girl I Left Behind Me' on the flute."

His brow grew black as thunder. The utterance came, terse and sharp.

"Ma'am, you have been gravely misinformed."

She jumped in terror.

"Oh!... Can it be?... Colonel, I do so beg you to forgive me! Let me assure you that neither the Mayor nor myself will ever again repeat the story."

"Ma'am, if you do ..."

"But I promise, never ..."

"Ma'am, if you never do, at least remember that the flute was an ocarina."

He left the good soul in an ecstasy of giggles, and crossed to Lady Hannah. She welcomed him with a glitter of eyes and teeth and discovered the reserve-chair that had been covered by her somewhat fatigued and wilted draperies of maize Liberty-silk, veiled with black Maltese lace.

"What it is to be a man of tact! You've made that purple creature perfectly happy. Don't say you're going to be less kind to another woman!"

She tapped with a reproachful fan the scarlet sleeve of his thin serge mess-jacket, her appraising eye busy with the badges worn on the dark green roll-collar and the miniature medals and star. If a clever woman could be the confidante of a Cabinet Minister, the post of right-hand to the Officer Commanding H.M. Forces in Gueldersdorp might be won. And then the world would know what Hannah Wrynche was born for. What was he saying?

"I never warn my victims beforehand."

"Sphinx! and I hoped to find you in the relenting mood!"

"If possible, ma'am, my granite bosom is more unyielding than on the last occasion when ..."

"Do go on!" said the fan.

"When you tried to tap it."

"You're all alike." She sighed. "That is, you give the keynote, and the others take up the tune. Even Bingo —Bingo, whom I firmly believed incapable of keeping a secret in which his dearest interests were concerned longer than ten minutes—Bingo has sprung a surprise on me. I shall end by falling in love with my own husband—such an indecent thing to do after seven years of married life!"

"Fortunately, the scene of your lapse from the crooked path of custom is distant from the West End of London nearly seven thousand miles. And you can rely upon me for secrecy."

"Ah, that!... If only you *did* leak a little information now and then." Her eyebrows went up to the dry fringe of her Pompadour transformation. "For the

sake of the thirsting public at home, to say nothing of my reputation as a Special Correspondent——"

"Drive over and call on General Brounckers at Head Laager, Geitfontein, on the Border, early to-morrow. Perhaps he would oblige you with matter for a paragraph, and forward the cable by private wire?"

Her birdlike eyes were bright on him.

"I would go if I thought I could get anything by going. Special information—with reference to a Plan of Attack. Oh! if you knew how I'm dying to be really under fire. To hear bullets zip-zip—isn't that the sound?—as they strike the ground or walls, and shells scream overhead!"

She clasped her sunburnt little jewelled hands in affected ecstasy. His eyes were stern, and the lines about his mouth deepened.

"Pray to-night that you may never hear those sounds you speak of!"

She struck an exaggerated attitude of horrified consternation.

"But no! Why am I here?"

"The Lord only knows. I've seen a hen peck at a lump of dynamite...."

"Ah, you never will take me seriously. But own in your secret heart you're as much afraid as I am that a Relieving Column will be sent down from—— Do tell me again where Grumer is with the Brigade? Uli, in Upper Rhodesia—thanks! Well, Grumer is quite a near friend of Bingo's, and an old flame of mine. But —to burst our lovely peacock bubble of Siege and let the whole situation down, *sans coup férir*, into muddy

commonplace—may Grumer never come!" She held up her coffee-cup, and drank the toast.

"Only for the women and children here," he said, and his thin nostrils moved to the measure of his quickened breathing, and a hot spark glowed in his keen eyes, "I'd have joined you in that. But under the present circumstances—I'd give five years of life—and I love life!—if our lookouts could pick up Grumer's Advance by the time grey dawn creeps up the east again."

She was incredulous.

"You, who said when you got orders to sail for South Africa—I have it on the authority of your Henley hostess—'I hope they'll give me a warm corner'!"

"I did say—just that. And I meant it."

His lips pursed in a soundless whistle. She went on:

"I've seen your preparations. The little old forts, put into such repair! and the armoured train, with a Maxim and a Hotchkiss, standing in the Railway siding, ready for business. And the earthworks! And the trek-waggon barricades, and the shelters panelled and roofed with corrugated iron. And your bomb-proof Headquarter Bureau, the iron skull that's to hold the working brain of the place ... with underground telegraphic and telephonic communications with all the forts and outposts. It's colossal! A masterpiece of cool, deadly, lethal forethought.... I thought I was incapable of the delicious shiver of expectation that the schoolboy enjoys, sitting in the stalls of dear Old Drury, waiting for the curtain to rise on the first act of the Autumn Drama. But you've given it to me—you and our

friends out there!" She waved the dry little glittering hand. "And you can talk in cold blood of marching out—and leaving the hive—and all the honey you might have had out of it. Sweet danger, perilous sport, the great Game of War—played as a man like you knows how to play it in this little sandy world-arena, with all the Powers and Dominions looking on. Preserve us! Oh, to be in your shoes this minute, if only for one week! But as I can't, it's you I hope to see riding the whirlwind and directing the storm. Not only for my own sake and the wretched paper's—though, mind you, I don't pretend to be anything but a mercenary, calculating worldly creature ..."

His eyes were very kind.

"Bingo knows better!"

Her laugh did not jangle this time.

"Lady Grasby, that vitriol-tongued water-nymph, as somebody clever once called her, said that if Bingo got killed by any chance, I should sit down and write a gossipy descriptive article, dealing with his military career, married life, and last moments, before I ordered my widow's-weepers. Horrible things! They've come in again, too! Talking of gossip, which I know you only pretend to despise, I found the son of a mutual acquaintance dying in the Hospital here. You know the Bishop of H ...?"

"His eldest son, Major Fraithorn, was my senior when I was Assistant Military Secretary at Gibraltar in '90. And the Bishop is quite a dear crony of my mother's."

"The Bishop," she said, "was always a person of excellent good taste—except when he cut off his second son, Julius, with two hundred a year for

turning Anglican, wearing a soft hat and Roman collars, and joining the staff at that clerical posture shop in Wendish Street West as Junior Curate."

"St. Margaret's. I know the church. Often go there when I'm at home."

"It's the Halfway House to Rome, according to the Bishop, who won't be content with running at every red rag of Ritualism that flutters in his own diocese, but keeps up the character of belligerent Broad Churchman by writing pamphlets and asking questions in the House of Lords with reference to affairs which are the business of other people. According to him, the red cassocks of the acolytes at St. Margaret's are cut out of the very skirts of the Woman of Babylon, and Father Turney and his curates—they're all Fathers there, and celibates by choice—are wolves in wool, and Mephistophelean plotters against the liberties of the Church. *Punch* published a cartoon of the Bishop shutting his eyes and charging at a windmill in a cope and chasuble. He is sending out a string of Protestant-Church-Integrity vans all over England, Scotland, and Wales this season, with acetylene-lantern pictures from Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs,' and a lecturer to point the morals and adorn the tales.... But if he could see his Mary's boy to-day, he'd put up with any amount of felt-basin hats and Roman collars, and incense and altar-genuflections wouldn't count for a tikkie. Oh! it's been a sore with me this many a year, but when I saw him to-day I said, 'Thank God I never had a child!' Because to have seen a boy or girl grow up and wither away as that beautiful young fellow is withering, is a thing that a mother must shudder to look back upon, even when she has found her lost one again in Heaven."

There was genuine feeling in her voice, usually loud, harsh, and tuneless. The bright black bird-eyes had a gleam as of tears. He turned to her with sympathetic interest.

"The Bishop will be obliged to you for finding this out. No hint of it had reached me. I am due at the Hospital in the morning, and we'll see if something can't be done for the boy."

She shook her head.

"It's a case of tuberculous lung-disease. He developed it in the Clergy House at St. Margaret's, and made light of it, supposing or pretending that the cough and wasting and difficulty of breathing meant bronchial trouble, the result of London fogs. These young people who don't value Life—glorious gift that it is! When he broke down utterly, at the end of a rampant campaign against Intemperance—he wouldn't be the Bishop's son if he didn't gall the withers of some hobby-horse or other—the doctors agreed there was nothing for him but South Africa."

He frowned, knowing how many sufferers had died of that deadly prescription. She went on:

"So he came out—alone—upon the advice of the well-intentioned wiseacres, knowing nothing of the country, to live on his two hundred a year until the end. And the end is coming—in Gueldersdorp Hospital—with giant strides." She blinked. "They've isolated him in a small detached ward. He has a kind friend in the Matron, and the chart-nurse is in love with him, unless I'm mistaken in the symptoms of the complaint. And he looks like St. Francis of Assisi, wedded to Death instead of Poverty—and coughs—fit to tear your heart. B'rrh!" she shuddered.

He repeated: "I'll see what can be done to-morrow. These cases are deceptive. There may be a gleam of hope."

"There is one doubt about the case which might infer a hope. I don't know what discoveries the London doctors made, but I wormed out of the chart-nurse, who plainly adores him, that the doctors in Gueldersdorp can't scare up a bacillus for the life of them."

His eyes lightened involuntary admiration, though his tone was jesting.

"You're thrown away on mere journalism. Criminal Investigation or Secret Intelligence would offer wider fields for your abilities."

"Wait!" she said, her beady eyes black diamonds. "I shall hope to prove one day that an English woman-journalist can be as useful as a Boer spy in the matter of useful information. Why, why am I not a man? You only don't trust me because I am a woman."

He had touched the rankling point in her ambition. He applied balm as he knew how.

"Your being a woman may have made all the difference—for Fraithorn. I shall set Taggart of the R.A.M.C. at him to-morrow; the Major's a bit of a crack at pulmonary cases. And he shall consult with Saxham, and——"

"Saxham." Her eyebrows were knitted. "I thought I knew the names of your Medical Staff men. But I can't recall a Saxham."

"This Saxham is Civilian—and rather a big pot—M.D., F.R.C.S., and lots more. We're lucky to have

got him."

She stiffened, scenting the paragraph.

"Can it be that you mean the Dr. Saxham of the Old Bailey Case?"

"The Jury acquitted, let me remind you."

"I believe so," she said; "but—he vanished afterwards. I think an innocent man would have stopped and faced the music, and not beaten a retreat with the Wedding March almost sounding in his ears. But—who knows? You have met his brother, Captain Saxham, of the —th Dragoons? It was he who stepped into the matrimonial breach, and married the young woman."

"The young woman?"

"His brother's fiancée—an heiress of the Dorsetshire Lee-Haileys, and rather a pretty-faced, silly person, with a penchant for French novels and sulphonal tabloids. I always shall believe that she liked the handsome Dragoon best, and took advantage of the Doctor's being—under the cloud of acquittal by a British Jury, to give him what the dear Irish call 'the back of her hand.'"

"The better luck for him!"

"It was mere instinct to let go when the man was dragging them both under water," she asserted.

"A Newfoundland bitch would have risen above it."

"You hit back quick and hard."

"I'm a tennis-player and a polo-player and a cricketer."

"What game is there that you don't play?"

"I could tell you of one or two.... But I must really go and speak to some of these ladies. One of them is an old friend."

"I know whom you mean. If I didn't, her glare of envy would have enlightened me. Did I tell you that *I* encountered an old friend—or, at least, a friend of old—at the Hospital yesterday?"

"You mean poor Fraithorn?"

"Not at all. I'm only a friend of his mother. I had only heard of the boy, not met him, until I tumbled over him here. But this face—severely framed in a starched white *guimpe* and floating black veil—belonged to my Past in several ways."

He showed interest.

"Your friend is a nun? At the Convent here? How did you come across her?"

"She called to see the Bishop's son—while I was with him. It seems that, judging by the poor dear boy's religious manuals and medals, and other High Church contraptions, the Matron had got him on the Hospital books as a Roman Catholic. And, consequently, when my friend looked in to visit a day-scholar who was to be operated on for adenoids —I've no idea what they are, but a thing with a name like that would naturally have to be cut out of one— she was told of this poor fellow, and has shed the light of her countenance on him occasionally since. Yesterday was one of the occasions, and Heavens! what a countenance it is even now! What a voice, what eyes, what a manner! I believed I gushed a bit.... She met me as though we'd only parted last

week. Nuns are wonderful creatures: *she's* unique, even as a nun."

He said: "I believe I had the honour of meeting the lady of whom you speak when I called at the Convent yesterday afternoon. A remarkable, noble, and most interesting personality."

Lady Hannah nodded. "All that. But you ought to have seen her at eighteen. We were at the High-School, Kensington, together, I a brat of ten in the Juniors' Division, she a Head Girl, cramming for Girton. She carried everything before her there, and emerged with a B.A. Degree Certificate in the days when it was thought hardly proper for a woman to go about with such a thing tacked to her skirts. And all the students idolised her, and the male lecturers worshipped the ground she trod. And when she was presented—what a sensation! They called her the 'Irish Rose,' and 'Deirdre,' for her skin of cream and her grey eyes and billowing clouds of black hair. Society raved of her for three seasons, until the fools went even madder about that little Hawting woman—a stiff starched martinet's frisky half—who bolted with the man my glorious Biddy had given her beautiful hand to. And the result! She—who might have married an Ambassador and queened it in Petersburg with the best of 'em—she's in a whitewashed Convent, superintending the education of Dutch and Afrikander schoolgirls in Greek, Latin, French, Algebra and Mathematics, calisthenics, needlework, the torture of the piano, and the twiddle of the globes. He has something to answer for, that old crony of yours!"

Lady Hannah stopped for breath, giving the listener his opportunity.

"My dear lady, you have told me a great deal without enlightening me in the least. Who is my 'crony,' and who was your friend?"

Lady Hannah opened her round beady eyes in astonishment.

"Haven't I told you? She is—or was—Lady Bridget-Mary Bawne, sister of that high-falutin' little donkey the present Earl of Castleclare, who came into the title and married at eighteen. His wife has means, I understand. The old Dowager Duchess of Strome, a bosom friend of my mother's, was Biddy's aunt, and Cardinal Voisey, handsome being! is an uncle on the distaff side. All the Catholic world and his wife were at her taking of the veil of profession nineteen years ago. The Pope's Nuncio, the Cardinal-Bishop of Mozella, officiated, and the Comtesse de Lutetia was there with the Duc d'O.... They didn't cut off her beautiful black hair, though we outsiders were on tiptoe to see the thing done. I don't think I ever cried so much in my life. Had hysterics—real—when I got home, and mother scolded fearfully. The Duke of C —— came with his equerry, and after the cloister-gates had shut—crash—on beautiful Biddy in her bridal laces, and white satin, and ropes of pearls, and we were all waiting, breathless, for her to come back in the habit, I heard the Duke say, not that the dear old thing ever meant to be profane: 'By God! General, I'm damned if Captain Mildare hasn't made Heaven an uncommonly handsome present!' And the man he said that to was the husband of the very woman Dicky had run away with not quite twelve months before. Mercy on us!"

"Good Heavens!" the listener had cried and started to his feet, the dark blood rushing to his forehead. The

ivory-pale, mutely-suffering face against the background of whitewashed wall flashed back upon his memory, in a circle of dazzling light. He saw her again, leaning against the door of the chapel as he told her the cruel news. He heard her saying:

"Are you at liberty to tell me the date of Captain Mildare's death? For I know—one who was also his friend—and would take an interest in the particulars."

The particulars! And he had bludgeoned the woman with them—stabbed her to the heart, poor soul, unknowing....

He was blameless, but he could not forgive himself.... He drove his teeth down savagely into his lower lip, and muttered an excuse, and went away abruptly, leaving Lady Hannah staring. He took leave soon after, and went to his own quarters with the D.A.A.G., while her ladyship, with infinite relief, getting rid of her feminine guests, repaired with Captain Bingham Wrynche, familiarly known to a wide circle of friends as "Bingo," and several chosen spirits to the billiard-room, for snooker-pool, and whisky-and-soda.

"The grey wolf is on the prowl to-night," said one of the chosen spirits, as he chalked Lady Hannah's cue with fastidious care. He winked across the table at Bingo, sunset-red with dinner, champagne, and stroke-play.

"S'st!" sibilated the Captain warningly, winking in the direction of his wife. Lady Hannah, her little thumb cocked in the air, her round, birdlike eyes scientifically calculating angles, paused before making a rapid stroke, to say:

"Don't be cheaply mysterious, my dear man. Of course, the Colonel visits the defences and outposts and so forth regularly after dark. It's part of the routine, surely?"

"Of course. But you don't suppose he goes alone, do you, old lady?" queried Captain Bingo.

"I suppose he takes his A.D.C.?"

"Not to mention a detachment of the B.S.A. Also a squad of the Town Guard in red neckties, solar topees and bandoliers; with the Rifles' Band, and D Squadron of the Baraland Irregular Horse. Isn't that the routine, Beauvayse? You're more up in these things than me, and I fancy there was a change in the order for the evenin'."

"Rather!" assented Beauvayse, continuing, to the rapture of winking Bingo. "On reaching the earthworks where our obsoletes are mounted, the townies will now fire a salute of blank, without falling down; and the Band have instructions to play 'There's Death in the Old Guns Yet.' Those were the only material changes, except that sentries will for the future wear fly- and fever-belts outside instead of in."

"So that he can see at a glance," Lady Hannah said approvingly, "that all precautions are being taken. Very sensible, I call it."

"Ha, ha, haw!" Bingo's joyous explosion revealed to the outraged woman the fact that she had been "had." "Haw, haw! What a beggar you are to rot, Beauvayse! and that makes five to us."

Lady Hannah, vibrating with womanly indignation, had made her long-delayed stroke, missed the

pyramid ball, and sent Pink spinning into the pocket. She threw aside her cue and rubbed her fingers angrily. She hated losing, and they were playing for shilling lives and half-a-crown on the game.

"You—schoolboys!" She threw them a glance of disdain, as Beauvayse, his seraphic face agrin, screwed in his supererogatory eyeglass, and lounged over the table. "You artless babes! Did you suppose I should be likely to swallow such a *feuille de chou* without even oil and vinegar? For pity's sake, leave off winking, Bingo! It's a habit that dates back to the era when women wore ringlets and white book-muslin, and men sported shaggy white beaver hats and pegtop trousers, and all the world read the novels of Lever and Dickens."

"Have Lever and Boz gone out?" asked Beauvayse, pocketing his pyramid ball. "I play at Blue." He hit Blue scientifically off the cushion and went on. "Read 'em myself over and over again, and find 'em give points in the way of amusement to the piffle Mudie sends out. Not that I pretend to be a judge of literature. Only know when I'm not bored, you know. You to play, Lord Henry."

But the senior officer of the Staff, Lady Hannah's partner, had vanished. Somebody passing the open window of the billiard-room had whistled a bar or so of a particularly pleasant little tune. Another man took Lord Henry's place, and the game went on, but never finished, for one by one, after the same quiet, unobtrusive fashion, the male players melted away.... Left alone, Lady Hannah, feeling uncommonly like the idle boy in the nursery-story who asked the beasts and birds and insects to play with him, betook herself to bed.

The arrogance of men! she thought as she hung her transformation Pompadour coiffure on the looking-glass. How cool, how unshaken in their conviction of superiority, in spite of all deference, courtesy, pretence of consideration for Queen Dolt.... But she would show them all one of these days, what could be achieved by a unit of the despised majority....

"I should like to see him at night-work," she said afterwards, when, very late, her Bingo appeared in the shadow of the conjugal mosquito-curtains.

"You wouldn't," was her martial lord's reply.

"Wouldn't what?" asked Lady Hannah, sitting up in tropical sleeping attire.

Bingo, applying her cold cream to a sun-cracked nose, replied to her reflection in the looking-glass:

"You wouldn't see him. Like the flea in the American story, when you've got your finger on him is the time he isn't there."

"But he is there for you?"

Bingo shook his head, holding the candle near the glass and regarding his leading feature with interest.

"Not if he don't choose to be. By the living Tinker! if I go on brownin' and chippin' at this rate, I shall do for the Etruscan Antiquity Room at the British Museum. Piff, what a smell of burning! It's the hair-thing hangin' on the lookin'-glass."

Male Society began to practise the shedding of its final g's, you will remember, about the time that Female Society took to wearing transformation coiffures. Lady Hannah, her active little figure rustling in the thinnest of silk drapery, jumped

nimbly out of bed, and rushed to save her property.

"Idiot!" she shrieked.

"Frightfully sorry! But you're lumps prettier without," said Bingo.

"Don't pile insult on injury."

"Couldn't flatter for nuts!"

"I'll forgive you if you'll tell me how *he* manages—to attain invisibility?"

Bingo struck an attitude and began to declaim:

"As the sable shades of Night were broodin' over the beleaguered town of Gueldersdorp, the manly form of a mysterious bearded stranger in grey reach-me-downs and a felt slouch might have been observed directin' its steps from one to the other of the various outlyin' pickets posted on the veld ..."

"Once for all, I decline to believe such theatrical rubbish! A beard, indeed! Why not a paper nose and a Pierrot's cap?"

"Why not?" acquiesced placid Bingo, getting into bed. But the eye concealed by the pillow winked; for he had told her the absolute truth; and woman-like, that was just what she wouldn't swallow, as he said to Beauvayse next morning.

XXII

"The Town Guard," according to W. Keyse, Esquire, who kept a Betts' Journal, one shilling net, including Rail and Ocean Accident Insurance, was "a kind of amachoor copper, swore in to look after the dorp, stand guard, and do sentry-go, and tumble to arms, just as the town dogs leave off barkin', an' the old gal in the room next yours is startin' to snore like a Kaffir sow."

Later on, even more was asked of the townie, and he rose to the demand.

The smasher hat was not unbecoming to the manly brow it shaded, when W. Keyse put it on and anxiously consulted the small greenish swing looking-glass that graced the chest of drawers, the most commanding article of furniture in his room at Filliter's Boarding-House. It was Mrs. Filliter who snored in the room on the other side of the thin partition. Like the immortal Mrs. Todgers, she was harassed by the demands of her resident gentlemen in connection with gravy; but, unlike Mrs. Todgers, she never supplied even browned and heated water as an equivalent. And the mutton was wonderfully lean, and the fowls, but for difference in size, might have been ostriches, they were so wiry of muscle, especially as regarded the legs. A time was to come when Mrs. Filliter was to cook shrapnel-killed mule and exhausted cavalry charger for her gentlemen, and when they were to bear up better than most sufferers from this tough and lasting form of diet, because of not having previously been pampered, as Mrs. Filliter expressed it, with delicacies and kickshaws.

The bandolier was heavy upon the thin shoulders and hollow chest of a pale young Cockney, who had

drifted down from Southampton in the steerage, and roared and rattled up from Cape Town by the three foot six inch gauge railway, eight hundred and seventy miles, to Gueldersdorp, that he might find his crown of manhood waiting there. The second-hand Sam Browne belt was distinctly good; the yellow puttees, worn with his own brown lace-up boots, took trouble to adjust. And it was barely possible, even by standing the small swing looking-glass on the floor, and tilting it excessively, to see how one's legs looked. W. Keyse suffered from the conviction that these limbs were over-thin. Behind the counter of a fried-fish shop in High Street, Camden Town, serving slabs of browned hake, and skate, and penn'orths of fried eels and chips to the hungry customers who surge in tempestuously to be fed on their homeward way from the Oxford or the Camden Hall of Varieties, or the theatre at the junction of Gower Street and the Hampstead Road—one develops acuteness of observation, one gains experience, there being always the bloke who cuts and runs without paying, or eats and shows reversed trouser-pockets in default of settlement, to deal with.... But one does not develop muscle, the thing above all that W. Keyse most longed to possess. When he went into the printing-business and bent all day over the formes of type in the composing-room, hand-setting up the columns of the North London *Half-penny Herald*, to the tune of three-and-eightpence a day, the hollow chest grew hollower, and he developed a "corf." The physician in charge of the out-patients' department at University College Hospital said there was lung-trouble, and a man at the printing-office who had never been there, said South Africa was the cure for that. And W. Keyse had thirty pounds in the Post-Office Savings Bank, earned

by the sweat of a brow which was his best feature, and the steamships were advertising ten-pound third-class single fares to Cape Town. One of the Societies for the Aid of Emigrants would have helped him, but while W. Keyse 'ad a bit of 'is own, no Blooming Paupery, said he, for him! His sole living relative, an aunt who inhabited one of a row of ginger-brick Virginia-creeper-clad almshouses "over aginst 'Ighgyte Cimitery," sniffled a little when he called to say good-bye, bringing in a parting present of a half-pound of Liphook's Luscious Tea and a screw of snuff.

"I shan't never see you no more, William."

"Ow yes, you will, mother! Don't be such a silly!" William's step cousin 'Melia, in service as general in Adelaide Road, Chalk Farm end, had said; and she had looked coldly upon William immediately afterwards, bestowing an amorous ogle upon Lobster, who sat well forward upon a backless Windsor chair, sucking the silver top of his swagger cane,—Lobster, who was six foot high and in the Grenadier Guards, and had supplanted William in 'Melia's affections, for they 'ad used to walk out regularly on Sundays and holidays before Lobster came along.... How William loved Lobster now! Why, but for him he might have been married to 'Melia to-day;—doomed to tread in the ways of commonplace, ordinary married life, fated to live and die without once having peeped into Paradise, without ever having looked upon the 'only woman in the world!' Greta, of the glorious golden pigtail, the entrancing figure and the bewitching, twinkling, teasing eyes of blue!

Suppose—only suppose—the silent threatening Thing across the border, jewelled with the glowing Argus-

eyes of many camp-fires, conjecturable in dark masses flecked with the white of waggon-tilts, and sometimes giving out the dull gleam of iron or the sparkle of steel, were to choose this, W. Keyse's first night on guard, for an attack! Even to the inexperience of W. K. the sand-bagged earthworks built about Gueldersdorp, the barricades of trek-waggons and railway-trucks blocking up the roads debouching on the veld, the extending lines of trenches, the watchdog forts, the sentinelled pickets, the noiseless, continually moving patrols, all the various parts of the marvellous machinery of defence, controlled by one master-hand upon the levers, would count for nothing against that overwhelming onrush of armed thousands, that flood of men dammed up above the town, and waiting the signal to roll down and overwhelm her, and—— Cripps! what a chance to make a glorious, heroic splash in Greta's sight! Die, perhaps, in saving her from them Dutchies. To be sure, she, divine creature, was a Dutchy too. But no matter—a time would come ...

Confident in the coming of that time, W. Keyse took the brown rifle tenderly from the corner, and replaced the meagre little looking-glass upon the yellow chest of drawers. In the act of bestowing a final glance of scrutiny upon his upper lip, whose manly crop had unaccountably delayed, he caught sight of a cheap paper-covered book lying beside the tin candlestick whose tallow dip had aided perusal of the volume o' nights. The red surged up in his thin cheeks as he picked up the thing. There were horrible woodcuts in it, coloured with liberal splashes of red and blue and yellow, and the print contained matter more lurid still. Vice mopped and mowed and slavered, obscene and hideous, within

those gaudy covers.

He looked round the mean, poor, ugly room, the volume in his hand; a photograph of the dubious sort leered from the wall beside the bed....

"If they rushed us to-night, an' I got shot in the scrap, an' they brought me back 'ere, dyin', and She came ... an' saw *that* ...!" His ears were scarlet as he dashed at the leering photograph and tore it down. Oh, W. Keyse, it is pitiful to think you had to blush, but good to know you had not forgotten how to. There was a little rusty fireplace in the room. W. Keyse burned something in it that left nothing but a feathery pile of ashes, and a little shameful heap of mud in the corner of a boy's memory, before he hurried to the Town Guardhouse, where other bandoliers were mustering, and fell in. As though the Powers deigned to reward an act of virtue on the very night of its performance, he was posted by his picket in the shadow of the high corrugated iron fence of the tree-bordered tennis-ground behind the Convent, as "Lights Out" sounded from the camp of the Irregulars, beyond the Railway-sheds and storehouses.

It was glorious to be there, taking care of Her, though it would have been nicer if one had been allowed to smoke. The moon of William's passion-inspired verse was not shining o'er South Africa's plain upon this the very night for her. It was dark and close and stiflingly hot. A dust-wind had blown that day, and the suspended particles thickened the atmosphere, to the oppression of the lungs and the hiding of the stars. He knew his picket posted a quarter of a mile away on the other side of the Cemetery; his fellow-sentry was on the opposite flank of the Convent. He was a stout, middle-aged

tradesman, with a large wife and a corresponding family, and it wrung the heart of W. Keyse to think that a tricky fate might have placed that insensible man on the side where Her window was! Through the boughs of the peach and orange trees, heavily burdened with unripe fruit, you could get an occasional glimpse of whitewashed brick walls, darkened by the outline of shuttered oblongs here and there. And Imagination could blow her cloud of fragrant vapour, though tobacco were denied you.

"They're all Her windows while she's there behind them walls," was the reflection in which W. Keyse found comfort.

She was not there. She was at that moment being kissed on the stoep of the Du Taine homestead near Johannesburg, by a young officer of Staats Artillery, to whom she had agreed to be clandestinely engaged, though Papa Du Taine had other views.

W. Keyse was spared this tragic knowledge. But if the moon, shining beautifully over the Du Taine gardens and orange-groves, had chosen to tell tales!

It was still—still and quiet; a blue radiance of electric light burned here and there; at the Staff Office on the Market Square, and at other centres of purposeful activity. Aromatic-beer cellars and whisky-saloons gave out a yellow glare of gas-jets; the red lamp of an apothecary showed a wakeful eye. Gueldersdorp sprawled in the outline of a sleeping turtle on her squat hillock of gravelly earth and sand. In smoke-coloured folds, closely matching the lowering dim canopy of vapour brooding overhead, the prairie spread about her, deepening to a basined valley in the middle distances, sweeping to a rise beyond, so that the edges of the basin looked down upon the

town. High on the hill-ranges in the South more chains of red sparks burned ... he knew them for the watch-fires of the Boer outposts, and the raised edges of the basin East and West were set thickly with similar twinkling jewels where the laagers were; while smaller groups shone nearer, marking the situation of isolated vedettes. The sickly taint upon the faint breeze told of massed and clustered humanity. 'Strewth, how they stunk, the brutes! He hoped there was enough of 'em, lying doggo up there, waiting the word to roll down and swallow the blooming dorp! His palate grew dry, as the sweat broke out upon his temples and trickled down the back of his neck, and the palms of his hands were moist and clammy. Also, under the buckle of the Sam Browne belt was a sinking, all-gone sensation excessively unpleasant to feel. Perhaps its wearer had a touch of fever! Then the stout tradesman on the other side of the Convent sneezed suddenly, and W. Keyse, with every nerve in his body jarring from the shock, knew that he was simply suffering from funk.

Staggering from the shock of the horrible self-revelation, he gritted his teeth. There was a Billy Keyse who was a blooming coward inside the other who was not. He told the sickening, white-gilled little skulker what he thought of him. He only wished—that is, one of him only wished—that a gang of the Dutchies would come along now!

He drew a lurid picture for the benefit of the trembler, and when the young soldier had fired into the brown of them and seen the whites of their eyes, and fallen, pierced by a hundred wounds, in the successful defence of the Convent, he was carried in, and laid on a sofa, and nobody could recognise him, along of all the blood, until She came, with her white

little feet peeping from the hem of a snowy nightgown, and her unbraided pigtail swamping the white with gold, and knew that it was her lover, and knelt by the hero's side. Soft music from the Orchestra, please! as with his final breath W. Keyse implores a last, first kiss. Even as William No. 1 thrilled to the rapture of that imagined osculation, Billy No. 2 experienced a ghastly fright.

For out of the enfolding velvety darkness ahead of him, and looking towards those firefly sparks shining on the heights, came the sound of stealthy measured footsteps and muffled voices talking Dutch. The enemy had made a sortie. The defences had been rushed, the town surrounded! Yet there were only two of them—a big, slouching villain and a short thin one, who wore a giant hat. The chirping sound of a kiss damped the fierce martial ardour of William, and greatly reassured Billy. It was only a townsman taking a night walk with his girl!

Crushed and discouraged, W. Keyse relaxed his grip upon the trusty rifle, and slunk back into the shadow, as the tall and the short figures halted at the angle of the fence.

"'Ain't it a 'eavenly night?" came from the short figure, who leaned against the tall one affectionately. "An' me got to go in. A crooil shyme, I call it. 'Ain't it, deer? Leggo me wyste, there's a love. You've no notion 'ow I shall cop it for bein' lyte."

He sportively declined to release her. There was the sound of a soft slap, followed by the smack of a kiss. She was very angry.

"Leggo, I tell you! Where's your manners, 'orlin' me abart! If that's the way you be'ayve with your Dutch

ones ...!"

He spat and asseverated:

"Neen! I no other girls but you heb got."

It was the Slabberts with Emigration Jane.

"Ho! So you *can* talk English a bit—give you a charnce?"

"Ja, a little now and then when it is useful. But when we are to be married, you shall only to me talk in my own moder Taal."

"Shan't I myke a gay old 'ash of it!" Recklessly she crushed the large hat against the unwieldy shoulder. "There, good-night agyne, deer! Sister Tobias—that's what they call the one that 'ousekeeps and manages the kitchen—Sister Tobias 'll be sittin' up for me, thinkin' I've got meself lost or bin run away with." She gurgled enjoyingly.

"Tell me again, before you shall go, about the Engelsch Commandant who came to visit at the Convent to-day?"

"Lor! 'Aven't I told you a'ready? 'E stopped 'arf an 'our or more ... an' She—that's the Reverend Mother, as they call her—She took 'im over the 'ouse, an' after 'e'd gone through the 'ouse, an' Sister Tobias—ain't that a rummy name for a nun?—Sister Tobias, she showed 'im to the gyte, an' 'e says to 'er as wot 'e's goin' to 'ave the flagstaff rigged up in the gardin fust thing to-morrow mornin', an' 'e'll undertake that the workin'-party detached for the purpose will know 'ow to be'ayve theirselves respectful. An' then 'e touches 'is 'at an' gets on 'is 'orse an' ..."

"Listen to me." The Slabbertian command of that

barbaric language of the Englanders evoked her surprise, but the painful squeeze he gave her arm compelled attention. "Next time the English Commandant to the house shall come, you to listen at the keyhole is."

"Wot for?"

"For what have you before at keyholes listened, little fool?"

"To find out when they was goin' to sack me, so's to git me own notice in fust—see? Then you can say to the lydy at the Registry Office—and don't they give theirselves hairs!—as wot you're leaving because the place don't suit. Twiggy?"

"You for yourself did listen, then. Goed. Now it is for me you listen will, if you a true Boer's vrouw wish to become by-and-by."

She rose to the immemorial allure that is never out of season in angling for her simple kind.

"That word you said means—wife, don't it, deer?" Her voice trembled; the joyous, longed-for haven of marriage—was it possible that it might be in sight?

"It shall mean wife, if you obey me—ja!—otherwise it will be that I shall marry the daughter of a good countryman of mine, who many sheep has, and much land, and plenty of money to give his daughter when she a husband gets!"

Her underlip dropped pitifully, and the tears welled up. It was too dark to see her crying, but he heard her sob, and grinned, himself unseen.

"I'll do anything for you, deer! Only don't tyke an' 'ave the other One. She may be a Dutchy, but she

won't never care for you like wot I do. Don't you know it, Walt?"

"I shall it know when I hear what you have found out," proclaimed the Slabberts grimly.

There was a boiling W. Keyse in the deep shadow of the tall corrugated-iron fence, who restrained with difficulty a snort of indignation.

"On'y tell me, deer. I'll find out anythink you want me to." Before her spread a lovely vista of floors—her own floors—to scrub, and a kitchen range—hers, too—which should cook dinners nice enough to make any husband adore you.

"You shall for me find out what that Commandant of the rooineks is up to under his Flag of the Red Cross."

"He didn't say nothink about no Red Cross, darlin'."

"Stilte! They will the Red Cross Flag hoist, I tell you, and it will cover more than a parcel of nuns and schoolgirls. That Commandant is so verdoemte slim! Tell me, do you cartridges well know when you shall see them? Little brown rolls with at one end a copper cap—and at the other a bullet. And gunpowder—you have that seen also?"

She quavered.

"Yes; but you don't want me to touch the narsty, dreadful stuff, do you, Walty deer?"

He scoffed.

"Afraid of gunpowder, Meisje, that like a whey-blooded Engelschwoman is. A true Boer's daughter would know how to load a gun, look you, and shoot

a man—many men—if for the help of the Republic it should be! But you will learn. Watch out, I tell you, for stores that Commandant will be sending into the Convent. Square boxes and long boxes, and cases—some of them heavy as if lined with iron; painted black with white letters, and others stone-colour with black letters, and yet others grey with red letters; the letters remember—'A.O.S.'"

"But wot'll be in the boxes, deer?"

His English, conned from recently published Imperial Army Service manuals, grew severely technical:

"If you could their big screws unscrew, and their big locks unlock, you would see, but you will not be able. What in them? Cakes! Black, square cakes, with in them holes; and grey, square cakes, and red cakes, light and crumbly, that dog-biscuits resemble; and long brown sticks, like peppermint-candy, in bundles tied together with string and paper. Boxes of stuff like the hair of horse, and packets of evil little electric detonators in tubes of copper. Alamachtig! who knows what he has not got—that Engelsch Commandant—both in the dorp and hidden in those thrice-accursed mines that he has laid on the veld about her. Prismatic powder and gun-cotton, dynamite and cordite enough to blow a dozen commandos of honest Booren into dust—a small, fine dust of bones and flesh that shall afterwards fall mingled with rain of blood. For I tell you that man has the wickedness of the duyvel in him, and the cunning of an old baboon!"

She babbled:

"'Ow pretty you talk English when you want to, Walty deer! 'Aven't you bin gittin' at me all along,

makin' out ..."

He swore at her savagely, and she held her tongue, worshipping this new development of masterful brutality in a man whom she had regarded as a "big softy."

He went on:

"Now you shall know what to look for, and when the verdoemte explosives come, you will know them by the boxes and the letters 'A.O.S.'—and you will tell me—and the guns of our Staats Artillery will not shoot that way, for the sake of the little woman who is going to be a true Boer's vrouw by-and-by."

She threw her arms about his rascally neck, and laid her head upon his hulking shoulder, regardless of the hat she wrecked, and cried in ecstasy:

"I'll do it, deer! I'll do it, Walty! But why should there be any shootin', lovey? At 'Ome I never could abear to see them theayter plays what 'ad guns an' firin' in 'em; it made me 'art beat so crooil bad."

He grinned over the big hat into the darkness.

"All right! I will tell the men with the guns that you do not like to hear them, and they will not perhaps shoot at all. But you will look out for the boxes with the dynamite, and send me the message when it comes?"

"Course I will, deer! But 'ow am I to send the message?"

The shadowy right arm of Slabberts swept out, taking in the black and void and formless veld with a large free gesture.

"Out to there. Stand in this place when it becomes dark, looking east. Straight in front of us is east. The game is great fun, and very easy. Strike a match, and count to ten before you blow it out, and you shall not have done that three times before you shall see him answer."

"But oo's 'im?"

"He is my friend—out there upon the veld."

"Lor! but where'll you be? Didn't you say as I'd be talkin' to you? I don't 'arf fancy wot you calls the gyme, not if I 'ave to play it with a strynge bloke!"

The answer came, accompanied by a scraping, familiar sound.

The Slabberts was striking a match of the fizzling, spluttering, Swedish-made non-safety kind, known to W. Keyse and his circle by the familiar abbreviation of "stinkers."

"Voor den donder! Have I not told you I shall be there with him—after to-night!"

Her womanly tenderness quickened at the hint of coming separation. She clung fondly to his arm, and the match went out, extinguished by a maiden's sigh. He shook her roughly off, and struck another.

"I shall go away—ja—and here is the only way for you to reach me!"

As the fresh match glimmered blue, he held it at arm's length in front of him, counting silently up to ten, then blew it out, and set his heavy boot upon the faintly-glowing spark, and did the thing again.

Endeavouring not to breathe so as to be heard, W.

Keyse flattened himself against the corrugated fence, and waited, looking ahead into the thick velvet darkness, sensing the faint human taint upon the tell-tale breeze, and counting with the Slabberts; and then, out in the blackness that concealed so much that was sinister, sprang into sudden life an answering bluish glimmer, and lasted for ten beats of the pulse, and went out as suddenly as though a human breath had blown upon it.

"Is that your pal?" she whispered.

"That is my pal now." He struck another match, and flared it, and screened it with his big hand, and showed the light again, and repeated the manœuvre three times. "That is my pal now—and I have said to him 'No news to-night'; but to-morrow night and the night after, and so on for many nights to come, I shall be out there where he is, and after you have called me and I have answered, just as he has done, you will tell me what there is to tell. Can you spell your language?"

"Pretty middlin', Walty deer, though not as I could wish, owin' to me 'avin' to leave Board School in the Fif' Stannard when father sold up the 'ome in drink after mother went orf wiv the young man lodger. Some'ow, try all I could, I never ..."

"Hou jou smoel! With our Boer people, when men speak, the women listen; but you English ones chatter and chatter! Remember that this match-talk goes thus: For the letter A one flare, and hide the light as you saw me do just now. For B, two flares, and hide the light; for C, three, and hide; for D, four, and hide; and so on ... It is slow, of course, and matches will blow out when you do not want them to, and a cycle-lamp or a candle-lantern would be

easier to deal with, but for the verdoemte patrols. Do you understand? Say now what I say, after me. For the letter A one flare and hide. For B ..."

He put her through the alphabet from end to end; she laboured faithfully, and pleased her taskmaster. He grunted approvingly.

"Zeer goed! See that you do not forget. And remember, you are to listen and watch, and tell me what you hear and see. If you are obedient, I will marry you—by-and-by."

He gave her a clumsy hug in earnest of endearments to come.

"But if you do not please me"—the grip of his heavy hand bruised her shoulder through the thin, flowery "blowse"—"I will punish you—yes, by the Lord! I will marry a fine Boer maiden who is the daughter of a landrost, and who has got much money and plenty of sheep. And you can give yourself to any dirty verdoemte schelm of an Engelschman you please, for I will have none of you! To-morrow you shall have a paper showing you how to tell me very many things in match-talk, and earn much money to buy presents for my nice little Boer vrouw. Alamachtig! what is this?"

"This" was the hard, cold, polished business-end of a condemned Martini poked violently out of the blackness into the Slabbertian thorax.

"Not in such a 'urry by 'arf, you perishin' Dopper," spluttered the ghastly little man in bandoliers behind the weapon. "Put up them dirty big 'ands o' yours, or, by Cripps! I'll let 'er off, you sneakin', match-talkin' spy!"

The arms of Slabberts soared as the tongue of Slabberts wagged in explanation.

"This is assault and battery, Meister, upon a peaceful burgher. You shall answer to your officer for it, I tell you slap. Voor den donder! Is not a young man to light his pipe as he talks to a young woman without being called spy by a verdoemte sentry! Tell him, Jannje, that is all I did do!"

W. Keyse felt a little awkward, and the rifle was uncommonly heavy. The Slabberts felt it tremble, and thought about taking his hands down and reaching for that Colts six-shooter he kept in his hip-pocket. But though the finger wobbled, it was at the trigger, and Walt was not fond of risks.

"Tell him, Jannje!" he spluttered once more.

She had not needed a second bidding.

As the domestic hen in defence of her chicken will give battle to the wilde-kat, so Emigration Jane, with ruffled plumage, blazing, defiant eyes, and shrill objurgations, couched in the vernacular most familiar to their object, hurled herself upon the enemy.

"You narsty little brute, you! To up and try an' murder my young man. With your jor about spies! Sauce! I'd perish you, I would, if I was 'im! Off the fyce o' the earth, an' charnce bein' 'ung for it! Take away that gun, you silly little imitation sojer—d' you 'eer?"

The weapon was extremely weighty. W. Keyse's arms ached frightfully. Perspiration trickled into his eyes from under the tilted smasher. He felt damp and small, and desperately at a loss. And—as though in

malice—the moon looked out from behind a curtain of thick, dim vapour, as he said with a lordly air:

"You be off, young woman, and don't interfere!"

Gawd! she knew him in spite of the smasher hat. Her rage burst the flood-gates. She screeched:

"You!... It's you. 'Oo I done a good turn to—an' this is 'ow I gits it back?" She gasped. "Because you're arter one young woman wot wouldn't be seen dead in the syme street wi' you ..."

Pierced with the awful thought that the adored one might be listening, W. Keyse lifted up his voice.

"Sentry.... 'Ere!... Mister!" he cried despairingly, "You on the other side, can't you hear?"

In vain the call. The stout fellow-townsman of W. Keyse, comfortably propped in an angle of the opposite fence, the bulk of the Convent and the width of its garden and tennis-ground being between them, continued to sleep and snore peacefully and undisturbed.

Emigration Jane continued:

"Because that sly cat wiv the yeller 'air-plait won't 'ear o' you, you try to git a pore servant-gal's fancy bloke pinched! Yah, greedy! Boo! You plate-faced, erring-backed, s'rimp-eyed little silly, with your love-letters an' messages! Wait till I give 'er another o' your screevin'—that's all!"

"Patrol!" cried W. Keyse in a despairing whimper.

She advanced upon him closer and closer, lashing herself as she came, to frenzy. How often had W. Keyse seen it outside the big gaudy pubs in the

Tottenham Court Road, and the Britannia, Camden Town! Perhaps the recollection staring, newly awakened, in the pale, moonlit eyes of the little perspiring Town Guardsman stung her to equal memory, and provoked the act. Who can tell? We may only know that she plucked the weapon of lower-class London from her hat, and jabbed at the pale face viciously, and heard the victim say "Owch!" as he winced, and knew herself, as her Slabberts gripped the rifle-barrel, and wrested it with iron strength from the failing hands of W. Keyse, the equal of those dauntless Boer women who killed men when it was necessary. But, oh! the 'orrible, 'ideous feeling of 'aving stuck something into live flesh! Sick and giddy, the heroine shut her eyes, seeing behind their lids wondrous phantasmagoria of coloured pyrotechny, rivalling the most marvellous triumphs of the magician Brock....

W. Keyse's beheld, at the moment when his weapon was wrenched from him, two long grey arms come out of the darkness and coil about the largely-looming form of Slabberts. Enveloped in the neutral-tinted tentacles of this mysterious embrace, the big Boer struggled impotently, and a quick, imperative voice said, between the thick pants of striving men:

"Get the gun from him, will you, and call up your picket. Don't fire; blow your whistle instead!"

"*Pip-ip-ip-'r'r! Pip-ip-r'r!*"

The long, shrill call brought armed men hurrying out of the darkness on the other side of the Cemetery, and considerably quickened the arrival of the visiting

patrol.

"Communicating with persons outside the defences by flashlight signals. We can't shoot him for it just yet, but we *can* gaol him on suspicion," said the Commander of the picket. And Slabberts, with a stalwart escort of B.S.A. troopers, reluctantly moved off in the direction of the guard-house.

"Who was the fellow who helped you, do you know?" asked the officer who had ridden up with the patrol. "Threw him and sat on him until the picket came up, you say," he commented, on hearing W. Keyse's version of the story. "A tall man in civilian clothes, with a dark wideawake and short pointed beard! H'm!"

"Coming from the veld, apparently, and not from town," said the picket Commander. "Must have known the countersign, or the sentries out there would have stopped him. I—see!"

He looked at the patrol-officer, who coughed again. The moonlight was quite bright enough for the exchange of a wink. Then:

"Hold on, man, you're bleeding," said W. Keyse's Sergeant, an old Naval Brigade man. "How did ye get that 'ere nasty prod under the eye?"

W. Keyse put up his hand, and gingerly felt the place that hurt. His fingers were red when they came away.

"The young woman wot was with the Dutchman, she jabbed me with a 'at-pin, to git me to let 'im go."

"There's a blindin' vixen for you!" commented the Sergeant. "Two inch higher, and she'd have doused

your light out. Where did she come from, d'ye know?"

"Have you any idea who she was?" asked the Commander of the picket.

W. Keyse shook his head.

"'Aven't the least idear, sir. Never sor 'er before in my natural!" he declared stoutly.

"Well, you'll know her again when you meet her—or she will you," said the patrol-officer, about to move on, when a deplorable figure came staggering into the circle, and the rider reined up his horse. "What's this? Hey, Johnny, where's your gun?"

It was W. Keyse's fellow-sentry from the opposite flank of the Convent.

"And time you turned up, I don't think," commented W. Keyse. "Didn't you 'ear me sing out to you just now?"

"Come, now, what were you up to?" the Sergeant pressed. "Better up an' own it if you've bin asleep on guard."

The eager faces crowded round. The object of interest and comment, not at all sympathetic or polite, was a stout, respectable tradesman, with a large, round, ghastly face, who saluted his officer with a trembling hand.

"I—I have been the victim of an outrage, sir!"

"Sorry to hear it; what's your name?"

"Brooker, sir," volunteered W. Keyse's Corporal. "The other sentry we put on with Keyse here."

"Mr. Brooker, sir, General Stores, Market Square," babbled the citizen.

"Well, Private Brooker, what have you to say?"

"I have been drugged or hypnotised, sir, and robbed of my gun while in a state of insensibility, sir—upon my honour as an Alderman and Magistrate of this borough! Swear me, sir, if you have any doubt of my veracity!" He flapped his hands like fins, and his bandolier heaved above a labouring bosom.

The Commander of the picket looked preternaturally grave.

"Very sorry, Private Brooker, but unless the Sergeant has brought his Testament along, you'll have to give your information in the ordinary way. So they drugged you or hypnotised you—or both, was it?—and took away your rifle. Of course you saw it done?"

"No, sir, I did not see it done. When I woke up ..."

"Ah, when you woke up! Please go on."

The crowding faces of B.S.A. men and Town Guardsmen were grinning now. The patrol-officer was rocking in his saddle.

"When I revived, sir, from the swoon or trance ..."

"Very good, Private Brooker; we'll hear the rest of that in the morning. Sergeant, relieve these sentries, and bring Private Keyse and the hypnotic subject before me in the morning. Make this man Brooker a prisoner at large for the present, and fall in the picket."

The Sergeant saluted. "Very good, sir."

The bubbling Brooker boiled over frothily as the sentries were changing.

"A prisoner! Good God! do they take me for a traitor? A Magistrate ... an Alderman, the President of the Gas Committee ..."

"I should 'ave guessed you to be that if I 'adn't 'eard it, sonny," said the Sergeant dryly, the implied sarcasm provoking a subdued guffaw. He added, as the visiting patrol rode on and the picket marched back to the Cemetery: "Can't relieve you of your rifle, because you 'aven't got 'er. What in 'Eaven's name are they goin' to do to you? Well, you'll find out to-morrow. Left face; quick march!"

Counting left-right, and keeping elbow-touch with the next man, W. Keyse got in a whisper:

"I say, Sergeant, am I in for it as well as Ole Bulgy Weskit? You might as well let me know and charnce it!"

The Sergeant answered with unfeeling indifference:

"Since you ask, I should say you was."

"That's a bit 'ard! Wot'll I git?"

"Ten to one, your skater."

"Wot is my skater?"

"Your Corporal's stripe, you suckin' innocent! Wot for? For takin' a Boer spy pris'ner—that's wot for!"

"Cripps!" said W. Keyse, enlightened, illuminated and glowing in the darkness. He added a moment later, in rather a depressed tone: "But it was 'im, the civilian bloke with the beard, 'oo downed the

Dutchy, an' sat on 'im till the guard come up."

The Sergeant was ahead of the half-company, speaking to the officer in charge. It was the Corporal who answered, across the man who marched upon the left of W. Keyse:

"O' course it was. But you 'ad the Dopper fust, and," he cackled quietly, "the Colonel won't be jealous."

The eyes and mouth of W. Keyse became circular.

"The who?"

"The Colonel, didn't you 'ear me say?"

"That wasn't never ... *'im*"?

"All right, since you know best. But him, for all that!"

"Great Jiminy Cripps!" gasped W. Keyse.

XXIII

You are to imagine Dawn, trailing weary-footed over the interminable plain, to find Gueldersdorp, lonely before, and before threatened, now isolated like some undaunted coral rock in mid-Pacific, crested with screaming sea-birds, girt with roaring breakers, set in the midst of waters haunted by myriads of hungry sharks. Ringed with silent menace, she squatted on her low hill, doggedly waiting the event.

It was known that on the previous day the telegraph wires north of Beaton had been cut, and this day was

to sever the last link with Cape Town at Maripo, some forty miles south. The railway bridge that crossed the Olopo River might go next. Staat's Engineers had been busy there overnight. Rumour had it, Heaven knows how, that the armoured train that had been sent up from the Cape with two light guns of superseded pattern—a generous contribution towards the collection of obsolete engines now bristling from the sand-bagged ramparts—had been seized by a commando, with the officer and the men in charge. This was to be confirmed later by the arrival of an engine-driver minus five fingers and some faith in the omnipotence of British arms. But at the beginning of this chapter he was hiding in a sand-hole, chewing the cud of his experiences, in default of other pabulum, and did not get in before dark of the long blazing day.

Crowds gathered on the barely-reclaimed veld at the northern end of the town to see the Military Executive take over the Hospital. But that the streets were barricaded with waggons and every able-bodied male citizen carried a rifle, it might have been mistaken for an occasion of national rejoicing or civic festivity. The leaves of the pepper-trees fringing the thoroughfares and clumped in the Market Square rustled in the faint hot breeze. By-and-by they were to stand scorched and seared and naked under the iron hail that beat in blizzards upon them, and die in the noxious lyddite fumes dispersed by bursting shells.

The variegated crowd cheered as the Staff dismounted at the white-painted iron gates of the railed-in Hospital grounds. It was not the acclamation of admiration, it was the cheer expectant. They wanted to know what the Officer in

Command was going to do? Intolerable suspense racked them. Wherever it was known that he would be, there they followed at this juncture—solid masses of humanity, bored with innumerable ear-holes, and enamelled with patient, glittering, expectant eyes. His own keen, kindly glance swept over them as he touched his grey felt hat in acknowledgment of their dubious greeting, that half-hearted but well-meant cheer. He read the mute question written upon all the faces. Part of his answer to the interrogation was standing in the Railway-yard, but they would have to wait a little while longer yet—just a little longer. He whistled his pleasant melodious little tune as the porter hurried to open the gates.

One pair of pale, rather ugly eyes in the crowd were illumined with pure hero-worship. "That's 'im," explained their owner, nudging a big man in shabby white drill, who was shouldering a deliberate way through the press.

"The Colonel—and ain't 'e a Regular Oner! Them along of 'im—with the red shoulder-straps and brown leather leggin's, they're cav'l'ry Orficers o' the Staff, they are. An' them others in khâki with puttees—syme as wot I've got on—they're the Medical Swells. Military Saw-boneses—twig? You can tell 'em, when you're near enough, by the bronze badges with a serpint climbin' up a stick inside a wreath, wot they 'ave on the fronts o' their caps an' on their jacket-collars, an' the instrument-cases wot they carries in their bres' pockets. I'm a bit in the know about these things, being a sort of Service man meself."

Thus delicately did W. Keyse invite comment.

Splendid additions had certainly been made to the martial outfit of the previous day. The tweed Norfolk had been replaced by a khâki jacket, evidently second-hand, and obligingly taken in by the lady of the boarding-house. A Corporal's stripe, purchased from a trooper of the B.S.A., who, as the consequence of over-indulgence in liquor and language, had one to sell, had been sewn upon the sleeve. The original owner had charged an extra tikkie for doing it, and it burned the arm that bore it like a vaccination-pustule on the fifth day.

"Being a sort of Service man meself," repeated W. Keyse. He twitched the stripe carelessly into sight. "C'manding orficer marked me down for this to-day," he continued, with elaborate indifference, "along of a Favourable Mention in the Cap'n's Guard Report. Nothin' much—little turn-up with a 'ulking big Dutch bloke, 'oo turned out to be a spy."

In the act of feeling for the invisible moustache, he recognised the face under the Panama hat worn by the big neighbour in white drill, and blushes swamped his yellow freckles. The owner of that square, powerful face, no longer bloated and crimson, but pale and drawn, was the man who had stepped in to the rescue at the Dutchman's saloon-bar on the previous day, where Fate had stage-managed effects so badly that the heroic leading attitude of W. Keyse had perforce given place to the minor rôle of the juvenile walking-gentleman. "Watto!" he began. "It's you, Mister! I bin wantin' to say thank——" But a surge of the crowd flattened W. Keyse against the green-painted iron railings surrounding a municipal gum-tree, and the big man was lost to view. Perhaps it was as well that the acquaintance made under conditions remote from respectability should not be

renewed. But W. Keyse would have preferred to thank the rescuer.

The taking over of the Hospital was accomplished in a moment, to the disappointment of the ceremony-loving Briton and the Colonial of British race, to say nothing of the Kaffirs and the Barala, who anticipated a big indaba. The little party of officers in khâki walked up the gravel-drive between the carefully-tended grass plats to the stoep where the Mayor of Gueldersdorp, with the matron, house-surgeon, secretary, and several prominent members of the Committee—including Alderman Brooker, puffy-cheeked and yellow-eyed for lack of a night's rest—waited. Military Authority saluted Civic Dignity, shook hands, and the thing was done. Inspection followed.

"The warr'ds, said ye?" The Chief Medical Officer, a tall raw-boned personage, very evidently hailed from North of the Tweed. "I'm obliged to ye, ma'am," he addressed the flustered matron, "but the warr'ds an' the contents o' the beds in them are no' to say of the firr'st importance—at least, whaur I'm concerr'ned. With your permeesion we'll tak' a look at the Operating Theatre, and overhaul the sterileezing plant, and the sanitary arrangements, and maybe, after a gliff at the kitchens, there would be a moment to spend in ganging through the warr'ds. Unless the Colonel would prefer to begin wi' them?" He turned a small, twinkling pair of blue eyes set in dry wrinkles upon his Chief.

"Not I, Major. This is your department. But I shall ask five minutes more grace in the interests of the friend I spoke of, Dr. Saxham; with whom I made an appointment at the half-hour."

"You're no' by any chance meaning the Saxham that wrote 'The Diseases of Civilisation,' are ye, Colonel? I mind a sentence in it that must have been a douse of cauld watter—toch! vitriol would be the better worr'd—in the faces o' some o' the dandy operators. '*Young men*,' he ca'ed them, as if he was a greybeard himsel', 'young men who, led to take up Surgery by the houp o' gains an' notoriety, have given themselves nae time to learn its scienteefic principles—showy operators, who diagnose wi' the knife an' endeavour to dictate to Nature and no' to assist her.' And yet Saxham could daur! 'I shall prove that the gastric ulcer can be cured wi'out exceesion,' he said, or they say he said in the *Lancet* report o' the operation on the Grand Duke Waldimir—I cam' across a reprint o' it no' lang ago—when Sir Henry McGavell sent for him, wi' the sweat o' mortal terror soakin' his Gladstone collar. He cut a hole in the Duke's stomach, ye will understand, in front o' the ulcer, clipped off the smaller intesteene, spliced the twa together wi' a Collins button, and by a successful deveece o' plumbing—naething less—earned the eterr'nal gratitude o' the autocrat an' the everlastin' currses o' the Nihilists. All that, seven years ago, an' the thing is dune the day wi'oot a hair's-breadth difference. For why? Ye canna paint the lily, or improve upon perfection. Toch!... Colonel, that man would be worth the waitin' for, if he stood in your friend's shoes the day!"

"Rejoice then, Major, and be exceeding glad, for I believe this is the man who wrote the book and plugged—or was it plumbed—the potentate."

The Chief Medical Officer rubbed his hands. "I promise myself a crack or twa wi' him, then.... But how is it a busy chiel like that can get awa' from his

private patients and his Hospital warr'ds in the London Winter Season Ahem! ahem!"

By the haste the Medical Officer developed in changing the conversation, it was plain that he had recalled the circumstances under which the "busy chiel" had turned his back upon the private patients and the Hospital wards. "Colonel," he went on, "I could be wishing this varry creeditable-appearing institution—judging from the ootside o't—were twice as big as it is, wi' maybe an Annexe or so to the back of that."

"My dear Major, I never knew you really satisfied and happy but once, and that was when we had fifty men down with dysentery and fever in a tin-roofed Railway goods-shed, and a hundred and seventy more under leaky canvas, and you were out of chlorodyne and quinine, and could get no milk."

"That goes to prove the eleementary difference between the male an' the female character. A man will no' keep on dithering for what he kens he canna' get. A woman, especially a young an' pretty——" He broke off to say: "Toch! will ye hark to Beauvayse! The very name of the sex sets that lad rampaging."

"Beautiful! I tell you, sir," the handsome, fair-haired young aide-de-camp was emphatically assuring that stout, rubicund personage, the Mayor, "the loveliest girl I ever saw in my life, or ever shall see—bar none! I saw her first on the Recreation Ground, the day a gang of Boer blackguards insulted some nuns who were in charge of a ladies' school, and to-day she passed with two other Sisters of Mercy, and I touched my hat to her as the Staff dismounted at the gate."

"Another *rara avis*, Beau?" the Colonel called across the intervening group of talkers. The group of khâki-clad figures separated, and turned first to the Chief, then to the bright-eyed, bright-faced enthusiast. White teeth flashed in tanned faces, chaff began:

"In love again, for the first and only time, Toby?"

"Since he lost his heart to Miss What's-her-name, that pretty 'Jollity' girl, with the double-barrelled repeating wink, and the postcard grin."

"Don't forget the velvet-voiced beauty of the dark, moonless night on the Cape Town Hotel verandah!"

"*She* turned out to be a Hottentot lady, didn't she?"

"Cavalry Problem No. 1. Put yourself in Lieutenant the Right Hon. the Lord Viscount Beauvayse's place, and give in detail the precautions you would have taken to insure the transport of your heart uninjured from the Staff Headquarters to the Hospital Gate. Show on the map the disposition of the enemy, whether desirous to enslave, or likely to be mashed...."

"She was neither," the crimson boy declared. "She was simply a lady, quiet and high-bred and simple enough to have been a Princess of the blood, or to look a fellow in the face and pass him by without the slightest idea—I'd swear to it—that she'd fairly taken his breath away."

"My dear Lord!" The Mayor took a great deal of comfort out of a title. "Attractive the young lady is, I certainly admit, and my wife is—I may say the word—in her praise. But you go one, or half a dozen, better than Mrs. Greening, who will be perfectly willing, I don't doubt, to introduce you, unless the

Colonel entertains objections ..."

"To Staff flirtations? Regard 'em as inevitable, Mr. Mayor, like Indian prickly-heat, or fever here. And probably the best cure for the complaint in the present instance would be to meet the cause of it."

"Judge for yourself, Colonel; you've first-class long-distance eyesight." There was a ring of defiance in the boy's fresh voice. "You've seen her before, and it isn't the kind of face one forgets. Here they are ... here she is now, coming back, with the other ladies. The railing spoils one's view, but the gates are open, and in another moment you'll see her pass them."

The Chief moved to the front of the stoep where the Staff had congregated. Men quietly fell aside, making place for him, so that he stood with Beauvayse, in a clear half-circle of figures attired like his own, in Service browns and drabs and umbers, waiting until the three approaching feminine shapes should pass across the open space. One or two Staff monocles went up. The Chief Medical Officer removed and wiped his steel-rimmed eyeglasses before replacing them on his bony aquiline nose.

They came and passed—the white figure and the two black ones. Of these one was very tall, one short and dumpy—veiled and mantled, their hands hidden in their ample sleeves, they went by with their eyes upon the ground. But the girl with them—a slight, willowy creature in a creamy cambric dress, a wide hat of black transparent material, frilled and bowed, upon her dead-leaf coloured hair, and tied by wide strings of muslin under her delicate round chin—looked with innocent, candid interest at the group of men outside the Hospital. The tanned faces, the simple workman-like Service dress, setting off the

well-knit, alert figures, the quiet, soldierly bearing, even the distant sound of the well-bred voices, pleased her, even as the whiff of cigars and Russian leather that the breeze brought down from the stoep struck some latent chord of subconscious memory, and brought a puzzled little frown between the delicately-drawn dark eyebrows arching over black-lashed golden hazel eyes. And cognisant of every fleeting change of expression in those lovely eyes, the taller of her two companions thought, with a stab of pain:

"*Your father was that man's friend, and the comrade of others like him.*"

"Now, then!" challenged Beauvayse, as the three figures moved out of sight.

"The 'Girl With the Golden Eyes'?" said somebody.

"You wouldn't speak of her in the same breath with that brainless beast of Balzac's, hang it all!" expostulated the champion. He turned eagerly to the Colonel. "Now you've seen her, sir, would you?"

"Not exactly. And I'm bound to say, I regard your claim to the possession of good taste as completely established.... 'Ware the horse, there! Look out! look out!" His eyes had followed the tall figure of the Mother-Superior, moving with the superlative grace and ease that comes of perfect physical proportion, carrying the black nun's robes, wearing the flowing veil of the nun with the dignity of an ideal queen. And the next instant, his charger, held with some others by a mounted orderly before the gates, and rendered nervous by the pressure of the crowd, shied at the towering *panache* of imitation grass-made ostrich feathers trailing from the aged and crownless

pot-hat worn by a headman of the Barala in holiday attire, jerked the bridle from the hand of the trooper, and backed, rearing, in the direction of the three women passing on the sidewalk. The other horses shied, frustrating the efforts of the orderly to catch the flying bridle, and the danger from the huge, towering brown body and dangling iron-shod hoofs was very real, seemed inevitable, when a man in white drill and wearing a Panama hat ran out of the crowd, sprang up and deftly caught the loose bridoon-rein, mastered the frightened beast, and dragged it back into the roadway, in time to avert harm.

"Cleverly done, but a close thing," the Chief said, as he turned away. "*I wish I had had that fellow's chance!*" was written in Beauvayse's face. To have won a look of gratitude from those wonderful black-fringed eyes, brought a flush of admiration into those white-rose cheeks, would have been worth while. The slight, tall, girlish figure in its dainty creamy draperies had passed out of sight now between its two black-robed guardians. And had not Luck, that mutable-minded deity, given the golden chance to a hulking stranger in white drill, his, Beauvayse's, might have been the hand to intervene in the matter of the Colonel's restive charger, and his the ears to receive Beauty's acknowledgments.

If he had known that her eyes had been too full of his own resplendent, virile, glowing young personality, to even see the man who had stepped in between her and possible danger! The most innocent girl will have her ideal of a lover and thrill at the imagined touch, and furnish the dumb image with a dream-voice that woos her in impossible, elaborate, impassioned sentences, very unlike the real

utterances of Love when he comes. The blue-eyed, ruddy-cheeked, golden-locked St. Michael portrayed in celestial-martial splendour upon one of the panels of the triptych over the altar in the Convent chapel, had, as he bent stern young brows over the writhing demon with the vainly-enveloping snake-folds, something of the young soldier's look, it seemed to Lynette. Ridiculous and profane, Sister Cleophée or Sister Ruperta would have said, to liken a handsome, stupid, young lieutenant of Hussars to the immortal Captain of the Armies of Heaven.

But she knew another who would understand. There was no flaw in the perfect sympathy that maintained between Lynette and the Mother-Superior, though, certainly, since the Colonel's visit of the previous day, the Mother had seemed strangely preoccupied and sad.... Her good-night kiss, invariably so warm and tender, had been the merest brush of lips against the girl's soft cheek; her good-morning had been even more perfunctory; her eyes, those great maternal radiances, turned their light elsewhere. Unloved and neglected, the Convent's spoiled darling hugged her abandonment, weaving a very pretty, ineffably silly romance, in which a noble and beautiful young Hussar lover, suddenly appearing over the corrugated-iron fence of the tennis-ground, the foliage of its fringe of pepper-trees waving in the night-breeze, strode towards the slender white figure leaning from her chamber-casement, whispering, with outstretched hands, and eyes that gleamed through the darkness:

"*Open the door! Do you hear, you Kid? Open the door!*"

Her heart beat once, heavily, and seemed to stop. A cold breath seemed to blow upon the little silken hair-tendrils at the nape of her white neck, spreading a creeping, stiffening horror through her body, deadening sensation, paralysing every limb.

The close approach of any man, even the thought of such contact, turned her deadly faint, checked her pulses, stopped her breath. At picnics and parties and dances to which the Mayor's wife or the mothers of some of the pupils would invite or chaperon her, her vivid, delicate, fragile beauty would draw, first men's eyes, and then their owners, not all unhandsome or undesirable; while showier girls looked in vain for partners or companions. The little triumph, the consciousness of being admired and sought after, would quicken Lynette's pulses, and heighten the radiance of her eyes, and lend animation to her girlish chatter and gaiety to her laughter—at first. Then some over-bold advance, some hot look or whispered word, would bring quick recollection leaping into the lovely eyes, and drive the vivid colour from the virginal transparent face, and stamp the smiling mouth into pale, breathless lines of Fear. That night in the tavern on the veld had branded a child with premature knowledge of the ferocious, ravening, devouring Beast that lies in Man concealed. Again she felt the scorching breath of lust upon her; she quailed under the intolerable touch; she shook like a reed in the brutal hands of the evil, dominating power that would brook no resistance and knew no mercy. The horrible obsession came upon her now, all the stronger for those moments of forgetfulness:

"*Clang—clang—clang!*"

The little Irish novice had rung the chapel bell for Sext and None. She could hear, from the nuns' end of the big rambling, two-storied house, the rustling habits sweeping along the passage. She hurried to the door, and tore it open, frantically as though that ravening breath had been hot upon her neck, saw the dear black figure of the Mother sweeping towards her, and rushed into the arms that were held out, hiding from that burning, scorching, hideous memory in the bosom that dead Richard Mildare had turned from in his blindness.

Just as Beauvayse, stimulated by the recollection of the Mayor's promise to introduce him to the loveliest girl he had ever seen in his life, or ever should see, mentally registered a vow that he would keep the old buffer up to that, by listening to his interminable hunting-stories, and laughing at his venerable jokes, to tears if necessary. Love, like War, sharpened a fellow's faculties....

"It's rum to reflect," Beauvayse said, conscious of perpetrating an epigram, "that from time immemorial the fellow who wants to make up to a young woman has always had to begin by getting round an old man!"

He looked round for the old man, whom the title would have estranged for ever. He had buttonholed the Chief, and was gassing away—joy!—upon the very subject.

"I fancy the ladies of the Convent, who occasionally visit the Hospital, were coming in at this gate. The short nun, I noticed, had a little basket in her hand. Probably they went round to the side entrance, seeing the—ha, ha!—the stoep garrisoned by Her Majesty's Imperial Forces. Certainly.... Without

doubt. We respect the Mother-Superior highly. A most gifted, most estimable person in every way, if rather stern and reserved.... Unapproachable, my wife calls her. But Miss Mildare, her ward——"

XXIV

"Miss Mildare!"

The Chief's keen eyes had lightened suddenly. The whole face had darkened and narrowed, and the clipped brown moustache lost its smiling curve, and straightened into a hard line.

"Miss *Mildare*?"

"Why, yes, that is her name.... An orphan, I have heard, and with no living relatives. But she seems happy enough at the Convent, judging by what Mrs. Greening says."

The hearer experienced a momentary feeling of relief and of anger—relief to think that dead Dick Mildare's daughter should have found refuge in such a woman's heart; anger that the woman should have concealed from him the girl's identity, knowing her the object of his own anxious search.

Then he understood. His anger died as suddenly as it had been kindled. He recalled something that he had seen when the rearing horse had inclined perilously towards the footway—that protecting maternal gesture, that swift interposition of the tall, active, black-robed figure between the white-clad, flower-

faced, girlish creature and those threatening iron-shod hoofs....

"She loves the girl—Dick Mildare's daughter by the treacherous friend who stole him from her. Is there a doubt? With poor little Lady Lucy Hawting's willowy figure and the same nymph-like droop of the little head, with its rich twists and coils of dead-leaf-coloured hair, shaded by the big black hat. That woman has taken her to her heart, however she came by her; the parting would be agony, stern, proud, tender creature that she is! I suppose she will be doing thundering penance for not having told me, a fellow who simply walked into the place and assegaied her with my death-news. Here's a marrowy bone of gossip Lady Hannah shall never crack. And yet I wouldn't swear there's not an angel husked inside that dried-up little chrysalis. For God made all women, though He only turned out a few of 'em perfect, and some only just a little better than the ruck."

He roused himself from the brown study that brought into relief many lurking lines and furrows in the thin, keen face, as the Chief Medical Officer, fixing him through suspicious eyeglasses, demanded:

"Ye got your full allowance o' sleep last nicht?"

He nodded.

"Thanks to a Cockney babe in bandoliers, who was born not only with eyes and ears, like other infants, but with the capacity for using 'em."

"Ay. It's remarr'kable how many men will daudle complacently through life, from the cradle to the grave, wi'out the remotest consciousness that they're

practically blind and no better than deaf, as far as regards real seeing and hearing. But who's your prodeegy?"

"One of Panizzi's Town Guardsmen. They put him on at the Convent with another sentry, their first experience of a night on guard. By not being in a hurry to challenge, and keeping his ears open while a conversation of the confidentially-affectionate kind was going on between a Dutchman—a fellow employed in the booking-office at the railway, on whom I've had my eye for some little time past—and his sweetheart, my townie found out for himself something that most of us knew before, and something else that we wanted to know particularly badly...."

"Namely?"

"For one thing, that the town is a hotbed of spies, and that our friends in laager outside are nightly communicated with by means of flash-signals."

"And that's an indeesputable fact. Toch!" No other combination of letters may convey the guttural, "Have I no' seen the lamps at warr'k mysel', after darr'k, at the end o' the roads that debouch upon the veld! The Dutchman would be able to plead precedent, I'm thinking."

"He will have plenty of time to think where he is at present. When the sentry interfered he was instructing the young woman in a simple but effective code of match-flare signals, by means of which she was to communicate with him when he had cleared out. And he had announced his intention of doing that without delay."

"An' skipping to his freends upo' the Borr'der.... Toch!" The network of wrinkles tightened about the sharp little blue-grey eyes of the Chief Medical Officer. "That would gie a thochtfu' man a kind o' notion that a reese in the temperature may be expectit shortly. An' so you—slept soundly on the strength o' many wakeful nichts to come? Ay, that would be the kind o' information ye were badly wanting!"

"You're wrong, Major. The bit of information was this—from the spy to his friends outside: '*No—news—to-night.*'" The keen hazel eyes conveyed something into the Northern blue ones that was not said in words: "'No news to-night.' And the sender of that message was a railway man!"

The wiry hairs of the Chief Medical Officer's red moustache bristled like a cat's.

"Toch! Colonel, you will have reason to be considering me dull in the uptake, but I see through the mud wall now. And so the knowledge that ye have no equal at hiding your deeds o' darkness even in the licht o' the railway-yard was as good to ye as Daffy's Elixir. And when micht we reckon on getting notification from what I may presume to ca' your double surpreese-packet?"

He looked at his watch—a well-used Waterbury, worn upon the silvered steel lip-strap of a cavalry bridle, and said:

"Ten o'clock. At a quarter past eleven I think we may count upon something. The driver of Engine 123 has given me the word of an Irishman from County Kildare; and the stoker, a Cardiff man, and the guard, who hails from Shoreditch, are quite as keen as

Kildare."

"You're sending the stuff up North?"

"In the direction of the stretch of railway-line they're busy wrecking, in the hope that it may come in useful."

"Weel, I will gie ye the guid wish that the affair may go off exactly as ye are hoping."

"Thanks, Major! You could hardly word the sentence more happily."

They exchanged a laugh as the Mayor bustled up, rubicund, important, and with a Member of the Committee to introduce.

"Colonel, you'll permit me to present Alderman Brooker, one of our most energetic and valued townsmen, President of the Gas Committee, and an Assistant Borough Magistrate. One of Major Panizzi's Town Guardsmen. Was on sentry-go last night not far from here, and had a most extraordinary experience. Worth your hearing, if you can spare time to listen to my friend's account of it."

"With pleasure, Mr. Mayor."

Brooker, a stout and flabby man, with pouches under biliously tinged eyes, bowed and broke into a violent perspiration, not wholly due to the shiny black frock-coat suit of broadcloth donned for the occasion.

"Sir, I humbly venture to submit that I have been the victim of a conspiracy!"

"Indeed? Step this way, Mr. Brooker."

Brooker, soothed by the courteous affability of the

reception, his sense of importance magnified by being led aside, apart from the others, into the official privacy of the stoep-corner, began to be eloquent. He knew, he said, that the story he had to relate would appear almost incredible, but a soldier, a diplomat, a master of strategy, such as the personage to whom he now addressed himself, would understand—none better—how to unravel the tangled web, and follow up the clue to its ending in a den of secret, black, and midnight conspiracy. A blob of foam appeared upon his under-lip. He waved his hands, thick, short-fingered, clammy members....

"My story is as follows, sir...."

"I shall have pleasure in listening to it, Mr. Brooker, on condition that you will do me first the favour of listening to a story of mine?"

Deferred Brooker protested willingness.

"Last night, Mr. Brooker, at about eleven-thirty to a quarter to twelve, I was returning from a little tour of inspection"—the slight riding sjambok the Chief carried pointed over the veld to the northward—"out there, when, passing the south angle of the enclosure of the Convent, where, by my special orders, a double sentry of the Town Guard had been posted, I heard a sound that I will endeavour to reproduce:

"*Gr'rumph! Honk'k! Gr'rumph!*"

Brooker bounded in his Oxford shoes.

The face upon which he glued his bulging eyes was grave to sternness. He stuttered, interrogated by the judicial glance:

"It—it sounds something like a snore."

"It was a snore, Mr. Brooker, and it proceeded from one of the sentries upon guard."

"Sir ... I ... I can expl——"

"Oblige me by not interrupting, Mr. Brooker. This sentry sat upon a short post, his back fitted comfortably into an angle of the Convent fence, his head thrown back, and his mouth wide open. From it, or from the organ immediately above, the snore proceeded. He was having a capital night's rest—in the Service of his Country. And as I halted in front of him, fixing upon him a gaze which was coldly observant, he shivered and ceased to snore, and said":—the wretched Brooker heard his own voice, rendered with marvellous fidelity, speaking in the muffled tone of the sleeper—"'*Annie, it's damned cold to-night; and you've got all the blanket.*'"

"Sir ... sir!" The stricken Brooker babbled hideously.... "Colonel ... for mercy's sake!..."

"I could not oblige the gentleman with a blanket, Mr. Brooker, but I relieved him of his rifle and left him, to tell his picket a cock-and-bull story of having been drugged and hypnotised by Boer spies. And—I will overlook it upon the present occasion, but in War-time, Mr. Brooker, men have been shot for less. I think I need not detain you further. Your rifle has been sent to your headquarters—with my card and an explanation. One word more, Mr. Brooker——"

Brooker, grey, streaky, and desperately wretched, was blind to the laughter brimming the keen hazel eyes.

"I am entrusted by the Imperial Government with the preservation of Public Morality in Guelderdorp, as

well as with the maintenance of the Public Safety—and I should be glad of an assurance from you that Mrs. Brooker's Christian name is really Annie?"

"I—I swear it, Colonel!"

Brooker fled, leaving the preserver of public morality to have his laugh out before he rejoined the Staff, glancing at the Waterbury on the short steel chain. Half-past ten. Would the Dop Doctor turn up to appointment, or had the battle with habit and the deadly craving born of indulgence ended in defeat? As his eyes moved from the dial, they lighted upon the man:

"*Clothed and in his right mind....*"

His own words of the night before recurred to memory as he came forwards with his long, light step, greeting the new-comer with the easy, cordial grace of high-breeding.

"Ah, Dr. Saxham, obliged to you for being punctual. Let me introduce you to Major Lord Henry Leighbury, D.S.O., Grenadier Guards, our D.A.A.G. Dr. Saxham, Colonel Ware, Baraland Rifles, and Sir George Wendysh, Wessex Regiment, commanding the Irregular Horse; Captain Bingham Wrynche, Royal Bay Dragoons, my senior aide-de-camp, and his junior, Lieutenant Lord Beauvayse, of the Grey Hussars. And Dr. Saxham, Major Taggart, R.A.M.C., our Chief Medical Officer."

He watched the man keenly as he made the introductions, saying to himself that this was better than he had hoped. The ragged black moustache had been shaved away; the frayed but spotless suit of white drill fitted the heavy-shouldered, thin-flanked,

muscular figure perfectly; the faded blue flannel shirt, with the white double collar and narrow black tie; the shabby black kamarband about his waist, the black-ribboned Panama, maintaining respectability in extremest old age, as that expensive but lasting headgear is wont to do, possessed, as worn by the Dop Doctor, a certain *cachet* of style. His slight, curt, almost frowning salutations displayed a well-graduated recognition of the official status of each individual to whom he was made known, betokening the man accustomed to move in circles where such knowledge and the application of it was indispensable, and who knew, too, that slight from him would have given chagrin. But another moment, and the junior Medical Officer, a black-avised little Irishman from County Meath, had gripped him by both hands, and was exclaiming in his juicy brogue, real delight beaming in his round, rosy face:

"Saxham! Saxham of St. Stephens, and the grand ould days! Deny me now, to my face. Say, 'Tom McFadyen, I don't know you,' if you dare."

The blue eyes shone out vivid gentian-colour in the kindly smile that illumined them, the stern lips parted in a laugh that showed the sound white closely-set teeth.

"Tom McFadyen, I do know you. But if you offer to pay me that cab-fare you owe me, I shall say I'm wrong, and that it's another man."

"Hould your tongue, jewel," drolled the little junior, who delighted in exaggerating the brogue that tripped naturally off his Irish tongue. "Don't be after giving me away to the Chief and the Senior that believe me, by me own account, to be descended from Ollamh Fodla, that was King of Tara, and

owned the cow-grazing from Trim to Athboy, and ate boiled turnips off shields of gold before potatoes were invented, when the bog-oaks were growing as acorns on the tree. And as to the cab-fare, sure I hailed the hansom out of politeness to your honour's glory, the day that saw me going off to the Army Medical School at Netley, wid all my worldly belongin's in wan ould hat-box and the half of a carpet-bag. Wirra, wirra! but it's some folks have luck, says I, as the train took me out av' Waterloo in a third-class smoker, while you were left on the platform sheddin' half-crowns out av every pore for the newspaper boys an' porters to pick up, and smilin' like a baby dhramin' av the bottle. You'd passed your exam in Anatomy wid wan hand held behind you an' a glove on the other, you'd got your London University Scholarship in Physiology, and you'd fallen head over ears in love with the prettiest and sweetest girl that ever wore out shoe-leather. You wrote to me two years later to say you'd been appointed an in-surgeon on the Junior Staff, an' that you were engaged to be married. But divil the taste of weddin'-cake did I ever get off you. What——"

The little Irishman, thoughtlessly rattling on, pulled up in an instant, seeing the ghastly unmistakable change upon the other's face. He remembered the grim black reason for the change in Saxham, and for once, his habitual tact deserted him. His rosy gills purpled, even as had the Mayor's on the Dop Doctor's entrance. His eyes winced under the heavy petrifying, unseeing stare of Saxham's blue ones....

"Sorry to stem the flood of your reminiscences, McFadyen, but we're going to overhaul the Hospital now."

It was the voice of the visitor who had come to the Harris Street house on the previous night, the tall, loosely-built, closely-knit figure in the easily fitting Service-dress that now stepped across the gulf that had suddenly opened between the two old friends, and laid a hand in pleasant, familiar fashion upon Saxham's heavy, rather bowed shoulders. But for that scholar's stoop they would have been of equal height. He went on: "You will be able to give us points, Saxham, where they will be needed most. Can't expect Colonial institutions, even at the best, to keep abreast of London."

The blue eyes met his almost defiantly.

"As I think I remember telling you, sir, it is five years since I saw London."

"Well, I don't blame you for taking a long holiday while it was procurable. There are a few of us who would benefit by a gallop without the halter, eh, Taggart?"

Saxham would not stoop even to benefit indirectly by the shrewd, kindly tact. He drew himself to his full height, and the words were spoken with such ringing clearness that they arrested the attention of every man present.

"My holiday was compulsory. I underwent—innocently—a legal prosecution for malpractice. The Crown Jury decided in my favour, but my West End connection was ruined. I resigned my Hospital and other appointments, and left England."

"Ay!" It was the Chief Medical Officer's broad Scots tongue that droned out the bagpipe note. "Weel, Doctor, it's an ill wind blaws naebody guid, and ye

canna expect Captain McFadyen or mysel' to sympatheese overmuch wi' the West End for a loss that is our gain. And, Colonel, it's in my memory that ye had set your mind on beginnin' wi' the Operating Theatre?..."

XXV

The chart-nurse looked in to say that the Medical officers of the Garrison Staff were making the rounds, and was stricken to the soul by the discovery that the Reverend Julius Fraithorn had had no breakfast. Occupying a small, single-cotted, electric-bell-less room in the outlying ward—brick-lined and corrugated-iron-built like the greater building, and reserved for infectious cases—the Reverend Julius might have been said to be marooned, had not his dark-eyed, transparent, wasted young face created such hot competition among the nurses for the privilege of attending on him, that he had frequently received breakfast and dinner in duplicate, and once three teas. Some of the probationers, reared in the outer darkness of Dissent, knew no better than to term him "the minister." To the matron, who was High Church, he existed as "Father Fraithorn." Julius is hardly complete to the reader without an intimation that he very dearly loved to be dubbed "Father." The matron had never failed in this.

A letter from Father Tatham, Julius's senior at St. Margaret's, lay under the bony hand—a mere bunch of fleshless fingers, in which the skin-covered stick

that had been a man's arm ended. Father Tatham wrote to say that, after a bright, enjoyable summer holiday, spent with a chosen band of West-Central London barrow-boys at a Rest Home at Cookham-on-Thames, he has started his Friday evening Confirmation classes for young costermongers in Little Schoolhouse Court, and obtained a record attendance by the simple plan of rewarding punctual attendance and ultimate mastery gained over the Catechism and Athanasian Creed with pairs of trousers. Julius had shaken his head over the trousers, knowing that the first walk taken by the garments in company with the winners would be as far as the pop-shop. But lying there in the clean-smelling, airy Hospital ward, he yearned with a mighty yearning for the stuffy West-Central classroom, and the rowdy crew of London roughs hulking and hustling on the benches, learning per medium of "the dodger," that one's duty to one's neighbour was not to abuse him foully without cause, to refrain one's hands from pocket-picking, shop-raiding, hustling, and jellying heads with brass-buckled belts or iron knuckle-dusters, and not to get drunk before Saturday night.

He had come out to South Africa upon the advice of physicians—honestly-meaning wiseacres—ignorant of the shifts, the fatigues, the inevitable exertions and privations that the panting, tottering invalid must inevitably undergo, in company with the hale traveller and the sound emigrant; the rough, protracted journeys, the neglect and discomfort of the inns and taverns and boarding-houses, where Kaffirs are the servants, and dirt and discomfort reign. He bore them because he must, and struggled on, learning by painful experience that fever-patches are best avoided, and finding out what dust-winds

mean to the man who has got sick lungs, and sometimes thinking he was getting better, and would be one day able to go back to the Clergy House, and take up his mission in the West and West-Central districts, and begin work again.

Now, lying panting on his pillows, raised high by the light chair slipped in behind them, hospital-fashion, he looked beyond the whitewashed walls northwards, to grimy London. He dreamed, while the chart-nurse was still apologising about the forgotten breakfast, of the High Ritual in the sacred place, and the solemn joy of the vested celebrant of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The incense rose in clouds to the gilded, diapered roof, the organ pealed ... then the ward seemed to fill with men in khâki Service dress, keen-eyed and tan-faced beings, of quiet movements and well-bred gestures, obviously stamped with the *cachet* of authority. Upright, alert, well-knit, and strong, the visitors exhaled the compound fragrance of healthy virility, clean linen, and excellent cigars; and the poor sufferer yielded to a pang of envy as he looked at them, standing about his bed, and thought of that resting-place even narrower, in which his wasted body must soon lie. And then he mentally smote his breast and repented. What was he, the unworthy servant of Heaven, that he should dare to oppose the Holy Will?

"Weel now, and how are we the day?" said the Chief Medical Officer, presented by the Resident Surgeon to the occupant of the bed. He read approaching death in the sunken face against the pillows, and in the feeble pulse as he touched the skeleton wrist, and the Resident Surgeon, catching the Scotsman's eye, shook his head slightly, imparting information that was not needed.

"It is not in my power, I am afraid, sir, to return you the conventional answer," said Julius Fraithorn. "To be plain and brief, I am suffering from tuberculous lung-disease, and I am advised that I have not many days to live."

He smiled gratefully at the Resident Surgeon.

"Everything that can be done for me here is done. I cannot be too thankful. But I should have liked—I should have wished to have been spared to return to England, if not to live a little longer among my friends, at least to ..." He broke off panting, and his rattling breaths seemed to shake him. He sounded like Indian corn shaken in a gunny-bag; he wheezed like the mildewed harmonium in the Hospital chapel, on which he had once tried to play. When he had spoken, his voice had had the flat, deadly softness of the exhausted phthisical sufferer's. When he had moved he had suffered torture: the shoulder-blades and hip-bones had pierced the wasted muscular tissues and projected through the skin.

"I can't!" he gasped out. "You see——"

A dizziness of deadly weakness seized him. His soft, muffled voice trailed away into a whisper, blue shadows gathered about his large, mobile, sensitive mouth, much like that of Keats as shown in the Death Cast, and his head fell back upon the pillows. Julius had fainted.

"Poor beggar!" said a large, pink man, wearing the red shoulder-straps and brown-leather leggings of the Staff, to another, a fair, handsome, young giant who leaned against the opposite door-post, as the chart-nurse hurried to take away the pillows, and lay the patient flat, and the shorter of the two medical

officers dropped brandy from a flask into a glass with water in it, while the tall Scot, his finger on the pulse, stooped over the pale figure on the bed;

"No doubt about his next address being the Cemetery. Should grouse myself if I was in his shoes —or bed-socks would be the proper word—what?"

Beauvayse agreed. "He looks like a chap I saw once get into a coffin at the Cabaret de l'Enfer—that shady restaurant place in the Boulevard de Clichy. When they turned on the lights ..." He shrugged. "The women of the party thought it simply ripping. I wanted to be sick."

Captain Bingo had also known the sensation of nausea during a similar experience. "But women'll stand anything," he said, "particularly if they've been told it's *chic*. My own part, I can stand any amount of dead men—healthy dead men, don't you know? But —give you my word—a cadaverous spectacle like that poor chap, bones stickin' out of his hide, and breathin' as if he was stuffed with dry shavin's, or husks like the Prodigal Son, gives me the downright horrors!"

Thus they conferred, supporting opposite door-posts with solid shoulders, until the C.M.O., turning his head, addressed them brusquely, curtly:

"Wrynche, if you'd transfer yourself with Lord Beauvayse to the passage, myself and my colleagues here would be the better obliged to ye."

"Pleasure!" They removed, with a simultaneous clink of scabbards and a ring of spurred heels on the tiled pavement.

The Colonel remained, making those about the bed a

group of five. The chart-nurse stayed, pending the nod of dismissal, a rigid statue of capped and aproned discipline, upright in the corner.

"Phew!" Captain Bingo blew a vast sigh of relief, and produced a cigar-case. "Well out of that, my boy. All jumps this morning; wouldn't take the odds you're not as bad?"

"Rather!" Beauvayse nodded, and drew the elder man's attention, with a look, to the strong young hand that held a choice Havana just accepted from the offered case. "Shaky, isn't it? and yet I didn't punish the champagne much last night. It's sheer excitement, just what one feels before riding a steeplechase, or going into Action early on a raw morning. Not that I've been in anything but a couple of Punitive Expeditions—from Peshawar, under Wilks-Dayrell, splitting up some North-West Frontier tribes that had lumped themselves together against British Authority—up to now. But I'm looking out for the chance of something better worth having, like you and all the rest of us. Trouble you for a light!"

"By the Living Tinker, and that's the fourth! Where d'you think I'd give a cool fifty to be this minute? Not cooling my heels in a brick-paved passage while a pack of doctors are swoppin' dog-Latin over the body of a moribund young parson, but on the roof of the Staff Quarters, lookin' North, with my eyes glued to the binoculars and my ears pricked for—you know what!"

Beauvayse groaned. "Isn't that what I'm suffering for? And the Chief must be ten times worse. How he keeps his countenance—demure as my grandmother's cat lappin' cream.... I say, the Transvaal Dutch; they call themselves the true Children of Israel, don't

they? Well, which did Moses and his little gang come across first in the Desert, the Pillar of Cloud, or the Pillar of Fire, or a couple of railway-trucks containin' the raw material for a sky-journey, only waitin' till Brer' Boer plugs a bullet in among the dynamite? It makes me feel good all over, as the American women say, when I think of it." He smiled like a mischievous young archangel, masquerading in Service kit.

Within the room the fainting man was coming back to consciousness, his dry, rattling breaths bearing out Captain Bingo Wrynche's similitude regarding husks and shavings, rings of blue fire swimming before his darkened vision, and a dull roaring in his ears.... The Royal Army Medical Corps wrought over him; the nurse lent a deft helping hand; the Resident Surgeon talked eagerly to the Colonel; and he, lending ear, scarcely heard the reiterated, stereotyped parrot-phrases, so taken up was his attention with the man in shabby white drill clothes, who leaned over the foot of the bed, his square face set into an expressionless mask, his gentian-blue, oddly vivid eyes fixed upon the wasted, waxy-yellow face of the sick man, his head bent, as he listened with profound, absorbed attention to the husky, rattling, laboured breaths.

Suddenly he straightened himself and spoke, addressing himself to the Resident Surgeon.

"The patient has told us, sir, that he is suffering from tuberculous disease of the lungs. May I ask, was that the conclusion arrived at by a London consulting physician, and whether your own diagnosis has confirmed the assertion?"

The Resident Surgeon nodded with patronising indifference. He was not going to waste civilities

upon this rowdy, drunken remittance-man, whom he had seen reeling through the streets of the stad as he went upon his own respectable way.

"*Phthisis pulmonalis.*" He addressed his reply to the Chief. "And the process of lung-destruction is, as you will observe, sir, nearly complete."

He encountered from the Chief a look of cool displeasure that flushed him to the top of his knobby forehead, and set him blinking nervously behind his big round spectacles.

"Dr. Saxham asked you, sir, unless I mistake, whether you had ascertained by your own diagnosis, the ..." Lady Hannah's words came back to him. He recalled the "bit of information wormed out of the nurse," and ended with "the presence of the bacillus?"

Saxham's blue eyes thrust their rapier-points at him, and then plunged into the oyster-like orbs behind the spectacles of the Resident Surgeon, who rapidly grew from scarlet to purple, and from purple to pale green. Major Taggart and the Irishman exchanged a look of intelligence.

"Koch's bacillus, sir, were this a case of tuberculosis proper, would be present in the expectoration of the patient, and easy of demonstration under the microscope." Saxham's voice was cold as ice and cutting as tempered steel. "May we take it that you can personally testify to its presence here?" He pointed to the bed.

"And varra possibly," put in Taggart, "ye could submit a culture for present inspection? It would be gratifeeying to me and Captain McFadyen here, as weel as to our friend an' colleague Dr. Saxham, late

of St. Stephen's-in-the-West, London, to varrafy the correctness o' your diagnosis."

"And it would that!" the Irishman chimed in. "So trot out your bacillus, by all manner of means!"

The Resident Surgeon babbled something incoherent, and melted out of the room.

"Moppin' his head as he goes down the passage," said McFadyen, coming back from the door.

"He'll no be in sic a sweatin' hurry to come back," pronounced the canny Scot, shedding a wink from a dry, red-fringed eyelid. He produced from the roomy breast-pocket of his khâki Service jacket a rubber-tubed stethoscope, and put it silently into the hand Saxham had mechanically stretched out for it. Then he drew back, his eyes, like those of the other two spectators of the strange scene that was beginning, fixed upon the chief actor in it. One other, weak after his swoon as a new-born child, lay passively, helplessly upon the bed.

Saxham, his square face stony and set, moved with a noiseless, feline, padding step towards the prone victim. A gleam of apprehension shot into Julius Fraithorn's great dark eyes, reopening now to consciousness. They fixed themselves, with an instinct born of that sudden thrill of fear, upon the lightly-closed right hand. Instantly comprehending, Saxham lifted the hand, showed that it held no instrument save the stethoscope, and dropped it again by his side, drawing nearer. Then the massive, close-cropped black head sank to the level of Julius Fraithorn's breast, revealed in its ghastly, emaciated nakedness by the open nightshirt. The massive shoulders bowed, the supple body curved, the keen

ear joined itself to the heaving surface. In a moment more the agonising, hacking, rending cough came on. Julius battled for air. Raising him deftly and tenderly, Saxham signed to the nurse, who hurried to him, answering his low questions in whispers, giving aid where he indicated it required.

Steadily, patiently, the binaural stethoscope travelled over the lung area, gathering abnormal sounds, searching for silent spaces, sucking evidence into the assimilative brain behind the eyes that saw nothing but the man upon the bed, the locked human casket housing the secret that was slowly, surely coming to light. In the fierce determination to gain it, he threw the stethoscope away, and glued his avid ear to the man again.

"Toch! but I wouldna' have missed this for a kittie o' Kruger sovereigns!" the Chief Medical Officer whispered to his colleague from Meath. And McFadyen whispered back:

"Nor me, for your shoes. 'Ssh!"

Saxham was lifting up the great stooping shoulders, and beginning to speak in a voice totally different from that of the man known in Gueldersdorp as the Dop Doctor. Clear, ringing, concise, the sentences left his lips:

"Gentlemen, I invite your attention to a case of involuntary simulation of the symptoms distinguishing pulmonary tuberculosis by a patient suffering from a grave disease of totally different and possibly much less malignant character. Oblige me by stepping nearer!"

They crowded about the bed like eager students.

"In order to show what false conclusions loose modes of reasoning and the habitual reliance upon precedent may lead to, take the instance of the consulting physician to whom some years ago this young man, now barely thirty, and reduced, as you may see for yourselves, to the final extremity of physical decline, resorted."

"I would gie five shillin' if the man could hear his ain judgment!" murmured the Chief Medical Officer; for he had gleaned from a whispered answer of Julius's the omnipotent name of Sir Jedbury Fargoe. "Toch!" He chuckled dryly. Saxham went on:

"The consulting patient suffers from cough, painful and racking, from impaired digestive power, from increasing debility, fever, and night-sweats. He visits the specialist, convinced that he is consumptive, he receives confirmation of his convictions, and you see him to-day presenting the appearance, and reproducing all the symptoms of a patient in consumption's final stage. Possibly the germs of tuberculosis may be dormant in his organisation, waiting the opportunity to develop into activity! Possibly—a very remote possibility—the disease may have already attacked some organ of his body! But—and upon this point I can take my stand with the confidence of absolute certainty—the lungs of this so-called pulmonary sufferer are absolutely sound!"

"My certie! Send I may live to foregather wi' Sir Jedbury Fargoe!" the Chief Medical Officer prayed inaudibly. "He will gang to the next International Consumption Congress wi' a smaller conceit of himsel', or my name's no Duncan Taggart!"

The lecturer, absorbed in his subject, lifted his hand to silence the murmur, and pursued:

"From what disease, then, is this man suffering? Logical and progressive conclusions drawn from experience, and based upon the local enlargement which the physicians previously consulted have apparently failed to perceive, lead me to diagnose the presence of a tumour in the mediastinum, extending its claws into the lungs, and seriously impeding their action and the action of the heart. An operation, serious and necessarily involving danger, is imperative. The growth may be benign or malignant; in the latter case I doubt whether the life of the patient is to be saved. But in the former case he has good hopes. Understand, I speak with certainty. Upon the presence of the growth, simple or otherwise, I am ready to stake my credit, my good name, my professional reputation——"

Ah! It rushed upon Saxham with a sickening shock of recollection that he was bankrupt in these things, and shame and anger strove for the mastery in his face, and anguish wrung a sob from him, despite his iron composure.

He wrenched at the collar about his swelling throat, as he turned away blindly towards the window, seeing nothing, fighting desperately with the horrible despair that had gripped him, and the mad, wild frenzy of yearning for the old, glorious life of strenuous effort and conscious power. Lost! lost! all that had been won.

"I ... I had forgotten ...!" he muttered; and then a hard, vigorous hand found his and gripped it.

"Go on forgetting, Saxham!" said a voice in his ear—a voice he knew, instantly steadying—such virtue is there in honest, heartfelt, comprehending sympathy between man and his fellow-man—the spinning

brain, and quieting the leaping pulses, and giving him back, as nothing else could have done, his lost self-control. "You have earned the right!"

"Man, you're a wonder!" groaned the enraptured Chief Medical Officer. He added, with a relapse into the national caution: "That is, ye will be if your prognosis proves correc'. But the Taggarts are a' of the canny breed of Doobtin' Tammas, an sae I'll just keep a calm sugh till I see what the knife lays bare."

"Use the knife now, sir. At once—without delay!"

It was the weak, muffled voice of the patient on the bed. Saxham wheeled sharply about, and the stern blue eyes and the great lustrous pleading brown ones, looked into each other.

The pale Julius spoke again:

"I entreat you, Doctor!"

Saxham spoke in his curt way:

"You are aware that there is risk?"

Julius Fraithorn stretched out his transparent hands.

"What risk can there be to a man in my state? Look at these; and did I not hear you say ..."

"Whatever I may have said, sir, and however urgent I may admit the necessity for immediate operation, you must wait until to-morrow morning."

"I am fasting, sir, and fed. I received Holy Communion this morning, and have not yet breakfasted."

The return of the chart-nurse followed by a probationer carrying a laden tray provoked an

exclamation from the little Irishman.

"Signs on it, the boy's as empty as a drum. The devil a wonder he went off like he did a bit back. And you can't deny him, Saxham?"

"I wad gie him the chance, Saxham"—this from Surgeon-Major Taggart—"in your place; and maybe I'm putting in six worrds for mysel' as well as half a dozen for the patient. For I have an auld bone to pyke wi' Sir Jedbury Fargoe, aboot a Regimental patient he slew for me, three years back, wi' his jawbone of a Philistine ass."

Saxham spoke to Fraithorn authoritatively, kindly.

"You have no near relative to sign the Hospital Register?"

"My family are all in England, sir. I have not thought it necessary to distress them with the knowledge of my state."

"I think Lady Hannah Wrynche, who is now in Gueldersdorp, happens to be an acquaintance of theirs, if not a friend?"

Julius turned eagerly to the Colonel.

"It is true, she did come here yesterday. But I should hardly wish ... Surely, being of mature age and in the full possession of all my faculties"—there was a smile on the pale lips—"I may be allowed to sign the book myself?"

The doctors interchanged a look. The Colonel said to the patient:

"Mr. Fraithorn, if the idea is not unwelcome to you, I myself will sign the book, and"—he stooped over the

bed and laid his hard, soldierly hand kindly on the pale one—"in the event of a less fortunate termination than that we hope for"—the faces of the three surgeons were a study in inscrutability—"I will communicate, as soon as any communication is rendered possible, with the Bishop and Mrs. Fraithorn."

The cough shook Julius as a terrier shakes a rat before he could gasp out:

"Thank you, sir. With all my heart I thank you!"

"You shall thank me when you get well!" The Chief shook the pale hand, crossed the bare boards to Saxham, who stood staring at them sullenly, and took him by the arm. They went out of the ward together, talking in low tones. The medical officers followed. Then the chart-nurse and the probationer who had been banished with the tray, came bustling back with towels, and razors, and a soapy solution in a basin, having a carbolic smell.

Dr. Saxham had gone to take a disinfecting bath, the nurse said, as she went about her minute preparations; and the Commanding Officer had gone with the Staff, and now her poor dear must let himself be got ready.

They wrapped the gaunt skeleton in a white blanket-robe with a heavy monkish cowl to it, and drew thick padded blanket-stockings over the ligament-tied, skin-covered bones that served the wasted wretch for legs, and wheeled in a high, narrow, rubber-wheeled, leather-cushioned stretcher, and laid him on it, light to lift, a very handful of humanity, and wheeled him, hooded and head-first, through the tile-floored passage and out into the golden African

sunshine, that baked him gloriously through the coverings, and so into the main building and down a tile-floored passage there.

He prayed silently as he was wheeled, with blinded, cowled eyes, through double doors at the end....

XXVI

The operation was over, and the two Celts, self-appointed to the temporary posts of assistant-surgeon and anæsthetist, expressed their emotions in characteristic manner....

"Twelve minutes to a second between the first incision an' the last stitch.... Och, Owen, the jewel you are! Give me the loan of your fist, man, this minute."

"What price Sir Jedbury Fargoe the noo? The auld-farrant, scraichin', obstinate grey gander. A hand I will tak' at him ower the head o' this, or I'm no Taggart of Taggartshowe. Speaking wi' seriousness, Saxham, it was a pretty operation, an' performed wi' extraordinary quickness. And I'm sorry there are no' a baker's dozen o' patients for ye to deal wi'. It's a gran' treat to see a borrn genius use the knife."

"You could have done it yourself, Major, in less time."

"Maybe I could, and maybe I couldna! I doubt but we Army billies are better at puttin' men thegither than at takin' them to pieces in the long run.... Gently

now, porter, wi' liftin' the patient.... Ay, McFadyen, that's richt, gie the man a hand. See to him, Saxham, is he no' fine to luik at? A wheen blue an' puffy, but the pulse is better than I would have expeckit. Wheel him awa', nurse; he'll no come round for another hour...."

They wheeled him away, back to the distant ward. The porter followed. The three surgeons standing by that grim table in the rubber-floored central space of the amphitheatre, fenced in by students' benches, vacant save for half a dozen whispering dressers, looked at one another. Bloused and aproned with sterilised material, masked, rubber-gloved, and slippered, and splashed with the same ominous stains that were on the table and upon the floor, Saxham's heavy-shouldered figure was as ominous and sinister as ever played a part in mediæval torture-chamber, or figured in a nightmare-tale of Poe's device. You can see the other surgeons, bibbed and sleeved, the Irishman, small and dark and wiry, sousing a lethal array of sharp and gleaming implements in a glass bath of carbolic; Taggart, standing at a glass table, rubber-wheeled and movable, like everything else for use, and laden with rolls of lint and bandaging, and blue-glass bottles of peroxide of hydrogen and mercurial perchloride, daintily returning reels of silk-worm-gut and bobbins of silver wire to their velvet-lined case.

"You're no' fatigued? You would no' like a steemulant?"

Saxham started and withdrew his gaze. He had been staring with dull intensity of desire at the brandy-decanter, forgotten by the matron, whose usual charge it was. And the sharp blue-grey eye of

Surgeon-Major Taggart followed the glance to its end in the golden-gleaming crystal.

"Fatigued? I hardly think so!"

He laughed, and the others joined in the laugh, remembering the lengthy line of patients operated on in a single mid-week morning at St. Stephen's. And yet his steady hand shook a little, and a curious soft, subtle dulness of sensation was stealing over him. He had gone to bed sober, had risen after three hours of blessed, unexpected, helpful sleep, to battle with his desperate craving until morning. When the old woman left in charge of the housekeeping arrangements had come to his door with hot water and his usual breakfast—a mug of strong coffee with milk and a roll—he had gulped down the reviving, steadying draught thirstily, and swallowed a mouthful or two of the bread; and when he was shaved and tubbed and clothed in the shabby white drill suit, had gone down to the dispensary and mixed himself a dose of chloric ether and strychnine, strong enough to brace his jarred nerves for the coming ordeal.

Not that Saxham habitually drugged: that craving was not yet known to him. But the habitual intemperance had exacted even from his iron constitution its forfeit of shakiness in the morning, and the rare sobriety left the man suffering and unstrung.

Looking about him as the dose began its work of stringing the lax nerves and stimulating the action of the heart, he saw that many of the drawers were open, a costly set of graduated scales missing, with their plush-lined box....

With a certain premonition of what would next be missing, he went into the surgery. A case of silver-mounted surgical instruments had vanished from a shelf, with a presentation loving-cup, given by admirers among De Boursy-Williams's patients to that gifted practitioner. A roll-top desk was partly broken open, but not rifled, the American boltlocks having defied the clumsy efforts of the thief, Koets, the Dutch dispensarist, who had cleared out of Gueldersdorp, under cover of the previous night, crossing, with the portable property reft from the accursed Englander, the barbed-wire fence that formed the line of demarcation between the British Imperial Forces and the Army of the United Republics. He had meant to wait yet another day, and take many things more, but the coming of those verdoemte soldiers of the Engelsch Commandant to fetch away the carboys of carbolic acid and the other medical stores had roused him to prompt action.

Later, wearing the brass badge of a Surgeon on the sleeve of his greasy black tail-coat, Koets ruled a Boer Field-Hospital, fearlessly slashing his way into the confidence of the United Republics through the tough, wincing brawn and muscle of Free Stater and Transvaaler. It speaks for the enduring qualities of the Boer constitution to say that many of his patients survived.

* * * * *

But the brandy in the decanter....

How it beckoned and allured and tempted. And the throat and palate of the man were parched with the desire of it. And yet, a moment before, with the toils about his feet, Saxham had wondered at the thought of these degraded years of bondage. He shook his

head sullenly as Taggart repeated his question, and went away to wash and get dressed.

Then he meant to shake off his companions and go where he could quench that inward fire. He loathed them as they followed, chatting pleasantly....

But above the hissing of the hot water from the faucets over the basins came presently another sound, most familiar to the ears of the gossiping Celts....

"Rifle-fire! Out on the veld over yonder." McFadyen's towel waved North. "Do ye hear it?"

"Ay, do I! First bluid has been drawn. And to which side?"

Boom!...

The Hospital quivered to its foundations at the tremendous detonation. Shattered glass fell in showers of fragments from the roof of the operating-theatre, as the force of the explosion passed beneath the buildings in a surging of the ground on which they stood, a slow wave rolling southwards, without a backward draw.

The lavatory door had jammed, as doors will jam in earthquakes. Saxham tore it open, and the three shirt-sleeved, ensanguined men ran through the theatre, strewn with the débris from the roof, and through the double glazed doors communicating with the passage, populous with patients who should have been in bed, pursued by nurses as pale and shaken as their stampeding charges. The rear of the Hospital faces North, and they ran down a corridor full of dust, ending in more glazed doors, and tore out upon the back stoep, wide and roomy, and full of

deck chairs and wicker lounges.

"Do ye see it? Ten thousand salted South African deevils! Do ye no' see it?" the Surgeon-Major yelled, pointing to a monstrous milk-white soap-bubble-shaped cloud that slowly rose up in the hot blue sky to the North and hung there, sullenly brooding.

"What is it, Major?" shouted Saxham, for behind them the Hospital was full of clamour. Nurses and dressers were running out into the grounds to listen and question and conjecture, the barely reclaimed veld beyond the palings was black with hurrying, shouting men, bandoliered, and carrying guns of every kind and calibre, from the venerable gaspipe of the native and the aged but still useful Martini-Henry of the citizen, to the Lee-Metford repeating-carbine, and the German magazine rifle of latest delivery to the troops of Imperial Majesty at Berlin. Men were clustered like bees on the flat tin roofs of the sheds at the Railway Works; men had climbed the signal-posts and were looking out from them over the sea of veld; the Volunteers garrisoning the Cemetery had poured from their temporary huts and dug-out shelters, and were massed on the top of their sand-bag mounds. A fair, handsome Staff officer, the younger of the two men who had accompanied the Colonel, went by at a tearing gallop, mounted on a fine grey charger, and followed by an orderly, while the pot-hat and truncheon of a scared native constable emerged timidly from the gaping jaws of a rusty water-cistern, long dismissed from Hospital use, and exiled to the open with other rubbish waiting transference to the scrap-heap; and far out upon the railway-line that vanished in the yellowing sea of veld an unseen engine screeched and screeched....

The Chief, in his pet post of vantage upon the roof of Nixey's Hotel, lowered his binoculars as the persistent whistle kept open. The lines about his keen eyes and mouth curved into a cheerful smile. The sound was coming nearer, and presently Engine 123 backed into view, a mile or so from waiting, expectant Gueldersdorp, and snorting, raced at full speed for her home in the railway-yard. Her driver was the young Irishman from the County Kildare, and her guard hailed from Shoreditch. And both of them had a tale to tell of what Taggart had called the Colonel's double surprise-packet, to a tall man whom they found waiting on the metals by the upper Signal Cabin.

"Six mile from the start, sorra a yard more or less, sorr! I sees a comp'ny o' thim divils mustered on the bog, I mane the veld, sorr—smokin' their pipes an' passin' the bottle, an' givin' the overlook to a gang av odthers, that was rippin' up the rails undher the directions av a head-gaffer wid a hat brim like me granny's tay-thray, an' a beard like the Prophet Moses."

"I sor 'is whoppin' big 'at myself, though we was two mile off when we picked the beggars out," the guard objected; "but 'ow could you twig 'is beard or that the other blokes was smokin'?"

"Did ye ever know a Dutch boss av any kind clane-shaved an' not hairy-faced?" was Kildare's just retort, "or see a crowd av Doppers gathered together that the blue smoke av the Blessed Creature was not curlin' out av their mouths an' ears an' noses, an' Old Square Face or Van der Hump makin' the rounds?"

"You thought the blokes on the metals was a workin' gang of our chaps at the fust go off," complained the

guard, "an' you opened the whistle to warn 'em!"

"He did that for sure," put in the Cardiff stoker. "But he was tipping me the wink while he did it, so he was; as much as to say he knew they were Boers all the time."

"Would they have stopped where they was, well widin range, av I had let on I knew they was a parcel av unwashed Dutchmen?" demanded Kildare hotly. "Would they have hung on as I pushed her towards thim—would they have stopped to watch me uncouplin' the two thrucks, smilin' wid simple interest in their haythen faces, av they had not taken me for a suckin' lamb in oily overalls that took themselves for sheep av the same fold?"

"They got a bit suspicious when we steamed orf," said the guard; "more than a bit suspicious, they did."

"They took the thrucks for the Armoured Thrain," recounted Kildare, with a radiant smile illuminating a countenance of surpassing griminess, "an' they rode to widin range, an' got off their hairies, an' dhropped in a volley just to insinse them they took to be squattin' down inside them insijious divizes, into what they would be gettin' if they put up the heads av them." He mopped his brimming eyes with a handful of cotton waste, not innocent of lubricating fluid. "Tower av Ivory! 'twas grand to see the contimpt av thim when the cowards widin did not reply. 'Donder!' says the gaffer in the tay-thray hat and the beard like the grandfather av all the billygoats. 'Is this,' he says, 'the British pluck they talk about? Show thim verdant English a Dutchman behind a geweer,' he says, an' that's what they call a gun in their dirty lingo—'an' they lie down wid all four legs in the air like a puppy that sees the whip.

Plug thim again, my sons,' says he, 'an' wid the blessin' av Heaven, we'll stiffen the lot!'"

"You could never hear him, so you could not, not at all that distance," the Cardiff stoker objected.

"Could I not see him, ye blind harper, swearin' in dumb show, an' urgin' thim to shoot sthraight for the honour av the Republics an' give the rooi batchers Jimmy O! Ga-*lant*-ly they respondid, battherin' the sides av the mysterious locomotive containin' the bloody an' rapacious soldiery av threacherous England wid nickel-plated Mauser bullets, ontil she hiccoughs indacintly, an' wid a bellow to bate St. Fin Barr's bull, kicks herself to pieces!"

"She did so, surely," affirmed the Cardiff stoker. "Surely she did so."

"Tell the Colonel 'ow the engine jumped right off the metals," advised the guard.

"Clane she did," went on Kildare jubilantly, "an' rattled Davis an' me inside the cab like pays in an iron pod. See the funny-bone I sthripped agin' the side av her!" He exhibited a raw elbow for the inspection of the Chief. "An' when Davis gets the betther av the rest av the black that's on him wid soft soap an' hot wather, there's an oi he'll not wash off."

"The brake-handle did that, it did so," said Davis, touching the optic tenderly. But Kildare was answering a question of the Chiefs.

"Killed! Wisha, yarra! av I'd left a dozen an twenty to the back av that sthretched on the bog behind me, it's a glad man I'd be to have it to tell ye, sorr. But barrin' they wor' blown to smithereens entirely, not a livin' man or horse av thim did I see dead at all, at

all. But the Sergeant an' the Reconnoithrin' Party will asy know the place—asy—by the thundherin' big hole that's knocked in the permanent way there, sizable enough to bury...." He paused, for once at a loss.

"Korah, Dathan, and Abiram," suggested Davis, who, as a Bible Baptist, had a fund of Scripture knowledge upon which he occasionally drew, "with their families and their pavilions and all their substance...."

"Av Cora was there," said Kildare, "she was disguised as a Dutchman, for sorrow an' oi I clapped on any human baste that was not a square-buttocked Boer in tan-cord throusers. Thank you, sorr, your Honour, an' good luck to yourself an' all av us! An' we'll dhrink your Honour's health wid it."

"We will so!" agreed Davis, as the sovereign, dropped into his own twice-greased palm, vanished in the recesses of his black and oleaginous overalls.

"Thankee, sir. You're a gentleman, sir!" the guard acknowledged, touching his cap and concealing the gold coin slid into his own ready hand with professional celerity.

"Begob! an' you might have tould the Colonel somethin' that was news," commented Kildare, as the tall, active figure stepped lightly over the metals and passed up the ramp, and 123 trundled on, and backed into the engine-shed amidst a salvo of cheers and hand-clapping.

The Colonel whistled his pleasant little tune quite

through as, the Reconnoitring Party despatched to the scene of the explosion, he went contentedly back to luncheon at Nixey's. True, Kildare had said, and as the Sergeant in command regretfully testified later, said correctly, that neither Boer nor beast had been put out of action by the flying débris. A poor reprisal had been made, in the opinion of some malcontents, for the act of War committed by the forces of the Republics in crossing the Border, in cutting the telegraph lines, and destroying the railway-bridge. But the moral result was anything but trifling, in its effect upon the Boer mind. The "new square gun" became a proverb of dread, inspiring a salutary fear of more traps of the same kind, "set by that slim duyvel, the English Commandant," and threw over the innocent stretch of veld outside those trivial sand-bagged defences the glamour of the Mysterious and the Unknown. No solid Dutchman welcomed the idea of soaring skywards in a multitude of infinitesimal fragments, in company with other Free Staters or sons of the Transvaal Republic similarly reduced.

No more boasts on the part of Brounckers, General in command of those massed, menacing, united laagers on the Border, seven miles from Gueldersdorp as the crow flew. No more imaginative promises with reference to the taking of the small, defiant hamlet before breakfast, wiping out the garrison to a rooinek, and starting on the homeward march refreshed with coffee and biltong, and driving the towns-people before them as prisoners of War. The desperate perils presented by the conjectural and largely non-existent mine were thenceforth to loom largely and luridly in the telegrams that went up to Pretoria.

"There's a lot in bluff, you know," that "slim duyvel," the Commandant of the rooineks, said long afterwards. "And we bluffed about the Mines, real and dummy, for all we were worth!"

So, possibly with premonition of the telegram that was even then clicking out its message at Pretoria, there was a note of satisfaction in his whistle out of keeping with the execution actually done, as Nixey's Hotel came in sight with the Union Jack floating over it, denoting that all was well. That flagstaff, with its changing signals, was to dominate the popular pulse ere long. But in these days it merely denoted Staff Quarters, and War, with its grim accompanying horrors, seemed a long way off.

A white-gowned European nursemaid on the opposite street-corner waved and shrieked to her deserting elder charges, and the Chief's quick eye noted that the small, sunburned, active, bare legs of the boy and girl in cool sailor-suits of blue-and-white linen twill, were scampering in his direction. He knew his fascination for children, and instinctively slackened his stride as they came up, abreast now, and shyly hand in hand:

"Mister Colonel ...?" The speaker touched the expansive brim of a straw sailor hat with a fine assumption of adult coolness.

"Quite right, and who are you?"

The small boy hesitated, plainly at a nonplus. The round-eyed girl tugged at the boy's sailor jumper, whispering:

"I *saided* he wouldn't know you!"

"I fought he would. Because Mummy said he

wemembered our names ve uvver night at ve Hotel ... when he promised ... about ve animals from Wodesia ... all made of mud, an' feavers, and bits of fur ..."

Memory gave up the missing names, helped by those boyish replicas of the candid clear grey eyes of the Mayor's wife, shining under the drooping plume of fair hair.

"Mummy was quite right, Hammy, and Berta was wrong, because I remember your names quite well, you see. And the birds and beasts and insects are in a box at my quarters. Come and get them."

"If Anne doesn't kick up a wow?" hesitated Hammy, his small brown hand already in the larger one.

"We'll arrange it with Anne." He waited for the arrival of the white-canopied perambulator and its fluttering-ribboned guardian to say, with a tone and smile that won her instant suffrages: "I'm going to borrow these children for a minute or so. Will you come into the shade and rest? I promise not to keep you long."

Beauvayse and Lady Hannah's Captain Bingo, relieved from lookout duty, and descending in quest of food from the Chief's particular eyrie on the roof of Nixey's Hotel, heard shrieks of infant laughter coming from the coffee-room. Knives, forks, and glasses had been ruthlessly swept from the upper end of one of the tables laid for the Staff luncheon, and across the fair expanse of linen, pounded into whiteness and occasional holes by the vigorous thumpers of the Kaffir laundry-women, meandered a marvellous procession of quagga and koodoo, rhino and hartebeest, lion and giraffe, ostrich and

elephant, modelled by the skilful hands of Matabele toy-makers. Tarantula, with wicked bright eyes of shining berries, brought up the rear, with the bee, and the mole-cricket, and, with bulgy brown, white-striped body and long wings importantly crossed behind its back, a tsetse of appallingly gigantic size....

"Oh, fank you, Mister Colonel," Hammy was saying, with shining eyes of rapture fixed upon the glorious ones; "and is they weally my own, my vewy own, for good?"

"Yours and Berta's, really and for good."

"And won't you"—Hammy's magnificent effort at disinterestedness brought the tears into his eyes —"won't you want vem to play wif, *ever* yourself?"

The deft hands swept the birds and beasts, with tarantula and tsetse, into the wooden box, and lifted the children from their chairs, as Captain Bingo and Beauvayse, following the D.A.A.G., came in, brimming with various versions of what had happened out there on the veld....

"I have other things to play with just now, Hammy. Run along with Berta now. You'll find your nurse in the hall."

Berta put up her face confidently to be kissed. Hammy, in manly fashion, offered a hand—the left—the right arm being occupied with the box of toys. As Berta's little legs scampered through the door, he delayed to ask:

"What are your playfings, Mister Colonel?"

"Live men and big guns, just now, Hammy; and

chances and issues, and results and risks."

The plume of fair hair fell back, clearing the candid grey eyes as Hammy lifted up his face, confidently lisping:

"I don't quite fink I know what wesults and wisks are, but I'd like to play wif the live men an' the big guns too sometimes ... if you didn't want vem always?"

"We'll see about it, Hammy, when you're grown up."

"Good-bye, Mister Colonel. And I would lend you my beasts an' fings, because I know you wouldn't bweak them?"

"See that Berta has her share in them meanwhile. Off with you, now!"

Later, in the seclusion of the connubial bedchamber, said Captain Bingo, dressing for dinner, the last time for many months, as it was to prove:

"What do you suppose was the Chief's next move, after the engine and tender got in, and the crowd hoorayed him back from the Railway Works? No use your guessin', though. Even a woman wouldn't have expected to find him playin' Noah's Ark in the coffee-room with the Mayor's two kids!"

"I like that!" said Lady Hannah meditatively, arranging the Pompadour transformation, not apparently the worse for the candle-accident of the previous night.

"Because you're a woman and sentimental," said her spouse, wrestling with a cuff-link.

"No; because I am a woman whose instinct tells her that nothing will seem too big for a man for whom

nothing is too small. And—what an incident for a paragraph!"

He grinned: "With headin's in thunderin' big capitals.... 'The Soldier Hero Sports With A Babbling Babe.... The Defender Of British Prestige At Gueldersdorp Puts In Half an Hour At Cat's-Cradle Ere The Armoured Train Toddles Out With The B.S.A.P. To Give Beans To The Blooming Boer!'"

She darted at him, caught him by the lapels ... made him look at her.

"It's true? You really mean it? The ball begins?"

"Upon the honour of a henpecked husband—before daybreak to-morrow, you'll hear the music."

She sparkled with delight.

"Oh, poor, unlucky, humdrum women at home in England, walking with the shooters, or lolling in hammocks under trees, and trying to flirt with fat City financiers or vapid young attachés of Legation! I shall take the Irish mare, and borrow an orderly, and ride out to see a Real Action!"

His round pink face grew long. "The devil you will!"

"The devil I won't, you mean. Why, for what else under the sky did I come out here but the glorious chance of War?" Her impatient foot tapped the floor. He recognised the warning of domestic battle, glowered, and gave in.

"Well, if you get chipped, don't blame me. There's about as much cover on a baccarat-table as you'll find on that small-bush veld."

"All the better for seeing things, my dear!" She gave

him a radiant glance over her shoulder as she snapped her diamond necklace.

"You'll see things you won't enjoy. Mind that. Unless the whole affair ends in sheer fizzle."

"I'll pray that it mayn't!"

"I'd pray to have you much more like the ordinary woman who funks raw-head-and-bloody-bones if I thought it would be any good!"

"My poor old boy, it's thirty years too late. You ought to have begun while I was crying in the cradle. And —I *was* under the impression that you married me because you found me different from the ruck. And besides—think of my paper!"

"Damn the rag! I think of my wife!"

She swept him a curtsy:

"Cela va sans dire!"

"And how a woman of your birth and breedin' can dream of nothin' else but doin' somethin' that'll make you notorious—set the smart crowd gabblin' and gapin' and crushin' to stare—is more than I can understand!"

She flashed round upon him. "You have the wrong word! Notoriety—any social *divorcée* or big-hatted music-hall high-kicker can have *that*—if only they've kicked high enough! Popularity is what I'd have if I could—and only the People can give it—as Brutus and Cromwell and Napoleon knew!"

He admitted that those old Roman johnnies who jawed in the Forum knew what they were about, but added that the Puritan chap with the wart on his

nose was a thundering old humbug, ending triumphantly: "And we whacked old Bony at Waterloo! And—suppose you stop a Boer bullet and get knocked out—where do I come in?"

She jangled out her shrillest laugh. "Behind the coffin as Chief Mourner, I suppose. And you'll tack on the orthodox black sleeve-band, and look out for Number Two. And choose the ordinary kind, who funks raw-head and all the rest of it, for the next venture. But I prophesy you'll be bored. It's settled about Sheila and the orderly?"

He nodded.

"Righto! but there'll be two troopers, not one. And you'll be under the Corporal's orders about range, and distance, and keepin' out of the hands of—the other side. You don't absolutely yearn to be killed or taken prisoner, I suppose?"

Her heart beat high at the latter-named eventuality. She saw London rushing to read of the thrilling seizure and the yet more thrilling escape of the Lady War Correspondent attached to H.I.M. forces on the Frontier:

Who got clean away, mind you, with complete information of the strategic plans of the General in command of the enemy's laagers, sewn inside her corsets or hidden in her shoes!

Bingo little dreamed of the definite plan seething under his little wife's transformation coiffure. It had matured since her meeting on the railway-journey from Cape Town with an interesting personality. A big, brown-bearded Johannesburger, with light queer eyes, who had been reticent at first, but more

interesting after his confidence had been gained.

Van Busch he had named himself. Of the British South African War Intelligence Bureau. That man knew how to value women. And he had proved them at what he called the risky game.

"With nerve and josh like yours, and plenty of money for palm-oil ..." Van Busch had said, and winked, signifying that there were no lengths to which a woman of Lady Hannah Wrynche's capabilities might not go. And he had slipped into her hand a card scrawled with an address where he might be got at *in case* ...

The pencilled oblong of soiled pasteboard was yet in a secret compartment of her handbag. By letter addressed care of W. Bough, Transport Agent and Stock-dealer, Van Busch was to be communicated with at a farmstead some thirty miles north.

The spice of adventure her palate craved could be had by corresponding with Van Busch through the man Bough. After that—— Well! She had her plan ...

She tied her husband's white tie, took him by the ears, kissed him warmly on each side of his large pink face, glowing with blushes evoked by her unwonted display of affection, and led him away to dinner, her mental vision seeing prophetic broadsheets papering the kerbs of Piccadilly, the ears of her imagination making celestial melody of those raucous yells:

"Speshul Edition! Hextry Speshul Edition! 'Ere y'are, sir; on'y a 'a'penny. SPESHUL!"

XXVII

For nearly two months, from dawn until dark, Gueldersdorp had squatted on her low-topped hill in a screaming blizzard of shrapnel and Mauser bullets. Never a town of imposing size or stately architecture, see her now a battered hamlet of gaping walls, and shattered roofs, and wrecked chimneys; staring defiance through glassless windows like the blind eyeholes in the mouldered House that once has held the living thought of Man. From dawn until dark the ancient seven-pounders of her batteries had banged and grumbled, her Maxims had rattled defiance from Kopje Fort, and the Nordenfelt released its showers of effective, death-dealing little projectiles. Scant news from outside trickled into the town. Grumer, with his Brigade, was guarding the Drifts, and when the Relief might be expected was now a moss-grown topic of general conversation in Gueldersdorp.

And within her girdle of trenches, stern, grimy, haggard men lived, cheek to the heated rifle-breech, and ate, and snatched brief spells of sleep, booted and bandoliered, and with the loaded weapon ready for gripping. Since the attack on Maxim Kopje had choked the Hospital with wounded men and dotted the Cemetery with little white crosses, nothing of much note had occurred. The armoured train had done good service, and the Baraland Rifle Volunteers had carried out their surprise against the enemy's western camp one fine dark night, helped by a squadron of the Irregulars, with eleven wounded, and the loss of six out of fifty fighting-men.

The Convent of the Holy Way stood empty and deserted in its shrapnel-littered garden-enclosure.

From east, west, north, and south the deadly iron messengers had come, making sore havoc of this poor house of Christ. "When the walls fall about our ears, Colonel," the Mother-Superior had declared, "it will be time to leave them." They were lacework now, with a confusion of bare rafters overhead, over which streamed, as if in mockery, the Red-Cross Flag. Grim figures, like geometrical problems gone mad, were made by water and gas pipes torn from their bedding, and twisted as if by the hands of giants in cruel play. The little iron bedsteads of the Sisters, and the holy symbols over them, were the only articles missing from the cells, revealed in section by the huge gaps in the masonry.

The Tabernacle of the chapel altar, void of the Unspeakable Mystery it had housed, fluttered its rearward curtains through the wreckage of the east wall and the cheap little stained-glass window, where the Shepherds and the Magi had bowed before the Virgin Mother and the Divine Child. Within sight of their ruined home, the Sisterhood had found refuge. An underground dwelling had been dug for them in the garden before an abandoned soft-brick-and-corrugated-iron house, formerly inhabited by one of the head officials of the railway, a personage of Dutch extraction and Boer sympathies, at present sequestered beneath the yellow flag of the town gaol for their too incautious manifestation; while his wife and young family were inhabitants of the Women's Laager. And from their subterranean burrow the Sisters carried on their work of mercy as cheerfully as though their Order had been originally one of Troglodytes, nursing the sick and wounded, cooking

and washing for the convalescents, comforting the bereaved, and tending the many orphans of the siege.

South lay the laager of the Refugees. To the westward within the ring of trenches and about a mile and a half from the town, was the Women's Laager, visited not seldom by the enemy's shell-fire, in spite of the Red-Cross Flag. Fever and rheumatism, pneumonia and diphtheria stalked among the dwellers in these tainted burrows, claiming their human toll. Women languished and little children pined and withered, dying for lack of exercise and fresh air, with the free veld spreading away on all sides to the horizon, and the burning blue South African sky overhead. Famine had not yet appeared among the Europeans, though grisly black spectres in Kaffir blankets haunted the refuse-heaps, and fought with gaunt dogs for picked bones and empty meat-tins, and were found dead not unseldom, after full meals of strange and dreadful things. Fresh meat was still to be had, though the cattle and sheep of the Barala had been thinned by raids on the part of the enemy, and poor grazing. Shell and rifle-fire not infrequently spared the butcher trouble, so that your joints were sometimes weirdly shaped. But they were joints, and there was plenty of the preserved article in Kriel's Warehouse and at the Army Service Stores. Tea and coffee were becoming rare and precious, the sparkling draught of lager was to be had only in remembrance; the aromatic beer was all drunk up, and the stone-ginger was three shillings a bottle. Whisky was to be had at the price of liquid gold, brandy was treasured above rubies, and served out sparingly by the Hand of Authority, as medicine in urgent cases.

You could get vegetables from the Chinaman, who continued to cultivate onions, cabbages, potatoes, and melons in the market-gardens about the town, imperturbable under shot and shell, his large straw hat affording an admirable target from the Boer sniper's point of view, as metaphorically he gathered his fat harvest of dollars from the soil. What you could not get for any amount of dollars was peace and rest, clean air, and space to stretch your cramped-up limbs in, until Sunday came, bringing the Truce of God for Englishman and Transvaaler.

The Hospital, like each of the smaller hospitals that had sprung from the parent stalk, was crowded. The operating theatre had been turned into a ward where the lane between the beds just gave room for a surgeon or a nurse to pass, and hourly the cry went up: "Room, more room for the wounded and the sick!" And among these Saxham worked, night and day, like a man upheld by forces superhuman.

"By-and-by," he would say impatiently, when they urged him to take rest, and would bend his black brows, and hunch those great shoulders of his to the work again.

"Ye have a demon, man," said Taggart, Major of the R.A.M.C., himself a haggard-eyed but tireless labourer in the red fields of pain. "At three o' the smalls ye got to your bed, and at six ye made the rounds, at seven ye were dealing with a select batch o' shell-fire an' rifle-shot casualties—our friends outside being a gey sicht better marksmen when refreshed by a guid nicht's sleep; at eight ye had had your bit o' breakfast, and got doon your gun an' gane oot for an hour o' calm, invigorating sniping on the veld before returning punctually at ten o' the clock to

attack the business o' the day, wi' a bag o' twa Boers to your creedit."

"I only got one, Major. The other chap hobbled down bandaged, upon crutches, to-day, and had a pot-shot at me as I lay doggo behind my particular stone. I put up my hat on a stick, and—see!" Saxham gravely exhibited a felt Service smasher with a clean hole through it, an inch above the lining-edge. "He's a snowy-locked, hoary-bearded, Father Noah-hatted patriarch of seventy at least, and very proud of his shooting, and I've let him think he got me this time, just to make him happy for one night. To-morrow he is to make the painful discovery that I am still in the flesh."

"Aweel, aweel! But I would point out to ye that Fortune is a fickle, tricksy jade, and the luck o' the game might fall to your patriarch in the antediluvian headgear to-morrow."

Then the luck of the game, thought the hearer, deep in that wounded heart of his, would not only be with the patriarch. And the great puzzle, Life, would be solved for good.

Taggart had said he, Saxham, had a demon. He could have answered that only by hard, unceasing, unremitting work, or, when no more work was there to do, by the fierce excitement of those grilling hours spent lying behind the stone, was the demon to be kept out. Of all things he dreaded inactivity, and though he would drop upon his cot in the tiny bedroom that had been a Hospital ward-pantry, and sleep the heavy sleep of weariness the moment his head touched the pillow, yet he would start awake after an hour or two, parched with that savage, unquenched thirst, and drink great draughts of the

brackish well-water, boiled for precaution's sake, and tramp the confined space until the grip of desire grew slack. But he had never once yielded since the night when a man with the eye and voice of a leader among men had come to the house in Harris Street and taken him by the hand.

Do you say impossible, that the man in whom the habit of vice had formed should be able to cast off his degrading weakness, like a shameful garment, by sheer force of will, and be sane and strong and masterful again? I say, possible with this man. You see him plucked from the slough by the strong hand of manly fellowship, and nerved and strengthened, if only for a little while, to play the game for the sake of that other's belief in him. Such influence have such men among their fellows for good or for ill.

You can see the Dop Doctor upon this brilliant November morning mounting a charger lent him by his friend, a handsome Waler full of mettle and spirit —oats not being yet required for the support of humans—and calling au revoir to Taggart as he rides away from the Hospital gates followed by an orderly of the R.A.M.C. in a spider, pulled by a wiry, shabby little Boer mare.

"The man rides like a fox-hunter," commented Taggart, noticing the ease of the seat, the light handling of the rein, the way in which the fidgety, spirited beast Saxham rode answered to the gentling hand and the guiding pressure of the rider's knee, as a sharp storm of rifle-fire swept from the enemy's northern trenches, and the Mauser bullets spurted sand between the wheels of the spider and under the horses' bellies.

Saxham spurred ahead, the spider following. The

bullet-pierced, grey felt smasher hat, a manly and not unpicturesque headgear, sat on the man's close-cropped head with a soldierly air becoming to the square, opaque-skinned face that had power and strength and virility in every line of it. The blue eyes, under their black bar of meeting eyebrows, were clear now, and the short aquiline nose, rough-hewn but not coarse, and the grimly-tender mouth were no longer thickened and swollen and reddened by intemperance. The figure, perfect in its manliness, if marred by the too heavy muscular development of the throat and the slightly bowed shoulders, looked well in the jacket of Service khâki, the Bedford cords and puttees and spurred brown boots that had replaced the worn white drills, the blue shirt and shabby black kamarband and canvas shoes. Looking at Saxham, even with knowledge of his past, you could not have associated a personality so striking and distinguished, an individuality so original and so strong, with the idea of the tipsy wastrel, wallowing like a hog in self-chosen degradation.

The Mother-Superior, coming up the ladder leading out of her underground abode as the horseman and the attendant spider drew near, thought of Bartolomeo Colleoni, as you see him, last of the great Condottieri, in the bronze by great Verrochio at Venice to-day. In armour, complete in the embossed morion, one with the great Flemish war-horse, he sat to the sculptor, the bâton of Captain-General, given him by the Doge of Venice, in the powerful hand that only a little while before aided his picked men of the infantry to pack and harden snow about the granite boulders of the mountains in the Val Seriana, and sent the giant snow-balls thundering down, crushing bloody lanes through the ranks of the Venetian cavalry massed in the narrow defile below, and

striking chill terror to the hearts of Doge and Prince and Senate.

Only the bâton was a well-worn staghorn-handled crop, Squire Saxham's gift, together with a hunter, to his boy Owen, at seventeen. It was one of the few relics of home that had stayed by Saxham during his wanderings.

He reined up now, saluting the Mother-Superior with marked respect.

"Good-morning, ma'am. All well with you and yours?"

She answered with unusual hesitation:

"All the Sisters are well, thank you. But—if you could spare me a minute, Dr. Saxham, there is a question I should like to ask."

"As many minutes as you wish, ma'am. It is not your day for the Hospital, I think?"

"Ah, no!" she said, with the velvety South of Ireland vowel-inflection. "We keep Wednesday for the Women's Laager, always. Many of them are so miserable, poor souls, about their husbands and sons and brothers who are in the trenches, or who have been killed, and then there are the children to be cared for and washed. Not only the siege orphans, but so many who have sick or neglectful mothers. It takes us the whole day once we get there."

Saxham dismounted as she stooped to seize the end of a blue cotton-covered washing-basket impelled from below by an ascending Sister. The spider pulled up under cover of the brick-and-corrugated-iron house vacated by the railway-official, as another

short storm of riflery cracked and rattled among the eastern foothills, and a whistling hurry of the sharp-nosed little messengers of death passed through Gueldersdorp. Some of them hit and flattened on the gable of the railway-official's house, one went through the leathern splashboard of the spider. Saxham moved instinctively to place himself between the closely-standing group of nuns and possible danger.

"No, no!" they cried, as one woman, their placid, cheerful tones taking a shade of anxiety. "You must not do that!"

"I know you are all well-seasoned," he said, looking at them with the smile that made his stern face changed and gentle.

"I am not so sure. The bullets come in the usual way of things. We take our chance of them," the Mother-Superior answered. But she pressed her lips together and grew pale as a faint cry came up from the subterranean dwelling, roofed with sheets of corrugated iron laid upon steel rails, and made bombproof with bags of earth. And Saxham, looking at the fine face, with its worn lines of fatigue and over-exertion, and noting the deep shadowy caves that housed the great luminous grey eyes, said:

"I think we must have you take some rest, or I shall be having my best helper on my hands as a patient. And that won't do, you know."

"No, it would not do," she said, looking fully and seriously at him. "And therefore I think our Lord will not permit it. But if He should, be sure another will rise up to fill my place."

"Whoever your successor might be," said Saxham sincerely, "she would not fulfil my ideal of an absolutely efficient nurse, as you do. So from the personal, if not the altruistic point of view, let me beg you to be careful."

"I take all reasonable care," she told him. "It is true, the work has been heavy this week; but to-morrow is Sunday, and we shall rest all day and sleep at the Convent. Indeed, some of us have taken it in turn to be on guard there every night, or nothing would be left us."

"I understand."

He knew how prowlers and night-thieves made harvest in the darkness among the deserted dwellings since Police and Town Guardsmen had been requisitioned to man the trenches. She went on:

"The upper story of the house is sheer wreck, as you may see, but the ground-floor is quite habitable. So much so that if the shells did not strike the poor dear place so often, I should suggest your turning it into a Convalescent Home."

"We may have to try the plan yet," said Saxham. "The Railway Institute is frightfully overcrowded."

"And," she told him, "a shell struck there yesterday evening, and burst in the larger ward."

"I had not heard of it," he said. "Was anybody hurt?"

"No one, thank God! But the fire was difficult to put out, until one of the Sisters thought of sand."

"It was an incendiary shell?" Disgust and contempt swelled his deep-cut nostrils and flamed from his vivid blue eyes. "And yet these Kaiser's gunners, in

their blue-and-white Death or Glory uniforms, can hardly pretend ignorance of the Geneva Convention. But—your question?"

"It is—Children!" She beckoned to the two nuns, who stood at a little distance apart holding the washing-basket between them. "I will ask you to go on slowly before me with the basket. I will overtake you when I have spoken to Dr. Saxham."

"Surely, Reverend Mother." One tall, pale, and thin, the other round and rosy, they were alike in the placid, cheerful serenity of their good eyes and readily smiling lips. "And won't we be after taking the bundle?"

"No, no! It is heavy, and I am as strong as both of you together."

"Very well, Reverend Mother."

They were obediently moving on.

"A moment." Saxham stopped them. "If you two ladies have no objection to a little crowding, the spider will hold both of you as well as the bundle and the basket of washing. At least, it looks like a basket of washing."

All three laughed as they accepted his offer, assuring him that his suspicions were correct. For neither Kaffir laundrywoman or Hindu *dhobi* would go down any more to the washing troughs by the river, for fear of crossing that Stygian flood of blackness rivalling their own, supposing, as Beauvayse once suggested, that there is a third-class ferry for niggers and persons of colour? And from the waterworks on the Eastern side of the town the supply had been cut off by the enemy, so that the taps of Gueldersdorp

had ceased to yield.

Old wells and springs had been reopened, cleaned, and brought into use for drinking purposes, so that of a water-famine there could be no fear. But the element became expensive when retailed by the tin bucketful, a bath a rare luxury when the contents of the said bucket might be spilled or thrown away in the course of the gymnastics wherewith the sable or coffee-brown bearer sought to evade the travelling unexploded shell or the fan-shaped charge of shrapnel. Therefore, the Sisters had turned laundry-women. You could hear the sound of Sister Tobias's smoothing-iron coming up from below, thump-thumping on the blanketed board.

"And where do you think we get the water, now?" the rosy Sister, in process of being packed into the spider, leaned over the wheel to ask.

"Not from the Convent?" Saxham thought of the strip of veld between there and the Hospital, even more fraught with peril than the patch he had just traversed, or the distance yet to be covered between the Sisters' bombproof and the Women's Laager, where Death, with the red sickle in his fleshless hand, stalked openly from dawn to nightfall.

"From the Convent, carrying it across after dark. And no well there, either, that you'd get the fill of a teaspoon out of"—a "tayspoon" it was in the rosy Sister's Dublin brogue—"and yet there's water there."

"But how——" Saxham began. The Mother-Superior shook her head, and the rosy Sister was silent.

"There is no mystery about the water at all. It is very simple." Standing there with her head held high and

the fine, free, graceful lines of her tall figure outlined by the heavy folds of the now worn and darned black habit, and her hands, still beautiful, though roughened by toil, calmly folded upon her scapular, she was as remarkable and noble a figure, it seemed to Saxham, as the golden sunlight could fall upon anywhere in the world. And besides, she was his right hand at the Hospital. A capable, watchful, untiring nurse—and beauty would have decked her in his surgeon's eyes if she had been physically ugly or deformed.

"There is no mystery whatever, only when the bombardment first began I thought of the waterworks, and that one of my first cares, supposing I had been General Brounckers"—she smiled slightly —"would have been to operate there. So I set the Sisters to work at filling every empty barrel and bucket and tub in the Convent with water from the taps. And as we happened to have plenty of empty barrels and tubs, why, there is water to be had there now, and will be for some time to come. Go now, my children."

The smiling Sisters waved their hands. The orderly saluted with his whip and drove on in obedience to Saxham's nod.

"Of course, the Sisters are aware," he said, meeting the Mother's grave glance, "that if it is quicker to drive, it is safer to walk?"

She nodded with the gay, sweet smile that had belonged to Lady Biddy.

"They know, of course. But danger is in the day's work. We do not seek it. We are prepared for it, and it comes and passes. If one day it does not pass

without the cost of life, we are prepared for that, and God's Will is done always."

"You are very brave," he said. It was the first time in his life that he had used the phrase to any woman, and the words came out almost grudgingly.

"Oh no, not brave," she told him; "only obedient." Her veil fluttered in the hot November breeze that bore with it the heavy fetid taint from the overcrowded trenches that ringed Gueldersdorp, and the acrid fumes of the cordite; though the air up here on the veld was sweet compared with the befouled atmosphere of the Women's Laager and the crowded wards at the Hospital, in spite of all that disinfectants could do. She went on:

"And we are very grateful to you for the lift. Sister Ruperta was on duty last night, and Sister Hilda Antony—the rosy Sister—is not as well as she would have us believe. Ah——"

With her grave eyes screened by her lifted hand, she had been watching the progress of the spider westward over the dun-yellow veld. Now the long wailing notes of the headquarter bugle sounded, in slow time, the Assembly, and in the same instant, from the Staff over the Colonel's hotel, where the red lamp signalled danger by night and the Red Flag gave its warning by day, the scarlet danger-signal fluttered in the breeze. Once, twice, again, the deep bell of the Catholic Church tolled. A dozen other bells echoed the warning, signifying danger by the number of their iron-tongue strokes to the threatened quarter of the town.

"'Ware big gun!" called the sentries. "West quarter, 'ware!"

The Mother-Superior grew pale, for the Women's Laager, towards which the little Boer mare was steadily trotting with the laden spider, lay in the menaced quarter, with a bare stretch of veld between it and the Camp of the Irregular Horse, whose white tents and dug-out shelters were pleasantly shaded by ancient blue gums, picturesque and stately in spite of broken boughs and foliage torn by shrapnel and seared by the chemical fumes of bursting charges innumerable.

"Will you not go down?" Saxham asked her.

She shook her head in reply, and stood with a waiting face in prayerful silence, not stirring save to make the Sign of the Cross. And as the long white fingers fluttered over the bosom of the black habit, the faint cry that Saxham's quick ear had heard before floated up from the populous depths below.

"What is that?"

Before the question had left Saxham's lips, the monster gun spoke out in deafening thunder from the enemy's position at East Point, nearly two miles away. The heavy grey smoke-pillar of the driving-charge towered against the sunbright distance, and simultaneously with the crack of the discharge, sounding as though all the pent-up forces of Hell had burst the brazen gates of Terror, and rushed forth to annihilate and destroy, the ninety-four pound projectile passed overhead, sweeping half the corrugated-iron roof from the railway-official's late dwelling with a fiendish clatter and din, as it passed harmlessly over the Women's Laager, and, wrecking a sentry's shelter on the western line of defences, burst harmlessly upon the veld beyond, blotting out the low hills behind a curtain of acrid green vapour.

"Get under cover, quick!" Saxham had shouted to his companion, as deafened by the tremendous concussion, and dazed and half-asphyxiated by the poisonous fumes, he strove for mastery with his maddened horse. This regained, he looked for the figure in the black habit and white coif, and knew a shock of horror in seeing it prone upon the ground.

"No, no, I am not hurt!" she cried, lightly rising as he hurried towards her. The tremendous air-concussion had thrown her down, and beyond a scratch upon her hand and some red dust on the black garments she was in nothing the worse.

"I don't know how I kept my own legs," Saxham said, laughing.

"It went by like twenty avalanches," she agreed. "And blessed be our Lord, excepting for the damage to the roof, no more seems to have been done. I can see the spider stopping near the Women's Laager." She peered out earnestly over the shimmering waste of dusty yellow-brown, and cried out joyfully: "Ah, Sister Hilda Antony and Sister Ruperta are getting out. All is well with them; all is well."

"But not with the washing."

Saxham had swung round his binoculars, and brought them to bear upon the vehicle and its late occupants. A grim smile played about his mouth as he handed her the glasses, and heard her cry of womanly distress as she beheld the fruit of late labour scattered on the veld and the Sisters' agonised activity displayed in the gathering up of sheets, pillow-slips, handkerchiefs, babies' shirts and petticoats, with other garments of a strictly feminine and private character. Her grave, discreet eyes

avoided his as she handed back the binoculars, but a dimple showed near the edge of the white coif.

"And now," Saxham said, glancing at his watch, "may I know in what I can be of service?" It had seemed to him that the Mother-Superior hesitated to broach the subject. Nor had he been mistaken. The dimple vanished. Her calm eyes became troubled, and she asked, with a slight catching of the breath:

"Yes, there was something.... Doctor, is it possible for a person to die of fear?"

He answered promptly:

"In circumstances like the present? Certainly. Undoubtedly possible. I have seen twenty deaths from pure fright since the bombardment began, and I expect to see more before the siege ends, or people get callous to the possibilities of sudden extermination that are afforded them a hundred times a day. Is the person to whom you refer a woman or a child?"

"A young girl——" she was beginning, when a buxom little figure, black veiled and habited like herself, rose up as if from the bowels of the earth.

"I vill look. But I can see nozing," she called to someone invisible below. "It must be that you vait until my eyes shall become more strong." She shaded them, newly brought from semi-darkness and blinking in the hot, white sunlight. The Mother-Superior hurried to her, saying with a note of anxiety in her usually calm voice:

"Sister—Sister Cleophée; is anything the matter?"

"*Mon Dieu!* It is ze Reverend Mozer!" ejaculated the

other, relief and joy expressed in the rapid movements of pliant hands and expressive eyes. "Nozing is ze matter, Reverend Mozer, if only you are safe."

"Quite safe, and so are the Sisters. Only the linen was upset."

"My 'eavens, but a miraculous escapement!" The supple hands and the expressive eyes and shoulders of Sister Cleophée made great play. "Me and Sister Tobias, 'ow we *pray* when we 'ear ze great gun, vith knowledge zat you and ze Sisters were upon the vay to ze Women's Laager. My faith, it vas terrible! Me, if I 'ad not make to ascend and learn how it go vid you, Lynette vould 'ave come running up to make discovery for herself. She behave like a little crazy, a little mad sing—I forget your vord for she zat have lost 'er vits! Sister Tobias and me, we 'ave to 'old 'er." The fine, expressive eyes went past the Mother-Superior, and lighted with evident relief on Saxham. "Ah, Monsieur le Docteur, it is incredible vat zat poor child she suffer. Madame 'ave told you——"

"Madame was about to tell me, my Sister," Saxham said, in his smooth, fluent French, "when you appeared upon the scene."

Sister Cleophée launched, unwitting of the Mother-Superior's gesture of vexation, into voluble explanations in that native language which M. le Docteur spoke so well.

Mademoiselle Mildare, the ward of Madame the Mother-Superior, was no coward. But no! the child had courage in plenty—it was the suspense that devoured her in the absence of the Mother, to whom Mademoiselle was most tenderly attached, that

reduced her to a state of the most pitiable. The Sisters left at home each day would talk of the work and the fine weather—anything to distract the mind, that presented itself to them—but now, nothing was of any use. When the Reverend Mother came back at nightfall, behold a transformation. Mademoiselle would laugh and sing and chatter. Her eyes would shine like stars, she would be happy, said Sister Cleophée, with dramatic emphasis and gesture, as a soul in Paradise. Next day, taking her guardian from her side, would bring the terrors back, find redoubled the nervous sufferings of Mademoiselle, to-day reaching such a height that Sister Cleophée felt convinced that something must be done.

"Ah, my Sister, if I could do anything!" the Mother-Superior said, with the velvet Southern Irish inflection in the breathing aspirate, and the soft melodious cadence that made her pure, cultivated utterance so exquisite. The voice broke and faltered, and a spasm of mother-anguish wrung the firm mouth, and as a slow tear dimmed each of her underlids and splashed on the white *guimpe* she put out her hand blindly, and the sympathetic little Frenchwoman took it in both her own.

"Reverend Mozer, you can do zis. You can bring Monsieur le Docteur to see Lynette. You can 'ave his advice upon 'er case, and you can——"

Another fusillade of rifle-fire, sweeping from the west over Gueldersdorp, brought a repetition of the faint moaning cry from below. Saxham consulted the Reverend Mother with a look. She bent her head in silent assent. He hitched the horse's bridle to what had been the gatepost of the railway-official's front-garden, as she signed to him to descend the ladder

leading to the Sisters' underground abode. And he went down to meet his Fate there.

XXVIII

The temporary Convent was a roomy trench dug out of the red gravelly sand, lined with the inevitable sheets of corrugated iron, and roofed with the same material, supported by a solid frame of steel rails. Wide chinks between the metal sheets gave admission to light and air, and earthen drain-pipes made ventilators in the walls. But the sunlight penetrated like spears of burning flame, and the air was stifling hot. The paraffin stove that heated irons for Sister Tobias smelled clamorously, and the droning of myriads of flies, not the least of the seven plagues of Gueldersdorp, kept up a persistent bass to the shrill singing of the little tin kettle. Later, when the April rains began, and the tarpaulins were pulled over the sand-bagged roof, tin lamps burning more paraffin did battle with Cimmerian darkness.

Saxham's professional approval was won by the marvellous cleanliness and neatness of the place, divided into living-room and dormitory by a heavy green baize curtain, that at the Convent had shut off the noise of the great classroom from the rest of the house. The curtain was drawn, hiding the little iron cots brought from the Sisters' cells, ascetic couches whose narrow wire mattresses must afford scant room for repose to double sleepers now, where all were crowded, and Conventual rules must be in

abeyance. The outer place held a deal table, the oil cooking-stove; some household utensils shining with cleanliness were ranged upon a shelf, and several pictures hung upon the walls. Upon a bracket the silver Crucifix from the altar of the Convent chapel gleamed against the background of a snowy, lace-bordered linen cloth. There were orderly piles of cleaned and mended clothes, military and civilian, the garments of sick and wounded male patients, who would leave the Hospital without a thought of the unselfish women who had foregone sleep to patch jackets and sew on missing buttons. There were haversacks of coarse canvas for the Volunteers, finished and partly made, with ammunition-pouches and bandoliers. And Sister Tobias stood ironing at the deal table, partly screened by a line of drying linen, while Sister Mary-Joseph turned the mangle, and the little brisk novice, her round cheeks no longer rosy, folded with active hands. The Dop Doctor's keen quick glance took note of the patient cheerful weariness written on the three faces, then rested on one other face there.

Its wild white-rose fairness had dulled into the pallor of old ivory. There were deep, bluish shadows about the eyes and round the mouth, and the hollow at the base of the throat, where the pulse throbbed and fluttered visibly, had grown deep. Her red-brown hair had lost its burnished beauty. It had become dull like her skin, and her garments hung loosely upon the form whose soft roundnesses had fallen away. But her eyes had changed most. Their golden-hazel irises had faded to pale bronze, the full, fair eyelids had shrunk, the pupils were distended to twice their natural size. She sat upon a stool in a corner, a slight girlish figure in a holland skirt and white cambric blouse-bodice, her slender waist

girdled with a belt of brown leather, the colour of her little shoes. Huddled up against the corrugated-iron wainscot of the rough earth wall, the obsession of fear that dilated her eyes and parched her lips shook her in recurrent gusts of trembling, whenever the guns of the Gueldersdorp batteries spoke in thunder, whenever the Boer artillery bellowed Death from the heights above. For since the great gun had spoken from East Point, Death's red sickle had not ceased to ply its task.

Some work, one of the coarse canvas haversacks made by the nuns for Gueldersdorp's enrolled defenders, lay at the girl's feet. Her right hand, horrible to see in its incessant, mechanical activity, made continually the motion of sewing. Her eyes stared blankly, unwinkingly at the opposite wall, and the gusts of trembling went over her without cessation. At a more deafening crash than ordinary, an irrepressible scream would break from her, and her hand would snatch at an invisible garment as though she plucked back its imaginary wearer from peril by main force.

"She sees nobody. She hear nozing when we speak—she vould feel nozing, if you should pinch or shake her. Was I not right, Reverend Mozer, to say it is time zat somesing should be done?"

The shrill whisper came from Sister Cleophée. The Mother-Superior made a sign in assent. Beyond words, her heart was crying—Oh, misery and joy in one mingled draught to have won such love as this from Richard's child! But her face was impassive and stern, and her eyes, looking over Saxham's great shoulder as he stood silently watching at the bottom of the ladder stairway, imposed silence on the busy,

observant, tactful Sisters, who continued their labours without a break, as the sewing hand went diligently to and fro, and the recurrent convulsive shudders shook the girl's slight frame, and the irrepressible cry of anguish was wrung from her at each ear-splitting shellburst. And yet, with all her agony of love intensifying her gaze, the Mother did not see as much as Saxham, who took in every detail and symptom with skilled, consummate ease, realizing the desperate effort that strove for self-command, noting the exhaustion of suspense in the dropped lines of the half-open, colourless mouth, the incipient mental breakdown in the vacant stare of the dilated eyes, the mechanical action of the stitching needle-hand, the convulsive shudder that rippled through the slight figure at each boom, or crash, or fusillade of rifle-fire that drifted over the shrapnel-torn veld and through the battered town. He threw a swift whisper over his shoulder presently, that only reached the ear of the Mother-Superior, standing behind him, her tall shape concealed from the sufferer's sight by his great form.

"How long has this been going on?"

She whispered back: "I am told ever since the bombardment began. Every day, and at night too, should duty detain me at one or another of the Hospitals."

He added in the same low tone:

"She has a morbid terror of death under ordinary circumstances?"

The Mother-Superior murmured, a hand upon the ache in her bosom:

"Not of death for herself. For—another."

His purely scientific attitude must have already abandoned him when he knew gladness that Self was not the dominant note in this dumb threnody of fear. But he wore the professional mask of the physician as he ordered:

"Let one of the Sisters speak to her."

The Mother-Superior glanced at the nun who was ironing, and then at the figure on the stool. The Sister was about to obey when the Boer Maxim-Nordenfelt on the southern position rattled. There was a hissing rush overhead, and as a series of sharp, splitting cracks told that a group of the shining little copper-banded shells had burst, and that their splinters were busily hunting far and wide for somebody to kill, the stitching hand dropped by the girl's side. A new wave of shuddering went over the desolate young figure, pitiable and horrible to see. Dull drops of sweat broke out upon her temples in the shadow of her red-brown hair.

"How are you getting on with your work, dearie?"

Sister Tobias had spoken to her gently. She moved her head and her fixed eyes in a blind way, and the stitching hand resumed its mechanical task, but she gave no answer, except with the shudderings that shook her, as a lily is shaken in an autumn blast.

Then Saxham stepped backwards noiselessly, climbed the steep ladder stairway, and stood waiting for the Mother-Superior in the blazing yellow sunshine, beside the post to which his horse was hitched. The Mother followed instantly. He was making some pencil memoranda in a shabby

notebook, and kept his eyes upon his writing, and made a mere mask of his square, pale face as he began:

"It—the case presents a very interesting development. The subject has at one time or other—probably the critical period of girlhood—sustained a severe physical and mental shock?"

The great grey eyes swam in sudden tears that were not to be repressed, as the Mother-Superior remembered the finding of that lost lamb on the veld seven years before. She bowed her head in silent assent.

"You would wish candour," Saxham said, looking away from her emotion. "And I should tell you that this is grave."

"I know it," her desperate eyes said more plainly than her scarcely moving lips. "But so many others are suffering in the same way, and there is nothing that can be done for any of them."

He answered with emphasis that struck her cold. "Some measures must be taken in the case, and without delay. This state of things must not go on." He saw that the Mother-Superior caught her breath and wrung her hands together in the loose, concealing sleeves as she said, with a breath of anguish:

"If she only had more self-control."

"She has self-control." He echoed the word impatiently. "She is using every ounce she has for all she is worth. She has used it too long and too persistently."

"I will say then, if she only had more faith!"

"I know nothing of faith," Saxham said curtly; "I deal in common-sense."

She could have asked if it were commonly sensible for a creature made by God, and existing but by His will, to live without Him? But she put the temptation past her. No cordial flame of mutual esteem and liking ever sprang up between these two, often brought together in their mutual work of help and healing. She recognised Saxham's power, she admitted his skill. But, as his practised eye had diagnosed in the beloved of her heart the signs of physical and mental crisis, so her clear gaze deciphered in his face the story written by those unbridled years of vice and dissipation, and knew him diseased in soul. She may have been fully acquainted with all Gueldersdorp had learned of him, going here, there, and everywhere, as was her wont, in obedience to her Spouse's call. But if so, she never betrayed Saxham. There was no resentment, only delicate irony in the curve of her finely-modelled lips as she queried:

"Am I so deficient in the quality of common-sense?"

"Madam," he said, "you have manifested it in each of the many instances where I have been brought in contact with you. But in your solicitude for this young girl you have shown, for the first time in my experience of you, some lack of good judgment, and have inflicted, and do inflict, severe suffering on her."

Her eyes flashed grey fire under her stern brows as she demanded:

"How, pray?"

"It is out of the question, I suppose," Saxham said coldly, "that you should slacken in your ministrations among the sick and wounded, and keep out of daily and hourly danger—for her sake?"

"Impossible," her voice answered, and her heart added unheard: "Impossible, unless I should be false to my Heavenly Bridegroom out of love for the child He gave."

"Then," said Saxham bluntly, "unless these recurrent nerve-storms are to culminate in cerebral lesion and mental and physical collapse—a result more easy to avert than to deal with—take the girl about with you."

"But——" the Mother uttered in irrepressible dismay. "I—we go everywhere!"

It was most true. He had a vision, as she said it, of the black-robed, white-coifed, cheerful Sisters passing in couples through the shrapnel-littered streets, between houses of gaping walls, and shattered roofs, and glassless windows, cheerful, serene, helpful, bringing comfort to the dying, and assistance to the sick, oblivious of whistling bullets and bursting shells. And the most arduous duties, the most repulsive tasks, the most danger-fraught errands, were hers, always by right, and claim, and choice. What a woman it was! A very Judith in Israel. He knew that Judith did not like him, but unconcealed admiration was in his blue eyes as he looked at her.

"I know it. Let *her* go everywhere. It is the sole chance, and—you spoke of faith just now.... If you

have it for yourself and the religious women of your Order, who go about doing good in confidence of the protection—I do not speak in mockery—of an Almighty Hand, why can't you have it for her?"

She had never seemed so noble in his eyes as when she took that implied rebuke of his, with meek bending of her proud head, and candid self-condemnation in the eyes that were lowered and then raised to his, and beautiful humility in her speech:

"Sir, your reproach is just; it is I who have been lacking in faith. And—it shall be as you advise."

The distant bugle blared out its warning. The bell tolled twice, stopped, and tolled four; the smaller bells echoed. The voices of the sentries came to their ears, loudly at first, then more distant, then reduced to the merest spider-thread of sound:

"'Ware big gun! South quarter, 'ware!"

"I must go to her," the Mother-Superior said, and passed him swiftly and went down the ladder. Saxham followed. The white figure on the stool had not stirred, apparently. Its blank eyes still stared at the wall, and the mechanical hand moved, sewing at nothing, as diligently as ever.

"Lynette!"

The fixed, blindly-staring eyes came to life. Colour throbbed back into the wan ivory cheeks. The mouth lost its vacant droop. She rose up from the stool with a joyful cry, and, stumbling in her haste, ran into the outstretched arms. As they wrapped about her, clinging to her sole earthly friend and guardian as though she could never let go, came the crash of the

driving-charge, the yelling Brocken-hunt of the passage of the huge projectile, the ear-splitting din of the shellburst. She lifted up a radiant face of laughing defiance, and then choked and quivered and burst out crying, leaning her panting young bosom against the black habit, and weeping as though her whole being must dissolve, Undine-like, in tears.

Ah, the lovely feminine woman who weeps and clings! She will never lose her dominion over the sons of men. The appealing glances of her beautiful wet eyes melt the stoniest male hearts, the soft tendril-like wreathing of her arms about the pillar of salt upon the Plain would have had power to change it back into a breathing human being once more, if Lot had looked back, instead of his helpmeet. Her sterner sisters may feel as keenly, love as tenderly, sorrow even more bitterly than she. Who will believe it among the sons of dead old Adam, who first felt the heaving bosom pant against his own, and saw the first bright tear-showers fall—forerunners of what oceans of world-sorrow to be shed hereafter, when the Angel of the flaming sword drove the peccant pair from Paradise. Ah, the fair, weak woman who weeps and clings!

And Owen Saxham, watching Lynette from the ladder-foot, and the Mother-Superior, clasping her and murmuring soft comfort into the delicate, fragile ear under the heaped waves of red-brown hair, shared the same thought.

How this trembling, vibrating, emotional creature will love one day, when the man arrives to whom imperious Nature shall bid her render up her all!

In whom, prayed the unselfish mother-heart, willing

to be bereft of even the Heaven-sent consolation for the sake of the beloved, in whom may she find not only the earthly mate-fellow, but the kindred soul. For, all-pitying Mother of Mercy! should she, too, be doomed to stake all upon a wavering, unstable, headlong Richard, what will happen then?

Looking at the pair, Saxham thought of Ruth and Naomi. Lynette's tears had been dried quickly, like all joy-drops that the eyes shed. She was talking low and earnestly, pleading her cause with clinging hands and wistful looks and coaxing tones that were broken sometimes by a sob and sometimes by a little peal of girlish laughter.

"Mother, I am not made of sugar to be melted in the sun, or Dresden china to be broken. I am strong enough to take my share of the work; I am brave enough to bear anything—anything," she urged, "if only I may be with you. But to sit cooped up here day after day, safe and sheltered, sewing powder-bags or giving Katie French lessons, or helping Sister Tobias, and listening to the guns"—the blood fled from her cheeks and the great pupils of her eyes dilated until they looked all black in her face of whiteness—"the dreadful guns, and wondering where you are when the shells are bursting"—her voice rose in anguish—"I can't bear it! Mother, do you hear?" She threw her beautiful head back entreatingly, and the pulses in her white throat throbbed under Saxham's eyes, and her slight hands were desperate in their clutch upon the arms that held her. "I want my share of the risk, whatever it is. I will have it! It is my right. I have tried to be good and patient, but I can't, I can't, I can't stand this any more!"

Her voice broke upon a sob, and Saxham said from

the doorway that was filled by his great shoulders from post to post:

"You will not have to stand it any more. The Reverend Mother has reconsidered her decision. She will take you to the Hospital and elsewhere from to-day."

The man's curt manner and authoritative tone brought Lynette for the first time to knowledge of his presence. Her glance went to him, and joy was mingled with surprise in the face she turned towards the Mother-Superior.

"Really, Mother?"

The Mother-Superior, though her own still face had flushed with quick, irrepressible resentment at Saxham's tone, said cheerfully:

"It is true, my child. Dr. Saxham thinks it will be best for you. Dr. Saxham, this is my ward, Miss Mildare."

Saxham made his little brusque bow. Lynette, bending her lovely head, gave a grateful glance at the khâki-clad figure with the great hulking shoulders, standing under the patch of hot blue sky that the top of the ladder vanished in, and a strange shock and thrill went through the man's whole frame. His odd, gentian-coloured eyes under the heavy thunder-cloud of black eyebrows lightened so suddenly in reply that the girl felt repelled and half frightened. She was conscious of a curious oppression. As for Saxham, a delicate, stinging fire ran newly in his veins. Something stirred in the secret depths of him, and came to life with an awakening thrill exquisitely poignant and sweet. For this slight, unsophisticated, Convent-bred creature,

slender as a lily, reared in innocence among the blameless, was rich as her frail, lovely mother had been before her in the mysterious allure of sex. Beautiful Lady Bridget-Mary at the zenith of her stately beauty had never possessed one-tenth of the seductive charm that emanated from this young girl. Thoughts of the stored-up golden honey seen gleaming through the translucent waxen cells of the virgin comb made the senses reel as you looked at her, if you were man born of woman, with your passions alive and keen-edged in you, and your blood had not lost the lilt of the song that it has sung in healthy veins of sons of Adam since the Woman was made for and given to the Man. For Artemis may invite, if unconsciously, the hot pursuit of the hunter; the shy, close-folded nymph among the sedges may awaken the primal desire of Pan among the reeds.... Saxham, even in the years of his degradation, had scarcely sunk to the level of the crook-shinned, hairy-thighed, hoofed satyr. But he had built his nest with the birds of night, and slaked his thirst at impure sources, and only now did he realise how his mad dream of vengeance upon the Power that had cast him down and wrecked his future was to recoil upon himself. "I have done with Love," he had said, "and with Hope, and with Life as it is known of the honourable and the upright and the cleanly among men for ever!"

And now ... his thoughts were tipped with fire as he drank in the suddenly-awakened, vivid, delicate beauty of Lynette Mildare. Now he realised the depths of his own mad folly. Oh, to have had the right to hope again, to love again, to live again, and be grateful to David, who had betrayed him, and Mildred, who had deserted him—to this end! Oh, never to have lost the honourable claim to woo such

loveliness as this and win such purity, and wear both as a talisman upon his heart for ever! He drew breath heavily as he looked at the girl, transformed and glowing under the touch she loved, shining from within like some frail, transparent alabaster lamp with the light that he had helped to rekindle. And as his great chest expanded with deep draughts of the subtle, intoxicating atmosphere of her, and the blood hummed through his veins to that new measure, the last link of his old fetters fell clanking to the ground. And then, with a sting of intolerable remorse, came the memory of his shameful five years' Odyssey spent as a hog among other hogs of the human kind. It had not been an overthrow. It had been a surrender of all that was noble and strong in him to all in him that was despicable and weak and vile. And his soul shuddered, and his heart contracted in the sickening clutch of shame.

XXIX

He awakened from that lost moment of enthralment to the pang and the shock of self-discovery, and to the knowledge that somebody was hailing him by name from the top of the ladder.

"Saxham! Doctor! Are you below there?"

It was the gay, fresh voice of Beauvayse, halted with a handful of Irregulars, bandoliered, carrying their rifles and the day's provisions, wearing their bayonets on their hips, and sitting their wiry little horses with the ease of old troopers in the lee-side of

the piled-up mound of sandbags that roofed the underground convent. Five men and a Corporal of the Town Guard, similarly burdened and accoutred—we know the pale Cockney eyes and the thin face of the Corporal, whose freckles have long ago vanished in a uniform gingerbread hue—had also taken momentary shelter from one of the intermittent blizzards of Mauser bullets that drifted through Gueldersdorp.

One Irregular was sitting on an earth-filled packing-case, swearing softly, nursing a disabled right arm, and looking at the corded network of hairy, sunburned muscles that were delicately outlined in the bright red stream that trickled from beneath the rolled-up shirt-sleeve of raspy "greyback."

"We saw your hairy tied up outside, Doctor, and 'sensed' your whereabouts, as McFadyen says. Can the ladies spare you for a moment? Sorry to be a nuisance, but one of my fellows has got winged on our way to relieve the garrison at Maxim Outpost South, and though he swears he is as fit as a fiddle, I don't believe he ought to come on."

"I'm all right, Sir, 'pon me Sam I am!" protested the dismounted trooper. "It's a bit stiff, but the bleedin' 'll take that off. I shan't shoot a tikkie the worse for it. Lay anybody 'ere a caulker I don't!"

Nobody took up the bet, fortunately for the sportsman, as surgical examination proved that the bullet had gone sheer through the fleshy part of the upper arm, breaking the bone, just missing the artery, and leaving a clean hole.

"You'll have to go to Hospital, my man," pronounced Saxham.

The face of the wounded Irregular lengthened in disgust. "My crimson luck! And I'd made up my mind to pick off a brace o' them blasted Dutch wart 'ogs over that there bad job of pore Bob Ellis."

He blinked violently, and gulped down something that rose in his brown, muscular throat as the voice of a comrade, middle-aged like himself, coffee-baked as a Colonial, and also speaking with the accents of the English barrack-room, took up the tale.

"Bob Ellis was 'is pal, Sir, and mine, too. We was in the same battery of 'Orse Artillery at Ali Musjid, an' we went up along of Lord Kitchener to Khartoum. An' they shot Bob yesterday. Through the 'ead, clean, an' 'e never spoke another word."

"Through the loop-'ole o' the parapet, it was," went on the wounded man. "Bein' in the advance trench, we've got on neighbourly terms like, with the Dutchies, and Tom Kelly, wot 'as just bin speakin', 'eard Bob Ellis promisin' this bloke as 'ow if 'e'd on'y 'urry up an' git killed soon enough, Bob would 'ave 'is farm and 'is frow when 'e come marchin' along to Pretoria. 'Oppin' mad the Dopper was at that, an' the names 'e called pore Bob was something disgraceful. An' when 'e got Bob through the loop-'ole, me an' Kelly made our minds up to show a bit o' fancy shootin' and lay 'im out in turn. That's 'ow it was, Sir. An' now"—the voice grew shaky—"they've corked me. Corked me, by God I—an' there's not a bloke among the lot of us but me can play the concertina." With his undamaged arm he swung round his haversack, bulging at the top with a cheap, bone-keyed, rosewood-veneered, gaudy-paper-sided instrument of German make, and hung his head over it in silence.

"But what on earth has the concertina got to do with it?" Saxham was frankly puzzled, and Beauvayse, with all his professional knowledge of "Tommy," was for once nonplussed.

"You'd better explain to the Doctor, Corporal Leash. I'm out of the running when it comes to killing men with concertinas. And—you don't play as badly as all that, do you?"

"On the contrywise, Sir," explained the comrade Kelly, "plays uncommon well, he does—all the tunes of the latest music-'all and patriotic songs."

"An' them blasted Doppers are uncommon fond o' music, d'ye see, Sir," explained the wounded trooper. "They can't keep their ugly 'eads down behind the sand-bags when they hears it. Up they pops 'em over the edge and then—you take care they don't pop down no more."

The gay young laughter of Beauvayse was infectious, while white teeth showed, or teeth that were not white, in the tanned faces of Irregulars and Town Guardsmen. Even the mourning comrades grinned, and Saxham smiled grimly as Beauvayse cried:

"By George, a more original method of reprisal I never came across! But it's clear if you can't shoot with that drilled arm of yours you can't play the concertina. Wish I could knock a tune out of the thing, Leash, for your sake—enough to make a Boer put his head up. But I'm a duffer at musical instruments—always was. What do you say, my man?"

"Beg pardon, Sir." The Corporal with the Town Guardsmen saluted, making the most of his five feet

two inches. "I can pl'y the squiffer—I mean the concertina, Sir—a fair treat for a hammatore. And if I might be let to tyke this man's plyce at Maxim Outpost South, Sir, I could 'elp serve the gun, too, Sir—we've bin' attendin' Artillery Drill in spare hours."

"I shouldn't think you had any spare hours to spare?" Beauvayse looked at the thin, tanned face with liking, and the keen pale eyes met his fairly.

"We haven't, Sir, but we manage some'ow."

"But what about your own duty?"

"I'm tykin' these men over, Sir." He indicated a solid family grocer, a clerk of the County Court, a pseudo-Swiss baker, and two Navy Reserve men reduced to the ranks for aggressive intemperance of the methylated-spirit kind, which, in the absence of other liquor, had prevailed among a certain class, until the intoxicating medium was confiscated by Government.

"Captain Thwaite 'as spared us from the Cemetery Works to relieve Corporal Brice an' 'is little lot at Angle VII. South Trenches. A telephone-message come from our Colonel to say Brice's men was bad with rheumatism and dysentery—but Brice is all right an' fit, Sir—and"—the pale eyes pleaded out of the brickdust-coloured face—"I'd like the charnce o' gettin' nearer to the enemy, Sir—an' that's the truth."

Beauvayse conceded. "Very well. I'll square things with your commanding officer as we go along, and explain matters to the Colonel per telephone from Maxim Outpost South. Come on there when you've handed over your men to Brice."

The pale eyes danced. "Thank you, Sir."

"An' I'll owe you a dollar whisky-peg for the good turn," muttered the perforated musician, as he handed over the cherished concertina to the volunteer, "till next Sunday that I see you in the stad."

"Righto!" said Corporal Keyse, accepting the sacred charge.

"Look here, though," came from Beauvayse, "there's one thing you must remember—what's your name?"

"Keyse, sir—Corporal, A Company, Gueldersdorp Town Guard."

"Well, Keyse, you've heard Meisje hiccoughing ninety-four-pound projectiles all the morning, haven't you?"

"Couldn't possibly miss 'er, sir"—the pale eyes twinkled as the Corporal finished—"not as long as she misses me."

"She has a talent for missing, otherwise a good many of us fellows would have heard the Long Call before now. But most of her delicate little attentions—with the exception of one shell she sent over the Women's Laager, to show the people there that she doesn't mind killin' females and children if she can't get men—most of 'em are meant for Maxim Outpost South; and one of 'em may get home sometimes, when the German gunner isn't thinking of his sweetheart. Then, if you find yourself soarin' heavenwards in a kind of scattered anatomical puzzle-map of little bits, don't blame me for obligin' you, that's all."

There was a guffaw from the listeners. W. Keyse saluted, cheerfully joining in.

"I shan't s'y a word, sir."

"By George, I believe you!" said Beauvayse. "What's up? Seen a ghost?"

Saxham had swung his wallet round, producing carbolic, antiseptic gauze, First Aid bandages, and other surgical indispensables from its recesses, as by legerdemain, and a tall, stately black figure, followed by a tall, slender white figure, had risen from the bowels of the earth. The Mother-Superior, taking in the situation and the need of her at a glance, called a brief order down the ladder stairway, and went swiftly over to Saxham, whipping a blue apron out of a big pocket, tying it about her, and pulling on a pair of sleeves of the same stuff as she went. Lynette turned to take the basin of hot water that the arm of Sister Tobias extended from below, and the jaws of W. Keyse snapped together. Until he twigged the bronze-red coils of hair under the broad, rough straw hat, he had thought ... Cripps!

We know how the dancing, provoking mischievous blue eyes and adorable wrist-thick golden pigtail of Greta du Taine dwelt in his love-stricken remembrance. Her worshipped image had got a little rubbed and dimmish of late to be sure, but breathe on the colours, and you saw them come out clear, and oh! bewilderingly lovely.

Billy Keyse had never even beheld the enchantress since that never-to-be-forgotten morning when he had seen her pass at the head of the serpentine procession of pupils, slowly winding across the Market Square. But he knew she was still in Gueldersdorp. He felt her, for one thing. We know that in his case Love's clairvoyant instinct had got its

nightcap on. We saw Greta depart on the train bound North and branch off East for the Du Taine homestead near Johannesburg. But if she were not in Gueldersdorp, why did the left breast-pocket of the now soiled and heavily-patched khâki tunic bulge so? There were six letters inside there, tied up with a frayed bit of blue ribbon. Hers? 'Strewth, they were! And each what you might call a Regular One-er of a love-letter. Never mind the paper being thumb-marked as well as cheaply inferior, one cannot expect all the refinements of civilisation in a beleaguered town. It was the spelling that—although we know W. Keyse to be no cold orthographist—occasionally gave him pause as he perused and re-perused the greasy but passionate page. And why did she sign herself "Fare Air?" The sense of ingratitude pierced him even as he wondered. Why shouldn't she if she chose? What a proper beast he was to grumble! Him, that ought to be proud of her demeaning herself to stoop to a young chap in a lower station, so to call. And her a Regular Swell.

He hugged the letters against him with the arm belonging to the hand that held the concertina. Beloved missives, where was the worshipped writer now? Sitting by a tapestry-frame, for he could not imagine her peeling potatoes, down in the Convent bombproof, dreaming of him, weeping over his last letter, or blushfully aware of his vicinity, panting at the bottom of the ladder, listening for the beloved accents of the man who ... Hold hard, though! she had never heard the voice of W. Keyse; or he hers for that matter, but he would have recognised it among a thousand. He had told her so, writing with ink pencil, of the kind that when sucked in moments of forgetfulness tastes peculiarly horrible, and tinges the saliva with violet, at spare moments in the

trench. A phlegmatic Chinaman acted as Love's postman, handing in the envelopes that were addressed to Mr. W. Keyse, Esquer, in caligraphy that began in the top left-hand corner, and trickled gradually down into the right-hand bottom one. Pumping the Celestial was no use. John Tow sabee'd only that a fair foreign devil gave the one missive, with a tikkie for delivery, and 'spose one time Tow makee plenty good walkee back with anulla paper some pidgin bime-bye catchee more tikkie. If walkee back no paper, too muchee John catchee hellee, reaping only reproaches and no tikkie at all.

Judge how the heart of W. Keyse bumped against the concertina when the slender vision in the holland skirt and white blouse and broad straw hat appeared from underground. It was not she, though, Queen of heroic thoughts, inspirer of deeds of daring yet to be done, who followed the Mother-Superior.

It was the loveliest girl Beauvayse had ever seen, or ever would see. The girl who had stood up in defence of three nuns against a threatening gang of rowdy Transvaalers, one day in the Recreation Ground,—the girl who had passed as the Staff dismounted at the Hospital gate on the day of appropriation. The Mayor had had no chance of fulfilling his promise of an introduction. The Mayor's wife, with her two children, was an inmate of the Women's Laager. But at last the kind little genii that deal with happenings and chances had brought Beauvayse and his divinity face to face. Now she rose out of the Convent dug-out, in the waste that had been the railway-official's front-garden, like a fair white Psyche-statue, delivered in the course of some convulsion of Nature from the matrix of the earth. And she was even more exquisite than his remembrance of her, even more ...

Beauvayse descended abruptly from an empyrean flight of poetic imagery to remember his torn and soiled silk polo-shirt with its rolled-up sleeves, his earth-stained cords, girt with a belt of vari-coloured webbing, his muddy leather leggings and boots with their caked and dusty spurs, telling of hard service and unresting activity.

But he looked radiantly handsome as he leapt to the ground and came forward, his tall athletic figure, trained by arduous toil and incessant work until the last superfluous ounce of flesh had vanished, looking the personification of manliness, his tanned face, still clean-shaven save for the slight fair moustache, one to set any maiden dreaming of its straight clean-cut features and lazy, long-shaped grey-green eyes. The wide felt hat he touched in salute sat with a jaunty air on the close-cropped golden head. Here was a gallant, heartsome vision to greet Lynette, stepping after the Mother into that outer world, where fire belched warning from iron mouths, and steel destruction sped through the skies, and bullets sang like hornets past your head, or hit the ground near your feet, sending up little bushy columns and spirts of dust.

The wounded man, now carbolised, plugged, and bandaged by Saxham's dexterous hands, took the hastily-scrawled admission-order, included his officer, the ladies, and the Doctor in a left-handed salute, distributed a parting wink among his comrades, counselled W. Keyse in a hoarse whisper to go tender on the off-side G of the instrument he dandled, and trudged sturdily away in the direction of the Hospital.

"Thank you, ma'am. There's no stealing a march on

you," Beauvayse said to the Mother-Superior, touching his hat with his gay, swaggering grace, as she emptied a bowl of red water on the ground, and whisked the blue apron and sleeves back into the vast recesses of the mysterious pocket. "But you're spoiling us. Hot water isn't on tap, as a rule, for Field-dressings, and—and won't you——" He reddened to the fair untanned skin upon his temples. "Mayn't I ask, ma'am, to be introduced to Miss Mildare?"

The Mother complied with his request, smiling indulgently. She had known and loved this bright boy's mother in her early married days. The Dark Rose of Ireland and the White Rose of Devon, a noted Society phrasemonger had dubbed them, seeing them together on the lawn one Ascot Cup Day, their light draperies and delicate ribbons whip-whipping in the pleasant June breeze, ivory-skinned, jetty-locked Celtic beauty and blue-eyed, flaxen-locked Saxon fairness in charming, confidential juxtaposition under one lace sunshade, lined with what has been the last new fashionable colour under twenty names, since then; only that year they called it *Rose fané*. Richard Mildare had praised the sunshade, a Paris affair supplied by Worth with his creation, Lady Biddy Bawne's beautiful gown. He asked Lady Biddy to marry him at the back of the box on the Grand Stand when Verneuil was winning the Cup. Who shall dare say that he was not then a sincere lover? thought the Mother-Superior of the Convent of the Holy Way. And then she recalled her wandering thoughts, and turned them to the One Lover who never betrays His chosen. And her rapt eyes looking up, seemed to pierce beyond the flaming sky-vault overhead. She forgot all else, suddenly snatched from earthly consciousness to beatific realisation of the

Divine.

There had been for some minutes now a lull in the bombardment from the ridges. The enemy's guns were silent a space, and the hot batteries of harassed Gueldersdorp snatched a brief respite while Boers gathered for the nine o'clock coffee-drinking round their little snapping fires of dried dung and tindery bush. Now and then a rifle cracked, and a bullet sang past or whitted in the dust. But comparative peace brooded over the shattered hamlet of wrecked homes and ploughed-up, littered roads, and raw earthworks blistering in the pitiless sun.

"Miss Mildare." Beauvayse was speaking in that pleasant, boyish voice of his, standing close to Lynette, his tall head bending for a glimpse of the eyes of golden hazel, that were shaded by the broad, rough straw hat; "if you knew how I've waited for this. Nearly seven weeks since one day in early October, when I saw you on the Recreation Ground, where some brutes were annoying you, and a day or so later you went by the Hospital as I rode up with the Chief. But, of course, you don't remember?" His eyes begged her to say she did.

"I remember quite well." It was the voice he had imagined for her—low, and round, and clear, with just an undernote of plaintiveness matching the wistful appeal of her eyes. At the first sound of it a shudder of exquisite delight went through him, as though she had touched him with her slender white, bare hand on the naked breast.

"Thank you for not quite forgetting. You don't know what it means to me, being kept in mind by you."

"I do not know that I kept you in mind." There was a

touch of girlish dignity in her utterance. "I only said that I remembered quite well."

He bent his head nearer, and lowered his pleasant voice to a coaxing, confidential tone.

"You'll think me a presumptuous kind of fellow for talking like this, won't you, Miss Mildare? But the circumstances are exceptional, aren't they? We're shut up away from the big world outside in a little world of our own, and—such chances fall to every man and most of the women here: a shrapnel bullet or a shell-splinter might stop me before another hour goes by, from ever saying—what I've felt for weeks on end had got to be said—what I'd risk a dozen lives, if I had 'em, to get the opportunity of saying to you." His hot eagerness frightened her. Her downcast eyelids quivered, and her flushed maiden-face shrank from him.

"Oh, don't be angry! Don't move away!" Beauvayse entreated; for Lynette's anxious glance had gone in search of the Mother-Superior, with whom Saxham was now discussing the nuns' idea of utilising the Convent as a Convalescent Hospital. In another instant she would have taken refuge by her side. "If you knew how I have thought of you and dreamed of you since I saw you! If you could only understand how I shall think of you now! If you could only realise how awfully, utterly strange it is to feel as I am feeling!" His voice was a tremulous, fervent whisper. His eyes gleamed like emeralds in the shadow of the wide-brimmed felt hat. "And if I die to-day, it won't end there. I shall think of you, and long for you, and worship you wherever I am!"

"Oh, why do you talk to me like this?"

Lynette's whisper was as tremulous as Beauvayse's own. Her eyes lifted to the glowing, ardent face for one shy instant, and found it good to look upon. Men, young and not undesirable, had tried to make love to her before, at dances and parties and picnics to which she had been chaperoned by the Mayor's wife. But the first hot glance, the first word that carried the vibration of a passionate meaning, had wakened the old terror in her, and bidden her escape. The nymph had always taken flight at the first step upon the bank, the first rustle of the sedges. She had never lingered to feel the air stirred by another burning breath. She had never asked any one of those other men why he talked like that. Beauvayse went on:

"Perhaps I even seem a little mad to you—fellows have told me lately that I went on as if I had a tile off. Perhaps I'm what the Scotch call 'fey.' I've got Highland blood in me, anyhow. And you have set it on fire, I think—started it boiling and racing and leaping in my veins as no woman ever did before. You slender white witch! you fay of mist and moonlight, you've woven a spell, and tangled my soul in it, and nothing in Life or in Death will ever loose me again." His tone changed, became infinitely caressing. "How sweet and dear you are to be so patient with me, while I'm sending the Conventionalities to the rightabout and terrifying the Proprieties. Forgive me, Miss Mildare."

The pleading in his face was exquisite. She felt as a bee might feel drowning in honey, as she wreathed her white fingers together upon the silver buckle of the brown leather belt she wore, and said confusedly:

"I ... I believe I ought to be very angry with you."

His whisper touched her ear like a kiss, and set her trembling.

"But you're not?"

"I——"

She caught her breath as he came nearer. There was a fragrance from him—a perfume of youth and health and vitality—that was powerful, heady, intoxicating as the first warm, flower-scented wind of Spring, blowing down a mountain-kloof from the high ranges. Her white-rose cheeks took sudden warmth of hue, and her pale nostrils quivered. A faint, mysterious smile dawned upon her lips. Something of the old terror was upon her still, and yet—it was delicious to be afraid of him!

"Say that you aren't angry with me for being so thunderingly presumptuous. Please be kind to me and say it."

Her lips began to utter disjointed phrases. "What can it matter really?... Oh, very well, then ... if my saying so is of such ... importance...."

"More important than anything in the world!" he declared.

"Very well, then, I am not angry—not furiously so, at least." The bud of a smile repressed pouted her lips.

"And," he begged, "you'll let what I've said to you be our secret? Promise."

"Very well."

"You sweetest, kindest, loveliest——"

"Please don't," she entreated.

"And I may know your Christian name?" he persisted, "I've thought of everything in the world, and nothing's good enough to fit you."

"Oh, how silly!" Her eyes gleamed with laughter. "It is Lynette."

He caught at it with rapture. "Perfect! The last touch.... The scent of the rose, or say the dewdrop on it. By George, I'm in earnest!"

He had spoken incautiously loud. A grating voice addressing him pulled his head round.

"Lord Beauvayse ..."

"Did you speak to me, Doctor? As I was saying, Miss Mildare," he went on, continuing the blameless conversation, "dust-storms and flies are the twin curses of South Africa."

The harsh voice spoke to him again. He looked round, and met Saxham's eyes, hard and cold as blue stones. The Doctor said grimly:

"You may not be aware that your men are drawing fire."

It was undeniable fact. The bullets had begun to hit the ground under the horses' bellies, spirting little columns of dust and flattening against the stones. Coffee-drinking was over in the enemy's trenches, and the business of the day had begun again. Beauvayse bade the ladies good-morning, and swung himself into the saddle.

"Au revoir, Miss Mildare. Please get under cover at once." The proprietorship in the tone stung Saxham to wincing. "Good-morning, ma'am," he cried to the Mother-Superior, "we know you ignore bullets. So

long, Doctor. Hope I shan't count one in your day's casualty-bag. Ready, boys?"

The chatting troopers sprang to alert attention. W. Keyse, pensively boring the sandy earth with the pneumatic auger of imagination, in search of the loved one believed to inhabit the Convent bomb-proof, was recalled to the surface by the curtly-uttered command, and knew the thrill of hero-worship as Beauvayse threw out his lightly-clenched hand, and the troopers, answering the signal, broke into a trot. The hot dust scurried at the horses' retreating heels. Corporal Keyse, trudging staunchly in their wake with his five Town Guardsmen, became ghostlike, enveloped in an African replica of the ginger-coloured type of London fog. And the Mother-Superior looked at her well-worn watch.

"My child, we must be moving if you are coming with me to the Women's Laager. I am nearly an hour late as it is."

"I am ready, Mother dear."

Lynette's eyes came back from following that dust-cloud in the distance to meet the hungry, jealous fires of Saxham's gaze.

He had seen Beauvayse's ardent look, and her shy heart's first leaf unfolded in the answering blush, and a spasm of intolerable anger gripped him as he saw. He turned away silently, cursing his own folly, and unhitched his horse's bridle from the broken gatepost. With the act a crowd rose up before Lynette and a frightened horse reared, threatening to fall upon three women who were hurrying along the sidewalk outside the Hospital, and a heavy-shouldered, black-haired man in shabby white drills

stepped out of the throng and seized the flying bridoon-rein, and wrenched the brute down. She recognised the horse and the man again, and exclaimed:

"Why ... Mother, don't you remember the rearing horse outside the Hospital that day in October? It was Dr. Saxham who caught him, and saved us from getting hurt."

"And we never even thanked you." The Mother-Superior turned to Saxham with outstretched hand and the smile that made her grave face beautiful. "What you must have thought!..."

"I looked for the person who had been so prompt, but you had vanished—where, nobody seemed to know," Lynette told him with her clear eyes on the stern, square face. "And then a man in the crowd called out, 'It's the Dop Doctor!' And I thought what an odd nickname!..." She broke off in dismay. Saxham had become livid. His grim jaws clamped themselves together, and the blue eyes grew hard as stone. One instant he stood immovable, the Waler's bridle on his left arm, his right hand clenched upon the old hunting-crop. Then he said very coldly and distinctly:

"As you observe, it is a queer nickname. But, at any rate, I had fairly earned——"

The bugle from the Staff headquarters sounded, drowning the rest of the sentence. The Catholic Church bell tolled. The other bells took up the warning, and the sentries called again from post to post:

"'Ware gun, Number Two! Southern Quarter, 'ware!"

The Krupp bellowed from the enemy's north position, and cleverly lobbed a seven-pound shell not far behind that rapidly-moving, distant pillar of dust, the nucleus of which was a little troop of cantering Irregulars, and not far in front of the lower, slower-moving cloud, the heart of which was a little knot of tramping Town Guardsmen. The shell burst with a splitting crack, earth and flying stones mingled with the deadly green flame and the poisonous chemical fumes of the lyddite. Figures scurried hither and thither in the smoke and smother; one lay prone upon the ground....

At the instant of the explosion Saxham had leaped forwards, setting his body and the horse's as a bulwark between Death and the two women. Now, though Lynette's rough straw hat had been whisked from her head by a force invisible, he saw her safe, caught in the Mother-Superior's embrace, sheltered by the tall, protecting figure as the sapling is sheltered by the pine.

"We are not hurt," the Mother protested, though her cheek had been cut by a flying flake of flint, and was bleeding. "But look ... over there!" She pointed over the veld to the prostrate brown figure, and a cry of alarm broke from Lynette.

"Oh, Mother, who ...?"

"It is a Town Guardsman," Saxham answered, his cold blue eyes meeting the wild frightened gaze of the pale girl. "Lord Beauvayse and the Irregulars got off scot-free. Reverend Mother, do not think of coming. Please go on to the Women's Laager. I will see to the wounded man, and follow by-and-by."

He mounted, refusing all offers of aid, and rode off.

Looking back an instant, he saw the black figure of the woman and the white figure of the girl setting out upon their perilous journey over the bare patch of ground where Death made harvest every day. They kissed each other before they started, and again Saxham thought of Ruth and Naomi. If Ruth had been only one half as lovely as this Convent-grown lily, Boaz was decidedly a lucky man. But he had been a respectable, sober, steady-going farmer, and not a man of thirty-six without a ten-pound note in the world, with a blighted career to regret, and five years of drunken wastrelhood to be ashamed of. And yet ... the drunken wastrel had been a man of mark once, and earned his thousands. And the success that had been achieved, and lost, could be rewon, and the career that had been pursued and abandoned could be his—Saxham's—again. And what were his publishers doing with those accumulated royalties? For he knew from Taggart and McFadyen that his books still sold.

"The Past is done with," he said aloud. "Why should not the Future be fair?"

And yet he had nearly yielded to the impulse to own to those degraded years, and claim the nickname they had earned him, and take her loathing and contempt in exchange. What sudden madness had possessed him, akin to that unaccountable, overmastering surge of emotion that he had known just now when he saw her tears?

We know the name of the divine madness, but we know not why it comes. Suddenly, after long years, in a crowded place or in a solitude where two are, it is upon you or upon me. The blood is changed to strange, ethereal ichor, the pulse beats a tune that is

as old as the Earth itself, but yet eternally new. Every breath we draw is rapture, every step we take leads us one way. One voice calls through all the voices, one hand beckons whether it will or no, and we follow because we must. With the Atlantic rolling between us I can feel your heart beat against mine, and your lips breathe into me your soul. The light that was upon your face, the look that was in your eyes as you gave the unforgettable, immemorial kiss, the clasp of your hands, the rising and falling of your bosom, like a wave beneath a sea-bird, like a sea-bird above a wave, shall be with me always, even to the end of time and beyond it.

For there are many loves, but one Love.

XXX

A long-legged, thinnish officer, riding a khâki-coloured bicycle over a dusty stretch of shrapnel-raked ground, carrying a riding-whip tucked under his arm and wearing steel jack-spurs, might have been considered a laughter-provoking object elsewhere, but the point was lost for Gueldersdorp. He got off his metal steed amongst the zipping bullets, and came over to the little group of Town Guards that were gathered round Saxham, who had just ridden up, and their prostrate comrade, who writhed and groaned lustily.

"You have a casualty. Serious?"

Saxham looked up, and his hard glance softened in

recognition of the Chief.

"I'll tell you in a moment, sir."

The earth-stained khâki jacket was torn down the left side and drenched with ominous red. A little pool of the same colour had gathered under the sufferer.

"He looks gassly, don't him?" muttered one of the Town Guardsmen, the Swiss baker who was not Swiss.

"Makes plenty of noise," said the County Court clerk hypercritically, "for a dying man."

"Oh Lord! oh Lord!"

The subject had bellowed with sonority, testifying at least to the possession of an uninjured diaphragm, as Saxham begun to cut away the jacket.

"Oh, come now!" said a brisk, pleasant, incisive voice that sent an electric shock volting through the presumably shattered frame. "That's not so bad!"

"I told you so," muttered the County Court clerk to the Swiss baker.

"You remember me, Colonel?"

Haggard, despairing eyes rolled up at the Chief appealingly. He had met the gaze of those oyster-orbs before. He recognised Alderman Brooker, proprietor of the grocery stores in Market Square, victim of the outrage perpetrated on a sentry near the Convent on a certain memorable night in October last.

"Yes, my man. Anything I can do?" He knelt down beside the prostrate form.

"You can tell my country, sir, that I died willingly," panted the moribund.

"With pleasure, when you're dead. But you're not yet, you know, Brooker." His keen glance was following the run of the Doctor's surgical scissors through the brown stuff and revelling in discovery. And Saxham's set, square face and stern eyes were for once all alight with laughter. The dying man went on:

"It's a privilege, sir, an inestimable privilege, to have shed one's blood in a great cause."

"It is, Mr. Brooker, but this is different stuff." His keen face wrinkled with amusement as he sniffed, and dipped a finger in the crimson puddle. "Too sticky." He put the finger to his tongue—"and too sweet. Show him the bottle, Saxham."

The Doctor, imperturbably grave, held forth at the end of the scissors the ripped-up ruins of a small-sized indiarubber hot-water bottle, a ductile vessel that, buttoned inside the khâki tunic, had adapted itself not uncomfortably to the still existing rotundities of the Alderman's figure. A hyæna-yell of laughter broke from each of the crowding heads. Brooker's face assumed the hue of the scarlet flannel chest-protector exposed by the ruthless steel.

"What the—what the——?" he stuttered.

"Yes, that's the question. What the devil was inside it, Brooker, when the shell-splinter hit you in the tummy and it saved your life? Stand him on his legs, men; he's as right as rain. Now, Brooker?"

Brooker, without volition, assumed the perpendicular, and began to babble:

"To tell the truth, sir, it was loquat syrup. Very soothing to the chest, and, upon my honour, perfectly wholesome. Mrs. Brooker makes it regularly every year, and—we sell a twenty-gallon barrel over the counter, besides what we keep for ourselves. And if I am to be exposed to mockery when Providence has snatched me from the verge of the grave ..."

"Not a watery grave, Brooker," came from the Chief, with an irrepressible chuckle—"a syrupy one. And—have I your word of honour that this is a non-alcoholic beverage?"

"Sir, to be candid with you, I won't deny but what it might contain a certain proportion of brandy. And the nights in the trench being particularly cold and myself constitutionally liable to chill ... I—I find a drop now and then a comfort, sir."

"Ah, and have you any more of this kind of comfort at your place of business or elsewhere?"

"Why—why ..." the Alderman faltered, "there might be a little keg, sir, in the shop, under the desk in the counting-house."

"Requisitioned, Mr. Brooker, as a Government store. You may feel more chilly without it; you'll certainly sleep more lightly. As far as I can see, it has been more useful outside of you than ever it was in. And—the safety of this town depends on the cool heads of the defenders who man the trenches. A fuddled man behind a gun is worse than no man to me."

The voice rang hard and clear as a gong. "I'm no teetotaller. Abstinence is the rule I enforce, by precept and example. While men are men they'll drink strong liquor. But as long as they are not fool-

men and brute-men, they can be trusted not to lap when they're on duty. Those I find untrustworthy I mark down, and they will be dealt with rigorously. You understand me, Brooker? You look as if you did. You've had a narrow squeak. Be thankful for it that nothing but a bruise over the ribs has come of it. Corporal, fall in your men, and get to your duty."

W. Keyse and his martial citizens tramped on, the resuscitated Brooker flying rags of sanguine stain. Then the stern face of the Chief broke up in laughter. The crinkled-up eyes ran over with tears of mirth.

"Lord, that fellow will be the death of me! Tartaglia in the flesh—how old Gozzi would have revelled in him! Those pathetic, oyster-eyes, that round, flabby face, that comic nose, and the bleating voice with the sentimental quaver in it, reeling off the live man's dying speech...." He wiped his brimming eyes. "Since the time when Boer spies hocussed him on guard—you remember that lovely affair?—he's registered a vow to impress me with his gallantry and devotion, or die in the attempt. He's the most admirably unconscious humbug I've ever yet met. Sands his sugar and brown-papers his teas philanthropically, for the good of the public, and denounces men who put in Old Squareface and whisky-pegs, as he fuddles himself with his loquat brandy after shop-hours in the sitting-room back of the store. But let us be thankful that Providence has sent Brooker on a special mission to play Pantaloon in this grimmish little interlude of ours. For we'll want every scrap of Comic Relief we can get by-and-by, Saxham, if the other one doesn't turn up—say by the middle of January."

"I understand, sir." Saxham, to whom this man's face

was as a book well loved, read in it that the Commissariat was caving. "There has been another Boer cattle-raid?"

The face that was turned to his own in reply had suddenly grown deeply-lined and haggard. "There has been a lot of cattle-shooting. Lobbing shrapnel at grazing cows was always quite a favourite game with Brounckers. But his gunners hit oftener than they used to. And the Government forage won't hold out for ever." He patted the brown Waler, who pricked his sagacious ears and threw up his handsome bluntish head in acknowledgment of his master's caress. "Presently we shall be killing our mounts to save their lives—and ours. Oats and horseflesh will keep life in men—and in children and women.... The devil of it is, Saxham, that there are such a lot of women."

"And seventy-five out of a hundred of them stayed out of pure curiosity," came grimly from Saxham.

"To see what a siege would be like. Well, poor souls, they know now! You were going over to the Women's Laager. I'll walk with you, and say my say as I go. I'm on my way to Nordenfeldt Fort West. Something has gone wrong with the telephone-wire between there and Staff headquarters, and I can't get anything through but Volapuk or Esperanto. And those happen to be two of the languages I haven't studied." The dry, humorous smile curved the reddish-brown moustache again. The pleasant little whistle stirred the short-clipped hairs of it as the two men turned in the direction of the Women's Laager, over which the Red-cross flag was fluttering, and where the spider with the little Boer mare, picking at the scanty grass, waited outside the earthworks. Saxham's eyes did not

travel so far. They were fastened upon a tall black figure and a less tall and more slender white figure that were by this time halfway upon their perilous journey across the patch of veld, bare and scorched by hellish fires, and ploughed by shrapnel ball into the furrows whence Death had reaped his harvest day by day.

"There goes one of the women we couldn't have done without," commented his companion, wheeling his bicycle beside Saxham, leading the brown Waler.

"It is the Mother-Superior," Saxham said, "with her ward, Miss Mildare."

"Ah! My invariable reply to Beauvayse—you know my junior A.D.C., who daily clamours for an introduction to Miss Mildare—is, that I have not yet had one myself, though at the outset of affairs I encountered the young lady under rather trying circumstances, in which she showed plenty of pluck. I thought I had told you. No? Well, it was one morning on the Recreation Ground. The School was out walking, a trio of nuns in charge, and some Dutch loafers mobbed them—threatened to lay hands on the Sisters—and Miss Mildare stood up in defence—head up, eyes blazing, a slim, tawny-haired young lioness ready to spring. And Beauvayse was with me, and ever since then has been dead-set upon making her acquaintance."

Saxham's blood warmed to the picture. But he said, and his tone was not pleasant: "Lord Beauvayse attained the height of his ambition a few minutes ago."

"Did he? Well, I hope disillusion was not the outcome of realisation. Up to the present"—the humorous,

keen eyes were wrinkled at the corners—"all the boy's swans have been geese, some of 'em the sable kind."

Saxham answered stiffly: "I should say that in this case the swan decidedly predominates."

The other whistled a bar of his pleasant little tune before he spoke again. "It is a capital thing for Beauvayse, being shut up here, out of the way of women."

"Are there no women in Gueldersdorp?"

"None of the kind Beauvayse's canoe is given to capsizing on." The line in his senior's cheek flickered with a hinted smile. "None of the kind that run after him, lie in wait for him, buzz round him like wasps about a honey-bowl. I've developed muscle getting the boy out of amatory scrapes, with the Society octopus, with the Garrison husband-hunter, with the professional man-eater, theatrical or music-hall; and the latest, most inexpressible She, is always the loveliest woman in the world. Queer world!"

"A damned queer world!" agreed Saxham.

"I'd prefer to call it a blessed queer one, because, with all its chaotic, weltering incongruities—there's a Carlyleism for you—I love it! I couldn't live without loving it and laughing at it, any more than Beauvayse could get on *minus* an affair of the heart. Ah, yes, that amatory lyre of his is an uncommonly adaptable instrument. I've known it thrummed to the praises of a middle-aged Duchess—quite a beauty still, even by daylight, with her three veils on, and an Operatic soprano, with a mascot cockatoo, not to mention a round dozen of frisky matrons of the kind

that exploit nice boys. Just before we came out, it could play nothing but that famous song-and-dance tune that London went mad over at the Jollity in June—is raving over still, I believe! Can't give you the exact title of the thing, but 'Darling, Will You Meet Me In The Centre Of The Circle That The Limelight Makes Upon The Floor, Tiddle-e-yum?' would meet the case. We have Musical Comedy now in place of what used to be Burlesque in your London days, Saxham, with a Leading Lady instead of a Principal Boy, and a Chorus in long skirts."

Saxham admitted with a cynical twitch of the mouth:

"There's nothing so short as a long skirt—properly managed."

"You're right. And Lessie Lavigne and the rest of the nimble sisterhood devote their gifts—Thespian and Terpsichorean—to demonstrating the fact. Oh, damned cowardly hounds!" The voice jarred and clanged with irrepressible anger. "Saxham, can't you see? Brouncker's sharpshooters are sniping at the women—the Sister of Mercy and the girl!"

His glance, as well as Saxham's, had followed the tall black figure and the slender white figure on their journey through Death's harvest-field. But his trained eye had been first to see the little jets and puffs of sickly hot, reddish dust rising about their perilous path. They walked quickly, but without hurry, keeping a pace apart, and holding one another by the hand. Saxham, watching them, said, with dry lips and a deadly sickness at the heart:

"And we can do nothing?"

"Nothing! It's one of those things a man has got to

look on at, and wonder why the Almighty doesn't interfere? Oh, to have the fellows triced up for three dozen of the best apiece—good old-fashioned measure. See, they're getting near the laager now. They'll soon be under cover. But—I wonder the Convent cares to risk its ewe lamb on that infernal patch of veld?"

"It is my doing." Saxham's eyes were glued on the black figure and the white figure nearing, nearing the embrasure in the earthwork redoubt, and his face was of an ugly blue-white, and dabbled with sweat.

"Your doing?"

"Mine. I was called in, to find Miss Mildare breaking down from suspense, and the overstrain of inaction. And—to avert even worse evils, I prescribed the tonic of danger. There was no choice—— In at last!"

The Sister of Mercy and the girl had vanished behind the dumpy earth-bag walls. He thought the white figure had glanced back, and waved its hand, and then a question from his companion startled him beyond his ordinary stolid self-control.

"By the way ... with reference to Miss Mildare, have you any idea whether she proposes taking the veil?"

"How should I have ideas upon the possibility?" The opaque, smooth skin of the square, pale face was dyed with a sudden rush of dark blood. The Colonel did not look at it, but said, as a bullet sang upon a stone near his boot, and flattened into a shiny star of lead:

"I would give something to hear you laugh sometimes, Saxham. You're too much in earnest, my dear fellow. Burnt Njal himself could hardly have

been more grim."

Saxham answered:

"That fellow in the Saga, you mean. He laughed only at the end, I think, when the great roof-beam burned through and the hall fell in. But my castle tumbled about my ears in the beginning, and I laughed then, I remember."

"And, take it from me, you will live to laugh again and again," said the kindly voice, "at the man who took it for granted that everything was over, and did not set to work by dawn of the next day building up the hall greater than before. Those old Vikings did, 'and each time the high seat was dight more splendidly, and the hangings of the closed beds woven more fair.' They never knew when they were beaten, those grand old fellows, and so it came about that they never were. By the way, I have something here that concerns you."

"Concerns me?"

"I think I may say, nearly concerns you. A paragraph in this copy of the *Cape Town Mercury*, which, by the way, is three weeks old."

A rubbed and shabby newspaper, folded small, came out of the baggy breast-pocket of the khâki jacket. Saxham received it with visible annoyance.

"Some belated notice of one of my books." The scowl with which he surveyed the paper testified to a strong desire to pitch it to the winds.

"Not a bit of it. It's an advertisement inserted by a London firm of solicitors—Donkin, Donkin, and Judd, Lincoln's Inn. Possibly you are acquainted with

Donkin, if not with Judd?"

"They are the solicitors for the trustees of my mother's property, sir. I heard from them three years ago, when I was at Diamond Town. They returned my last letter to her, and told me of her death."

"They state in the usual formula that it will be to your advantage to communicate with them. May I, as a friend, urge on you the necessity of doing so?"

Saxham's grim mouth shut close. His eyes brooded sullenly.

"I will think it over, sir."

"You haven't much time. A despatch-runner from Koodoosvaal got through the enemy's lines last night with some letters and this paper. No, no word of the Relief. His verbal news was practically nil. He goes out at midnight with some cipher messages. And, if you will let me have your reply to the advertisement with the returned paper by eleven at latest, I will see that it is sent." The rather peremptory tone softened —became persuasive; "You must build up the great hall again, Saxham, and building can't be done without money. And—it occurs to me that this may be some question of a legacy."

"My father was not a wealthy man," Saxham said. "He gave me a costly education, and later advanced four thousand pounds for the purchase of a West End practice, upon the understanding that I was to expect no more from him, and that the bulk of his property, with the exception of a sum left as provision for my mother, should be strictly entailed upon my brother and his heirs, if he should marry. The arrangement was most just, as I was then in receipt of a

considerable income from my profession, and my father died before my circumstances altered for the worse. Independently of the provision he made for her, my mother possessed a small jointure, a freehold estate in South Wales, bringing in, when the house is let, about a hundred and fifty pounds a year. That was to have been left to me as the younger son. But her trustees informed me, through these solicitors, that she had changed her mind, as she had a perfect right to do, and bequeathed everything she possessed to my brother's son, a child who"—Saxham's voice was deadly cold—"may be about four years old."

"A later will may have been found. If I have any influence with you, Saxham, I would use it in urging you to reply to the advertisement."

Saxham agreed unwillingly: "Very well."

The other knew the point gained, and adroitly changed the conversation. It grew severely technical, bristling with scientific terms, dealing chiefly with food-values. The black cloud cleared from Saxham's forehead as he lectured on the energy-fuels, and settled the minimum of protein, fat, starch, and sugar necessary to keep the furnace of Life burning in the human body.

Milk, that precious fluid, could henceforth only be given to invalids and children. Margarine and jam were severely relegated to the list of luxuries. Sardines, tinned salmon, and American canned goods had entirely given out. And flour, the staff of life, was vanishing.

The joy of battle lightened in their faces as they talked, forging weapons that should make men enduring, and Saxham warmed. His icy armour of

habitual silence melted and broke up. He became eloquent, pouring out his treasured projects, suggesting substitutes for this, and makeshifts for that and the other. He was in his element—he knew the ground he trod. He thrust out his grim under-jaw, and hulked with his heavy shoulders as he talked to this man who understood; and every supple movement of his surgeon's hand pointed out some fresh expedient, as the singing bullets went by or whit-whitted about them in the dust, and now and then a shell burst over patient Gueldersdorp.

They parted at the Women's Laager, and as the khâki bicycle grew small in the distance, Saxham realised with a shock that he was happy, that life had suddenly become sweet, and opened out anew before him in a vista, not of shining promise, but with one golden gleam of hope in it, to a man freed by the force of Will from the bondage of the accursed liquor-thirst. Freed! If freed in truth, why should the sight and smell even of Brooker's sticky loquat-brandy have set the long-denied palate craving? Saxham put that question from him with both hands.

And then he frowned, thinking of that adaptable instrument that had thrummed an accompaniment to the arias of the Opera soprano, as to the Society drawing-room duets sung with the frisky married ladies who liked nice boys, and had made tinkling music for the twinkling small feet, and the strident voice of Lessie Lavigne of the Jollity Theatre, and now must serenade outside a Convent-close in beleaguered Gueldersdorp, where the whitest of maiden lilies bloomed, tall and pure and slender and unharmed, in a raging tempest of fire and steel and lead.

XXXI

Pray give a thought to the spy, Walt Slabberts, languishing in durance vile under the yellow flag. Several times the first-class, up-to-date, effective artillery of his countrymen, being brought to bear upon the gaol, had caused the captive to bound like the proverbial parched pea, and to curse with curses not only loud but fervent the indiscriminating zeal of his brother patriots.

He was, though lost to sight behind the walls of what Emigration Jane designated the jug, still fondly dear to one whose pliant affections, rudely disentangled by the hand of perfidy from the person of That There Green, had twined vigorously about the slouching person of the young Boer. Letters were received, but not forwarded to suspects enjoying the hospitality of the Government, so communication with the object of her dreams was painfully impossible. Stratagems were not successful. A passionate missive concealed in a plum-pudding—before it was put on to boil—had become incorporated with the individuality of a prison official, who objected on principle to waste.

On Sundays, when you could go out without your 'art in your mouth an account of them 'orful shellses, a fair female form in a large and flamboyant hat, whose imitation ostridge tips were now mere bundles of quill shavings, and whose flowers were as wilted as the other blossoms of her heart, wandered disconsolately round her Walt's place of bondage, waving a lily hand on the chance of being seen and recognised. Tactics productive of nothing but blown kisses on the part of extra-susceptible warders, and one or two troopers of the B.S.A., who ought to have

known better. These advances Walt's bereaved betrothed rejected with ringing sniffs of scorn, yet, of such conflicting elements is the feminine heart composed, found them strangely solacing.

She 'ad 'ad 'er month's notice from Sister Tobias upon the morning following the night of the tragedy, another score to the account of the traitor Keyse. Arriving unseemly late, and in an agitated state of mind—and could you wonder, after her young man had been pinched and took away?—she had mechanically accounted for her late return in the well-worn formula of Kentish Town, explaining to the surprised Sisters that there 'ad bin a haccident on the Underground between the Edgeware Road and 'Ammersmiff, an' that her sister Hemmaline had bin took bad in consequence, the second being looked for at the month's end; and to leave that pore dear in that state—her 'usband being at his Social Club—was more than Emigration Jane 'ad 'ad the 'art to do. She received her dismissal to bed, and the advice to examine her conscience carefully before retiring, with defiance, culminating in an attack of whooping hysteria. Nor was she repentant, but defiantly elated by the knowledge that nobody had slept in the Convent that night, until she had run down. The character supplied by Sister Tobias to her next employer specified terminological inexactitude among her failings, combined with lack of emotional self-control; but laid stress on an affectionate disposition, and a tendency to intermittent attacks of hard work.

She was now, with her new mistress and the kids, pigging—you couldn't call it nothink else, not to be truthful you couldn't—at the Women's Laager, along of them there dirty Dutch frows. She refrained from

too candid criticism of her Walt's countrywomen, but it was proper 'ard all the same not to call crock and muck by their right names!

Languishing in seclusion, week and week about, cooking scant meals of the Commissariat beef, moistened with gravy made from them patent packets of Consecrated Soup, can you wonder that her burden of bitterness against W. Keyse, author of all her wrongs, instrument most actively potential in the jogging of her young man, bulked larger every day? She was not one to 'ave the world's 'eel upon 'er without turning like a worm. No Fear, and Chance it! Her bosom heaved under the soiled two-and-elevenpenny peek-a-boo "blowse" as she registered her vow. That there Keyse—the conduct of the faithless Mr. Green appeared almost blonde in complexion beside the sable villainy of the other—That There Keyse should Rue the Day!

How to make him?—that was the question. Then came the dazzling flash of inspiration—but not until they had met again.

She was circulating hungry-hearted about the brick-built case that held her jewel—the man who had held out that vista of a home, and called her his good little Boer-wife to be. We know it was a mere bait designed to allure and dazzle—the Boer spy had caught many women with it before. Do you despise her and those others for the predominance of the primal instinct, the sacred passion for the inviolate hearth? Not so much they yearned for the man as for the roof-tree, whose roots are twined about the heart-strings of the natural woman, the spreading rafter-branches of which shelter little downy heads.

She encountered the traitor, I say, and her eyes

darted fire beneath a bristling palisade of iron curling-pins. She had not the heart in these days to free her imprisoned tresses. The villain had the perishing nerve to accost her, jauntily touching the smasher hat.

"'Day, Miss! 'Aven't seen you since when I can't think."

She replied with a ringing sniff and a glance of infinite scorn that she would trouble him not to think; and that she regarded low, interfering, vulgar fellows as the dirt under her feet. So there!

"Cripps!" He was took aback, but not to the extent of taking hisself off, which he ought to. "You're fair mad with me, an' no mistyke." His pale eyes were unmistakably good-natured; the loss of the yellow freckles, swamped in a fine, uniform, brick-dust colour, was an improvement, she could not help thinking. "But I only did my duty, Miss, same as another chap would 'ave 'ad to. Look 'ere! Come and 'ave a split gingerade."

The delicious beverage was three shillings the bottle. She frowned, but hesitated. He persisted; she ended by giving in. Weeks and weeks since she had walked with a young man! The Dutchman's saloon was closed and barricaded; its owner had made tracks to his Transvaal friends at the beginning of the siege. But the aromatic-beer cellar was one of the places open. They went in there. Oh! the deliciousness of that first sip of the stinging, fizzling beverage! He lifted his glass in the way that she remembered, and drank a toast.

"'Er 'ealth! If you knew how I bin wantin' to git word of 'er! She's well, isn't she, Miss? Lumme! the Fair

Old Knock-out I got when I see the Convent standin' empty.... Gone into laager near the railway works now, you 'ave, I know. Safe, if not stric'ly luxurious. But—I git the Regular Hump when I think of—of a Angel like 'Er 'avin' to live an' eat an' sleep in a—a—in a bloomin' rabbit-'ole." He sighed as he wiped the pungent froth from his upper lip.

"Pity you can't tell 'er so!" The sarcasm would have its way, but it failed of his great simplicity.

"That's why I bin lookin' out for you." He blushed through the brick-dust hue as he extracted a fatigued-looking letter from a baggy left breast-pocket in which it had sojourned in company with a tobacco-pouch, a pipe which must not be smoked in the trenches if a man would prefer to do without a bullet through his brain, a handful of screws not innocent of lubricating medium, a clasp-knife, a flat tin box of carbolised vaseline, a First-Aid bandage, and a ration of bread and cheese wrapped in old newspaper. The bread was getting deplorable, for even the dusty seconds flour was fast dribbling out.

"You'll give 'er this, won't you, Miss, and tell her I bin thinkin' of 'er night and d'y? Fair live in the trenches now; and when I do git strollin' round the stad, blimme if I ever see 'er. But she's there—an 'ere's a ticker beatin' true to 'er." He rapped a little awkwardly upon the bulging left breast-pocket, "To the bloomin' end, wotever it may be!"

"Oh, you—silly, you!"

She found him ridiculous and tragic, and so touching all at once that the gibe ended in a sob. It was not the stinging effervescence of the gingerade that made her choke and brought the smarting tears to her eyes.

It was envy of that other girl. And then she noticed, under his left eye, a tiny scar, and she knew how he came by it, and remembered what she owed him, and saw that the chance had come for her revenge. She could pierce the heart beating under the khâki breast-pocket to its very core with three words as easily as she had jabbed his face with her hat pin on that never-to-be-forgotten night. She would tell him that the lady of his love had gone up to Johannesburg weeks and weeks ago. Oh, but it would be sweet to see the duped lover's face! She would give him a bit of her mind, too—perhaps tear up the letter.

Then flashed across the murky-black night of her stormy mind the forked-lightning inspiration of what the real revenge would be. To take his letter—write him another back, and yet others, fool him to the top of his bent, and presently tell him, tossing at his feet a sheaf of billets. "And serve you glad—and no more than your deservings! Who put away my Walt?"

She accepted the letter, only permitting herself one scornful sniff, and put the missive in her pocket. Next day John Tow, the Chinaman, serenely fatalistic, smilingly perpendicular in felt-soled shoes, amidst zipping bullets, brought to the trench a reply, signed "Fare Air."

The writer Toke the Libberty of Hopeing W. Keyse was as it Left her at preasent. She was Mutch obblig for his Dear Leter Witch it 'ad made her Hapey to Know a Brave Man fiteing for her Saik.

"Cr'r——!" ejaculated W. Keyse, below his breath. His face was radiant as he read. Her spelling was a bit off, it was impossible to deny. But—Cripps!—to be called a brave man by the owner of the maddening

blue eyes, and that great thick golden pigtail. The letter went on:

> "Dear mr. Keyse yu will be Plese to Kno Jane is Sutch a Cumfut to me in Trubel. As it is Selldom Fathful Frends are To be Fownd But Jane is trew as Stele & Cold be Trustid with lbs & lbs. no More at Preasent from yr afexn Swetart.
>
> "X X X X
>
> "FARE AIR."

His senses reeled, as under pretence of masking a sneeze he pressed his burning lips to those osculatory crosses. He wrote her a flaming answer, begging a Sunday rendezvous. She appointed a place and an hour. He went there on the wings of love, but nobody turned up except the Jane who could be trusted with pounds and pounds.

She hurried to him trembling and quite pale, her blue eyes—he had never noticed that they were blue and really pretty—wide with fright under her yellow fringe of curls newly released from steely fetters. Her lips were apart, but he failed to observe that the teeth they revealed were creditably white; her cotton-gloved hand repressed her fluttering heart, but he did not see its tumultuous throbbing. He gulped as he said, with a fallen jaw and a look of abject misery that pierced her to the quick:

"She—couldn't come, then?"

"No, pore deer!" gasped the comfort in trouble, casting about for something to tell him. She had made up her mind as she came along; she would have her revenge there and then, and chance it.

Something kept her from laying the candle-flame to the time-fuse. She did not know what it was yet. But, oh! the sharp look of terror in the thin, eager face pierced her through and through.

"My Gawd! She's not bin killed?" he cried. "Don't tell me she's bin——"

"Lor', gracious goodness, no! What will you think of next?" She lied, rallying him, with jealousy eating at her own poor heart. "Can't git away, that's all. Them Sisters are so precious sharp. An'—'Go an' tell 'im,' she says, "e'll 'ave to put up with you this once. An' you'll come back an' tell me all about 'im!'"

He swallowed the bait, and her spirits revived. Emigration Jane, if not the rose, lived with it. Strictly speaking, they spent a pleasant Sunday, though when he found himself forgetting the absent one, he pulled himself sharply up. He saw her part of the way home; more she would not allow.

"And—and"—she whispered at their parting, her eyes avoiding his—"if she can't git out next Sunday—an' it's a chance whether she does, that Sister Tobias being such a watchful old cat—would you like to 'ave me meet you an' tell you all about 'er?"

W. Keyse assented, even eagerly, and so it began. Behold the poor deceiver drinking perilous joys, and learning to shudder at the thought of discovery. Think of her cherishing his letters, those passionate epistles addressed to the owner of the golden pigtail.

Think of her pouring out her poor full heart in those wildly-spelt missives that found their way to him, and be a little pitiful.

She did not thirst for that revenge now. But, oh! the

day would come when he would find out and have his, in casting her off, with what contempt and loathing of her treachery she wept at night to picture. This feeling, that lifted you to Heaven one instant, and cast you down to Hell the next, was Love. Passion for the man, not yearning for the hearth-place, and the sheltering roof, and the security of marriage.

She left off walking round the gaol—indeed, rather avoided the vicinity of the casket that for her had once held a treasure. What would the Slabberts think of his little Boer-wife that was to have been? What would he say and do when they let him out? She took to losing breath and colour at the sound of a heavy step behind her, and would shrink close to the martial figure of W. Keyse when any hulking form distantly resembling the Boer's loomed up in the distance.

Oh, shame on her, the doubly false! But—but—she had never been so orful 'appy. Oh, what a queer thing was Love! If only—— But never, never would he. She was mistaken.

There came a moment when W. Keyse swerved from the path of single-hearted devotion to the unseen but ever-present wearer of the golden pigtail.

As Christmas drew near, and Gueldersdorp, not yet sensible of the belly-pinch of famine, sought to relieve its tense muscles and weary brains by getting up an entertainment here and there, W. Keyse escorted his beloved—by proxy, as usual—to a Sunday smoking-concert, given in a cleared-out Army Service Stores shed, lent by Imperial Government to the promoters of the entertainment.

Oh, the first delicious sniff of an atmosphere tinged with paint and acetylene from the stage-battens and footlights, and so flavoured with crowded humanity as to be strongly reminiscent of the lower troop-deck in stormy weather, when all the ports are shut and all the hatches are battened down! The excess of brilliancy which must not stream from the windows had been boarded in, and a tarpaulin was drawn over the skylight, in case the gunners of Meisje should be tempted to rouse the monster from her Sabbath quiet, and send in a ninety-four-pound shell to break up an orgy of godless Englanders. But the stuffiness made it all the snugger. You could fancy yourself in the pit of the Theayter of Varieties, 'Oxton, or perched up close to the blue starred ceiling-dome of the Pavilion, Mile End, on a Saturday night, when every gentleman sits in shirt-sleeves, with his arm round the waist of a lady, and the faggots and sausage-rolls and stone-gingers are going off like smoke, and the orange-peel rains from the upper circle back-benches, and the nut-cracking runs up and down the packed rows like the snapping of the breech-bolts in the trenches when the fire is hottest....

Ah! that brought one back to Gueldersdorp at once.

Meanwhile, a pale green canvas railway-truck cover, marked in black, "Light Goods—Destructible," served as a drop-curtain. Another, upon which the interior of an impossible palace had been delineated in a bewildering perspective of red and blue and yellow paint-smudges, served as a general back-scene for the performance.

The orchestra piano had been wounded by shell-fire, and had a leg in splints. Many members of the crowded audience were in strapping and bandages. Drink did not flow plentifully, but there was something to wet your whistle with, and the tobacco-cloud that hung above the trestle-benches, packed with black and yellow faces, as well as brown and white, could almost have been cut with a knife.

It was a long, rambling programme, scrawled in huge, black-paint characters on a white planed board, hung where everyone could read it. There were comic songs and Christy Minstrel choruses by people who had developed vocal talent for this occasion only, and a screaming display of conjuring tricks by an amateur of legerdemain who had forgotten the art, if ever he had mastered it. At every new mistake or blunder, and with each fresh change of expression on the entertainer's streaky face, conveying the idea of his being under the influence of a bad dream, and hoping to wake up in his own quarters by-and-by, to find that he had never really undertaken to make a pudding in a hat, and smash a gentleman's watch and produce it intact from some unexpected place of concealment, the spectators rocked and roared. Then there was a Pantomimic Interlude, with a great deal of genuine knockabout, and, the crowning item of the entertainment, a comic song and stump-speech, announced to be given by The Anonymous Mammoth Comique—an incognito not dimly suspected to conceal the identity of the Chief himself, being delayed by the Mammoth's character top-hat—a fondly cherished property of the Stiggins brand—and the cabbage umbrella that went with it, having been accidentally left behind at the Mammoth's hotel, the Master of the Revels, still distinguished by the jib-sail collar and shiny burnt-

cork complexion of the corner-man, was sent to the front to ask if any lady or gentleman in the audience would kindly oblige with a ten-minute turn?

"All right, Mister!"

A soiled cotton glove waved, a flowery hat nodded to the appeal from behind the acetylene footlights. The faces in the front rows of seats, pale and brick-dust, gingerbread and cigar-browned European, African countenances with rolling eyes and shining teeth; and here and there the impassive, almond-eyed, yellow mask of the Asiatic, slewed round as Emigration Jane rose up in the place beside W. Keyse, a little pale, and with damp patches in the palms of the washed white cotton gloves, as she said: If the gentleman pleased, she could sing—just a little!

No, thank you! She wasn't afryde, not she; they was all friends there. And do 'er best she would. She took off the big flowery hat quite calmly, giving it to W. Keyse to keep. The panic came on later, when the Christy-minstrel-collared, burnt-corked Master of the Revels was gallantly helping her up the short side-ladder, and culminated when he retreated, and left her there, standing on the platform in the bewildering glare of the acetylene footlights, a little, rather slight and flat-chested figure of a girl, blue-eyed and yellow-haired, in a washed-out flowery "blowse," and a "voylet" delaine skirt that had lost its pristine beauty, and showed faded and shabby in the yellow gas-flare.

Oh! 'owever 'ad she dared? That dazzling sea of faces, with the eyes all fixed on her, was terrifying. A big lump grew in her throat, and the crowded benches tilted, and the flaming lights leaped to the

roof as the helpless, timid tears welled into her blue eyes.

And then the miracle happened.

W. Keyse sat on a back-bench, the thin Cockney face a little raised above the others, because he had slipped a rolled-up overcoat under him, pretending that it was to get it out of the way, you understand. Always very sensitive about his shortness, W. Keyse. And she saw his face, as plain as you please, and with a look in the pale, eager eyes, that for once was for Emigration Jane, her very own self, and not for That There Other One. She knew in that moment of revelation that she had always been jealous. Oh, wasn't it strynge? Her heart surged out to W. Keyse across the gulf of crowded faces. And her eyes had in them, all at once, the look that is born of Love.

Ah! who can mistake it? It begets a solitude in a vast thronged assemblage for you and for me. It sends its silent, wordless, eloquent message thrilling to the heart of the Beloved, and wins its passionate answer back. Ah! who can err about the look of Love?

She drew a deep breath that was her longing sigh for him, infinitely dear, and never to belong to her, and began her song. She sang it quite simply and naturally, in an untutored but sweet and plaintive voice, and with the Cockney accent that spoke of home to nearly all that heard. And her eyes never moved from his face as she sang.

The song was, I dare say, a foolish, trivial thing. But the air was pretty, and the words were simple, and it had a haunting refrain. To this effect, that the world is a big place and a hard place, with scant measure of joy in it, for you or for me. Bitter herbs grow side by

side with the flowers in our Earth gardens. Salt tears mingle with our laughter; Night comes down in blotting darkness—perhaps in drenching rain,—at the close of every short, bright day of sunshine. But Life gone by, its hopes and fears and sorrows laid with our once-beating hearts in the good grey dust to rest, I shall meet with you again, in the Land where dreams come true.

"The Land Where Dreams Come True." That was the title of the song and its refrain, and somehow it caught the listeners by the heart strings, making the women sob aloud, and wringing bright sudden drops from the bold eyes of rough, strong, hardy men. You are to remember how the people stood: that scarcely one was there that had not lost brother or sister, mother or husband, child or friend or comrade since the beginning of the siege; and thus the touch of Nature made itself felt, and the simple pathos went home to the sore quick. They sang the refrain with her, fervently, and when the song was done, they sat in touched silence but one moment—and then the applause came down. As it fell upon her like a wall, she screamed in terror, and ran away behind the scene, and was found by W. Keyse a minute later, sobbing hysterically, with her head jammed into an angle of the wall of un-plastered brick-work.

None saw. He put his arms manfully about the waistline of the flowery blouse.

"Oh, let me go! Oh, what a wicked, wicked girl I've bin! Oh, it's all come over me on a sudden, like a flood! Don't touch me—I'm not good enough! Oh! how can you, can you?"

She sobbed the words out, and W. Keyse had kissed her. He did not get another utterance of her that

night. She parted from him in tingling silence. His own uneasy sense of faithlessness to One immeasurably beloved, to whom he had pledged inviolable and eternal fidelity, nearly prompted him to ask her not to up and tell. But he manfully kept silence.

The worst of one kiss of that kind is that it begets the desire for others like it. She had turned her mouth to his in that whirling, breathless moment, and it was small, and warm, and clung. He tried to shake off the remembrance, but it haunted persistently.

He knew he had behaved like a regular beast—a low cur, in fact. To kiss one girl and mean it for another was, in the Keysian Code of morals, to be guilty of a baseness. The worst of it was that he knew, given the chance, he would do the same thing again.

For he could not shake off the memory of the blushing face, wetted with streaming tears from the wide bright eyes that pleaded so. They were blue, too, and the fringe above them might, by a not too exhausting stretch of the imagination, be termed golden. He heard her voice crying to him, "How can you, can you?" And he trembled at the thought of the mouth that kissed and clung.

He had known bought kisses, of the kind that brand the lips and shame the buyer as the seller. Never the kiss of Love, until now.

And now—was any other worth the taking?

"Cr'ripps!" said W. Keyse. "Not much!"

XXXII

It was Wednesday again, and Saxham came riding through the embrasure in the oblong earthwork, and down the gravelly glacis that led into the Women's Laager. An obsequious Hindu, in an unclean shirt and a filthy red turban, rose up salaaming, almost under his horse's feet, and took the bridle. He dismounted and went his rounds.

It might have been the dry bed of a high-banked placer-river, with spare lengths of steel railway-line borne across from bank to bank, covered with beams and sheets of corrugated iron and tarpaulins, with wide chinks to let in the much-needed air and light. A line of living-waggons, crowded with women and children—English, American, Irish, Dutch, and half-caste—ran down the centre of the giant trench. In each of its sloping faces a row of dug-out habitations gave accommodation to twice the number that the waggons held. At the eastern end a line of camp cooking-places had been arranged in military fashion, but the Dutchwomen's little coffee-pipkin-bearing fires of dung and chips burned everywhere, and possibly they did something towards purifying the air. For, to be frank, it vied with the native village in the compound and variegated nature of its smells, without the African muskiness of odour that is perceptible in the vicinity of our sable brother. The fat, slatternly, frankly dirty vrouws had not the remotest idea of sanitation; the Germans and Irish, blandly or doggedly impervious to savage smells, pursued their unsavoury way in defiance of the clamorous necessity for hygienic measures, until the majority of the pallid, untidy, scared Englishwomen, the energetic Americans, and the sturdier

Africanders, after making what headway was possible against the ever-rising tide of filth, had yielded to the lethargy bred of despair and lack of exercise, and ceased to strive. A few, worthy of honour, still stoutly battled with the demon of Uncleanliness.

But the first April rainfall would turn the dry ditch into an open sewer—a vast trough of muddy water—in which draggled women would paddle for submerged household gods. Many would prefer to tramp back to the town at night and sleep in their own shrapnel-riddled homes. But the majority stayed, of choice or of necessity, incubating sickness in that fetid place where nothing would thrive but fierce social and political hatreds, and petty grudges, and rankling jealousies, and shrieking quarrels that burst out and raged a hundred times in a day.

From one of the dug-out refuges Saxham now saw Lynette Mildare coming, making her swift way between the knots of frowsy refugees, the negro women-servants squatting over the little cooking-fires, the pallid children swarming on the narrow pathways.

"Dr. Saxham." Her simple brown holland skirt and thin linen blouse hung loosely upon her. Her face, too, had grown thinner, and looked tired. But the eyes were no longer unnaturally dilated, and the face had a more healthful pallor. "Mrs. Greening begged me to look out for you. She is so anxious about Berta. We have been doing everything we can, but I am afraid the child is seriously ill. It is the third shelter from the end, south side." She pointed out the place.

He had lifted his hat with his short, brusque salute. His vivid eyes wore a preoccupied look, his mobile

nostrils angrily sniffed the villainous air.

"I'll come directly, Miss Mildare. But—who can expect children to keep healthy under conditions as insanitary as these?"

"It is—horrible!" Disgust was in her face. "But many of the women are as ignorant as the Kaffirs and Cape boys, and they and the coolie sweepers won't carry away refuse any more unless they're paid."

"You are sure of this?" His tone was curt and official.

"I am almost certain," she told him. "I have heard some of the women complaining that the charges grew higher every day. And, when I asked one of the boys why he did not do the work properly, he was—rude.... Oh, don't punish him!"

He had not said a word, but a white-hot spark had darted from his blue eye, and his grim jaws had clamped ominously together.

"It is my duty to put down insubordination, and chastise inefficiency where I encounter it. May I ask you to point out the fellow who behaved insolently?"

She said: "I—I think he is head of the carting-gang. A Kaffir boy they call Jim Gubo."

"That will do, thank you, Miss Mildare. You are not alone here?"

Her glad smile assured him of that. "Oh no, I am with the Mother. I go everywhere with her, and I think I am of use. I am not at all afraid of sickness, you know, or—the other things."

"But yet," Saxham said, "you must be careful of your health."

"You have no idea how tremendously strong I am," she answered him, and he broke into laughter in spite of himself. She looked so tender, so delicately frail a creature to be there in that malodorous Gehenna, ministering to the wants of slatternly vrouws and stalwart, down-at-heel Irishwomen. His smile emboldened her to say: "I did not thank you the other day, after all."

"The Krupp shell came along and changed the subject of the conversation." He added: "Were you alarmed? You had rather an escape."

"I was with Mother."

"You love her very dearly?" The words had escaped him unconsciously. They were his spoken thought. She flushed, and said with a thrill of tenderness in her clear girlish tones:

"More dearly than it is possible to say. I don't believe God Himself will be angry with me that I have always seen His Face and Our Blessed Lady's shining through hers and beyond it; for He knows as no one else can ever know what she has been since they brought me to the Convent years and years ago."

"They" were her people, presumably. It was odd—Saxham supposed it the outcome of that Convent breeding—that she should speak of God as simply, to quote Gladstone's criticism on the Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff, as though He were her grandfather. Saxham had been reared in the Christian faith by a pious Welsh mother, but there had always been a little awkwardness about domestic references to the Deity. In times of sadness or bereavement He was frequently referred to. But always in a deprecatory tone.

"Your family is not Colonial?" he asked.

She shook her lovely red-brown head.

"I—don't know."

"Mildare is an unusual surname."

"You think it pretty?"

He thought her very pretty as she stood there, a slender willowy creature with the golden shadow of her rough straw-hat intensifying the clear amber of her thoughtful eyes.

"Very."

She looked him in the face and smiled.

"So did I when the Mother gave it to me. I think it belonged to someone she used to know, and her mother was Lynette. So they baptised me Lynette Mildare. It seems rather strange not having a name of one's own, but really I never had one."

"Never had one?"

Saxham echoed her half-consciously, revelling in the play of light and shadow over the delicate face, and the gleaming as of golden dust upon the outer edges of the waves of red-brown hair drawn carelessly back over the little ears.

"Not to my knowledge. Of course, I may have had one once." She added, as he looked at her in suddenly roused surprise, "I must have had one once." She was looking beyond him at a broad ray of moted white-hot sunshine that slanted through one of the wide openings above, and cleft the thick atmosphere of the crowded place like a fiery sword.

"I have often wondered what it really is, and whether I should like it if I heard it? To exchange Lynette Mildare for Eliza Smith ... that would be horrible. Don't you think so?"

Saxham smiled. "I think you are joking, and that a young lady who can do so under the present circumstances deserves to be commended."

She looked at him full.

"I am not joking." Borne by a waft of the sickly air a downy winged seed came floating towards her, a frail gossamer courier coming from the world above with tidings that Dame Nature, in spite of all the destruction wreaked by men, was carrying on her business. "And—I do not even know that I am a young lady. See there"—she blew a little puff of breath at the moving messenger, and it wafted away upon a new air-pilgrimage, and, rising, caught a stronger current, and soared out of sight—"that is me. It came from somewhere, and it is going somewhere. That is all I know about myself; perhaps as much as I shall ever know. Why do you look so glad?"

His lips were sealed. The throb of selfish triumphant exultation came of the belief that the gulf between them was less wide and deep than he had thought it. A wastrel may woo and wed a waif, surely, without many questions being asked. And then, at the clear, innocent questioning of her eyes, rushed in upon him, scalding, the memories he had thrust away. He saw the Dop Doctor of Gueldersdorp, his short daily stint of labour done, settling down to drink himself into hoggish oblivion in his accustomed corner of the Dutchman's liquor-saloon. He beheld him, his purpose accomplished, sleeping stertorously, spilled

out like the very dregs of manhood in the sawdust of that foul place; he shuddered as the bloated, dishevelled thing roused and reeled homewards, trickling at the mouth, as the clear primrose day peeped over the flat-topped eastern hills. And he sickened at the thing he had been.

"I felt glad," he lied, with looks that shunned Lynette's, "that in your need you found so good a friend as the Mother-Superior. Yours must have been a sorrowful, lonely childhood."

Her own vision rose before her, blotting out his face. She saw the little kopje with the grave at its foot. She saw a ragged child sitting there watching for the earliest flush of dawn or the solemn folding of night's wide wing over the lonely veld, and the coming of the great white stars....

"She is much, much more than a friend. She is the Mother." Her loyal heart was in her face. "I have no secrets from her. I tell her everything."

Was that deeper flush born of the remembrance of a secret unshared? And how strange that every change of colour and expression in the delicate face should mean so much, so soon. He said, with a hungry flash of the gentian-blue eyes:

"Your love and confidence repay her richly."

"I can do so little." There was an anxious fold between the slender eyebrows. "Only follow her and be near her; only look on as she spends herself for others, never resting, never sparing, never discouraged or cast down." Great tears brimmed the white, darkly-fringed underlids, and ran over. "And she only laughs at me at night when I cry at the sight

of her dear, blistered feet."

"You will be able to laugh with her when this is over," Saxham said rather clumsily.

"Shall I? Perhaps." Still that fold between the fine, delicate eyebrows.

"You have seen War," Saxham went on, his own voice sounding strange to him. "And that is a terrible experience for a woman, young or old, but you will be the richer by it in the end, believe me, Miss Mildare. Richer in courage and endurance and calmness in the presence of danger and death, and in sympathy with the pain and suffering inevitable under such circumstances."

"Sympathy? They had all my sympathy before." Her fair throat swelled against its encircling band of moss-green velvet, her voice rang, her eyes flashed golden fire under the shadow of the wide straw hat. "Do you think it needed War to teach me how hideously women suffer? How they have suffered since the world began, and how they will suffer until its end, unless they rise up in revolt once for all, against the wickedness of men?"

She was transformed under Saxham's eyes. The slender virginal body increased in stature and proportions as he gazed, and what obscure emotions seemed striving in her face!

"Look at them," she said, indicating with a slight revealing gesture the swarming, dowdy, listless occupants of the crowded trench. "How patient they are, how resigned to the dreadful life they drag on here from day to day, full of the horror and the pain and the suffering that you say is inevitable. Why

should it be inevitable? Did these women who are the chief victims of it and the greatest losers by it, choose that there should be War? See that poor soul with the rag of crape upon her hat, who sits at her door peeling potatoes. Did she desire it? Yet her young husband was shot in the trenches a week ago and her little baby died of fever this morning.... And, did those other women whose homes have been wrecked and ruined, whose sons and husbands and fathers may be shot, and whose children may sicken with the same fever before night, demand of their Governments, Imperial or Republican, that there should be War? You see them patient and submissive because they neither realise their wrongs or understand their rights. But a day will come when they will understand, and then"—her eyes grew dreamy—"I do not know exactly what will happen. But these international questions, with others, will be decided by a general plebiscite, the women will vote as well as the men; and as women are in the majority, and every woman will vote for Peace—how can there be War?"

"You are an advocate of Universal Suffrage, then? You believe that there must be absolute sex-equality before the world can be—I think 'finally regenerated' is the stock phrase of the militant apostle of Women's Rights? I have heard this outcry from many feminine throats in London, but Gueldersdorp," said Saxham drily, "is about the last place one would expect to ring with it."

"'Universal Suffrage, Sex-Equality, Women's Rights....'" The shibboleth that Saxham quoted was evidently unfamiliar to the girl. "I know"—there was a sombre shadow in her glance—"what Women's Wrongs are, but I am not very well informed about

the things you speak of. The Mother tells me that there are many well-educated women in London and Paris, in Berlin and in New York, who have devoted their lives to the study of such questions. Who write and speak and labour to teach their fellow-women that they have only to band themselves together to be powerful, only to be powerful to be feared, only to will it to be free. When I am twenty-four I mean to go out into the world and meet those leader-women. Some of them, I am told, have suffered loss and ill-usage; some of them have even undergone imprisonment for the sake of what they believe and teach. Well, I will hear what they have to say, and then they will listen to me. For until my work is done, theirs will never be accomplished, Something tells me that with a most certain voice."

"And until that time comes?" said Saxham.

Her eyes grew bright again, a smile played about her exquisite lips.

"Until that time comes I will study and gather more knowledge, and capacity to fit myself for a struggle with the world."

"*You* 'struggle with the world'!"

Her girlish pride in her high purpose being sensitive, she mistook the brusque tenderness in Saxham's face and voice for irony.

"Yes. Perhaps you may not believe it, but I know a great many useful things. Latin and French and German and Italian, well enough to teach and translate. I am well grounded in History and Science and Mathematics. I can take a temperature and make a poultice, or sweep a room and cook a dinner." She

nodded at Saxham with a little spark of laughter underlying the sweet earnestness of her look. "Also, I have learned book-keeping and typewriting, and shorthand. I earn enough now, by bookbinding, to pay for my clothes. The Mother says that I am competent to earn my living anywhere, and to teach others to earn theirs. But I am not to begin until I am twenty-four. That is our agreement."

Saxham understood the fine maternal tact that never set this ardent young enthusiast chafing at the tightened rein. But he said roughly:

"The Mother.... How can she approve your joining the ranks of the Shrieking Sisterhood?"

"She knows," Lynette explained, with adorable gravity, "that I should never shriek."

"How will you bear parting from her? And how will she endure parting from you?"

The girl's mobile lips began to tremble. The luminous amber eyes were dimmed with moisture as she said:

"It will not be losing me. Nor could I ever bear to leave her if I did not know that I should come back. But I shall come back. And she will ask me what I have done. And I shall tell her: 'This, and this, and all the rest, my Mother, for the love of you, and for the sake of those others who once sat in darkness and the Shadow of Death, and now have found the Way of Peace.'"

"And those others, Beatrice?"

Saxham knew now the secret of the haunting familiarity of the beautiful girlish face. The delicate oval outline, the pale wild-rose colouring, the

reddish-brown of the fine, glistening tresses, the amber-hazel of the wistful, brilliant eyes, reproduced to a wonderful degree the modelling and tinting of the wonderful Guido portrait, the white-draped head in the Barberini Gallery, which, in defiance of Bertolotti and the *Edinburgh Review*, will always be associated with the name of the sorrowful-sweet heroine of the most sombre of sex-tragedies.

"Why do you call me Beatrice?" she asked, with that sudden darkening of those luminous eyes. He told her:

"Because you are like the Daughter of the Cenci. Shelley used to be my favourite among the English poets, and when I first went to Rome, years ago, the first thing I did was to hunt up the portrait in the Barberini Palace Gallery; and it is marvellous. No reproduction has ever done justice to it. One could not forget it if one tried."

"I am glad I am like Beatrice," she said slowly. "I have always loved and pitied her. I pray to her as my friend among the Blessed Souls in Paradise, and she always hears. And by-and-by she will help me when I go out into the world——"

"To look for those others," Saxham interpolated. "Tell me who they are?"

She looked at him, and for an instant the virginal veil fell from her, and there was strange and terrible knowledge in her eyes.

"They are women, and girls, and children," she answered him. "They are the most unhappy of all the souls that suffer on earth. For they are the slaves and the victims and the martyrs of the unrelenting,

merciless, dreadful pleasures of Man. And I want to go among them and lift them up, and say to them, 'You are free!' And one day I will do it."

There was a dull burning under Saxham's opaque skin, and a drumming in his ears. His authority and knowledge fell from him as that virginal veil had fallen from her; he stood before her humbled and ashamed, shunning her eyes, that penetrated and scathed his soul as the eyes of an avenging Angel might, with their clear, simple, direct estimate of himself and his fellow-men. And the distance between them, that had seemed to be lessening as they talked, spread illimitably vast; a dark, sunless plain, bounded by a livid horizon, reflected in the slimy pools of foul swamps and pestilential marshes, where poisonous reptiles bred in slimy, writhing knots, and the Eaters of Human Flesh lurked under the tangled shade of the jungles. Less vile of life, even in his degradation, than many men, he felt himself beside this girl a moral leper.

"Unclean, unclean!"

While that voice yet echoed in the desert places of his soul, he heard her saying:

"I don't know why I should talk to you of these plans and projects of mine. I never have spoken of them yet to anyone except the Mother. But—you spoke of sympathy with those who suffer. I think you have it, Dr. Saxham, and that you have suffered yourself. It is in your face. And—you are not to suppose that I believe all men to be——"

He ended for her: "To be devouring beasts. No; but we are bad enough, the best of us, if the truth must be told. And—I *have* suffered, Miss Mildare, at the

hands of men and women, and through the unwritten laws, as through the accepted institutions of what is called Society, most brutally. I would not soil and scorch your ears with the recital of my experiences, for all that a miracle could give me back. I swear to you that I would not!"

She touched the little ears with a smile that had pathos in it.

"They have heard much that is evil, these ears of mine."

"And the evil has left them undefiled," said Saxham.

"Thank you!"

She begged him again not to forget the sick child at Mrs. Greening's shelter, and hurried away, keeping her face from Saxham. He knew that there was no hope for him, that there never would be any. And he loved her—hungrily, hopelessly loved her. Dear innocent, wise enthusiast, with her impossible scheme for cleansing the Augean stable of this world! Chivalrous child-Quixote, tilting at the Black Windmills, whose sails are whirled by burning blasts from Hell, and whose millstones grind the souls of Eve's lost daughters into the dust that makes the devil's daily bread—how should the Dop Doctor of Gueldersdorp dare to love her? But he did not cease to, for all the height of his self-knowledge and all the depth of his self-scorn.

He seemed to Lynette a strange, harsh man, but there was something in him that won her liking. He had a stern mouth, she thought, and sorrowful, angry eyes, with that thunder-cloud of black, lowering eyebrow above them. And he looked at her as though she

reminded him of someone he knew. Perhaps he had sisters, though they could hardly be very young. Or it was not a sister. He must be quite old—the Mother had thought him certainly thirty-five—but possibly he had a young wife in England—or somewhere else? And she had spoken to him of her great project. She wondered now at that impulse of confidence. Perhaps she had yielded to it to convince herself that her enthusiasm was as strong, her purpose still as clear, as ever, in the mirror of the Future; that no gay, youthful reflection had ever risen up of late days between it and her wistful eyes when she peeped in. The remembered image of the handsome face that had laughed, even as Beauvayse had declared:

"Even if I die to-day, it won't end there. I shall think of you, and long for you, and worship you wherever I am."

The thought of Beauvayse's dying was horrible, intolerable. His name came after the Mother's in her prayers. He had asked her to keep the secret—his and hers—and called her such exquisite, impossible things for promising that the mere remembrance of his words and his eyes as he said them in that low, passionate, eager voice, took her breath deliciously.

"*Sweetest, kindest, loveliest....*" She whispered them to herself as she hurried back to comfort worried Mrs. Greening with the news that the doctor was coming.

Meanwhile Saxham went on his accustomed way between the long line of waggons and the corrugated-iron lined huts on the other hand, in a cross-fire of appeals, requests, complaints. Nothing escaped him. He would pass by, with the most casual glance and nod, women who volubly protested themselves dying, and single out the face that bore

the dull, scorched flush of fever or the yellow or livid stamp of rheumatism, or ague, or liver-trouble, with a beckon of his hand, and the owner of such a face, invariably declaring herself a well woman, would be summarily dealt with, and dosed with tabloid or tincture out of the inexhaustible wallet he carried, slung about his shoulders by its webbing band.

"Dokter," screeched a portly Tante in a soiled cotton bedgown and flapping kappje, appearing, copper stewpan in hand, from between the canvas tilt-curtains of a living-waggon. "You are come at last; the Lord be thanked for it! I have much, much trouble inside." She groaned, and laid her fat, unoccupied hand upon the afflicted area, adding: "I feel I shall not be quite wholesome here."

"Wat scheelt er aan, Tante?" He spoke the Taal with ease.

The large Tante snorted:

"What is the matter? Do you ask me what is the matter? As if a dokter oughtn't to tell me that! But the Engelsch are regular devils for asking questions. Since you must know, I have a mighty wallowing under my apron-band, and therewith a pain. How is it begun? It is begun since middageten yesterday. And little Dierck here has the belly-ache, and is giddy in the head."

"Little Dierck will have something worse than the belly-ache, and you also, if you eat of broth or vegetables cooked in a vessel as unclean as that, mevrouw."

"Hoe?" The large flabby face under the expansive kappje became red as the South African sunset. She

flourished the venerable copper stewpan, its rim liberally garnished with verdigris, ancient deposit of fatty matters accumulated at the bottom. "Do you call my good stewpan, that my mother cooked beef and succotash and pottage-herbs in before me, an unclean vessel—you? And were the pan otherwise than clean as my hand—as my apron!"—a double comparison of the unfortuitous kind—"how should I alter matters in a heathen place like this?" Her large bosom rocked tumultuously. "Dwelling at the bottom of a mud-hole like a frog, O God of my fathers! with bullets as big as pumpkins trundling overhead, ready to whip your head off your body if you as much as stick your nose above ground—the accursed things!"

"They are pumpkins sent by your own countrymen, Tante, so you ought to speak of them more civilly. And—scour the pot with a double-handful of clean sand; it will be for your health as well as the kind's. Come here, jongen—give me a look at the little tongue." The boy went to him confidently, and stuck it out, looking up with innocent wide eyes in the square, powerful face, as Saxham swung round his wallet, continuing, "Here, mevrouw, is a packet of Epsom salts. Take half of it, stirred in a cup of warm water, to-morrow morning fasting——"

"Alamachtig!" she protested. "Is that the Engelsch way of doctoring? To put another belly-grief on the top of the one you have got, what sense is in that?"

"It is the new nail, Tante, that drives out the rusty old one. Give the boy a teaspoonful in half a cup of water, and remember to scour the pans."

Saxham passed on, stepping neatly with his small, tan-booted, spurred feet between the dung and chip fires curling up in blue smoke-spirals, and the

sprawling children, seeming as though he did not notice them, yet catching up one that had a rash, and satisfying himself that the eruption was innocent ere he passed on, visiting every waggon-dwelling and cave-refuge, rating the inhabitants of some, dosing the occupants of others, emerging from three or four of the stuffy, ill-smelling places with a heavy frown that boded ill for somebody. For though Famine had not yet begun to gnaw the vitals of those immured in Gueldersdorp, Disease had here and there sprung into active, threatening, infectious being, menacing the crowded community with invisible, maleficent forces. Soon the hospitals were to be crowded to the doors, to remain crowded for many months to come; and the cry, "Room for the sick! more room!" was to go up unceasingly.

Coming out of a miserable habitation, where lay a woman in rheumatic fever, whose three children had developed measles on the previous day, and, seeing about the door of a neighbouring hovel a particularly noisome aggregation of garbage and waste, he paused but to give a brief direction to the mild-faced Sister who had assumed charge of the sick. Then his voice rang out above all the feminine and childish Babel, strong, resonant, masculine:

"Where are the head-boys of the gangs that I told off to clean up and carry ash-buckets to the dumping-place?"

Whence, under cover of night, the garbage and waste were carted to the destructor in connection with the Acetylene Gas Company's plant, soon to be shattered by one of Meisje's shells. There was no answer. Saxham took the worn hunting-crop from under his arm, and with an easy movement shook out the

twisted thong.

"Where are those two boys? Jim Gubo! Rasu!"

A pale young woman peeling potatoes at her door looked up knowingly. "They won't carry away a cabbage-leaf unless they're bribed, and they open their mouths wider every day. It's a tikkie a bucket now."

The young woman went back to her potatoes. The offenders, visibly quaking, crept from under a waggon, where they had been gambling with dry mealies for ill-gotten tikkies. A big Kaffir boy in ragged tan-cords and the crownless brim of an Oxford straw, with a red-turbaned, blue dungaree-clad, supple Oriental of the coolie class. Jim Gubo, with liberal display of ivory, assured the Baas, in defiance of the Baas's own eyes and the organ in juxtaposition, that the work had been regularly done. Rasu the Sweeper, with many oaths and protestations, assured the Presence that such neglect as was apparent was owing to the incapacity of the hubshi and his myrmidons, Rasu's own share of the labour and that of his fellow-countryman being scrupulously performed.

The Presence made short work of Kaffir and Hindu. Shrill feminine clamours filled the air as the singing lash performed its work of castigation; and while Saxham scored repentance upon the hide of his blacker brother, holding him writhing, shouting, and bellowing at the full stretch of one muscular arm, as he plied the other he kept a foot on Rasu the Sweeper, so as to have him handy when his turn came. Meanwhile, the Oriental, with tears and lamentable howlings, wound about the doctor's leg, a vocal worm, deprecating tyranny.

"Your Honour is my father and mother. Let the hand of justice refrain from excoriating the person of the unfortunate, wreaking double vengeance upon the hubshi, who is but fuel for Hell, like all his accursed race, and full explanation shall be made."

He was jerked upward by the scruff, as, smarting, blubbering Africa retired to the shadow of the waggons.

"Well, what have you got to say?"

The bellow of the town batteries, with the clack—clack—clack! of the Hotchkiss that had been removed from the armoured train and mounted on the North Fort, reduced the tirade to pantomime.

"This is a bad, a very bad, place for the son of my mother." The lean brown right hand swept upwards to the thick canopy of white smoke that the shifting breeze rolled back from the Cemetery Earthworks. "The food of coarse grain is diet for camels, and the water stinks very greatly. Moreover, it is better for thy slave to die amongst defilements than to carry buckets and be chased by devils in iron pots thirsting for the blood of men. Aie—aie!"

One of the enemy's Maxim-Nordenfelts had loosed off a group of the gaily-painted little shells. With the reduplicated rattle of the detonation, they passed over the laager, bursting as they went, sending their fan-shaped showers of splinters broadcast. Slatternly women and scared children bolted for their burrows. Rasu the Sweeper dived frantically between the fore and hind wheels of a waggon, praying to all the gods of the low-caste to ward off those wicked little bits of rending metal....

"Anyone hurt?" called Saxham.

"No one, I think," called back the strong sweet voice of the Mother-Superior, who had come out of a hovel, where she was tending some sick. There was a glint in her deep eyes as she regarded Saxham's thorough handiwork that told her approval of castigation well deserved. Then:

"Maharaj! Oh, Maharaj! Succour in calamity! Aid for the dying! Hai, hai, behold how I bleed!"

The red-turbaned martyr rolled in the unclean litter, elevating a stick-like brown leg, in the lean, muscular calf of which one of the smallest of the wicked little splinters had, as Rasu the Sweeper dived for the waggon, found a home.

"That has saved you a well-earned hiding, so thank your stars for it. Let the Kaffir see to it that he insults no more English ladies, or he shall pay for every word with an inch of skin. Now put up your leg." Saxham whipped out the splinter with a little pair of tweezers, deftly cleansed and dressed the wound, bandaged it, and, dismissing Rasu the Sweeper with a caution, was coming across to the Reverend Mother when a chorus of cries and piercing shrieks broke forth:

"Mijn jongen! mijn jongen!"

She was a bulky Dutch vrouw, with a dishevelled head of coarse black hair, and a dirty cotton gown, and dirty bare feet in bulgy shoes that were trodden down at heel. But with her livid, purple face and protruding, bloodshot eyeballs uplifted to the drifting cloud of greenish lyddite vapour that thinned away overhead, she was great and terrible, and the very

incarnation of Maternity Bereft.

One huge arm gripped the little body to her broad, panting bosom. She had called him, and he had not answered; she had sought and found him, just as he had slidden off the box-seat, where he had been playing driver of the ox-span, lying curled up against the dashboard, the little whip of stick and string he had been at pains to make only yesterday fallen from the lax, childish hand. The fair hair on the left temple was dabbled in blood, that trickled from the tiny three-cornered bluish hole. His eyes were open, as if in wonder at the sudden darkness that had fallen at bright midday; the smile had frozen on the parted, innocent lips....

Oh, look at this, Premier and President! Look at this, my Lords and Commons and militant Burghers of Republican States! Grave Ministers who decide in Cabinet Councils that the prestige of the Government you represent is at stake, and that the bedraggled honour of the Country can only be washed clean in one red river, flowing from the veins of Humanity, look, look here! You who lust for Sovereignty, hiding rapacious Ambitions and base lust for gold behind the splendid ermined folds of the Imperial purple. You who resented Suzerainty, coveting to keep in your hands riches that you could not use, resources that your ignorance could not develop, greedy to have and hold what you wrested from the Sons of Ham, lest white men should snatch it back from you again; and prating of Liberty and Freedom while the necks of three races of men were bending under the yoke of an oligarchy more imperious, more pitiless, more covetous, besotted, brutal, and ignorant than any other that the spotted records of History can show—look here, look here!

Nations that rush to dreadful War, loosing the direful threefold plague of Iron, Fire, and Disease to scourge and brand and desolate the once smiling face of your Mother Earth, pause as you roll onwards in desolating cataclysms of armed and desperate men, and forgetting the bloodstained she-devil you misname Glory, look here, in the Name of One who loved and suffered little children, rating their innocent bodies and spotless souls at such high value that Little Dierck and his countless brother-and-sister-babes that have perished of Iron, Fire, and Disease, as of Terror and Famine, Death's twin henchmen, shall weigh in the balance against Crowned Heads and Lords and Commons and Presidents and Representatives and Deputies, until they kick the beam!

Should there be War? Of course there should be War! you say.

Have you seen War? Perhaps, even as I have. And, having seen it, dare you justify the shedding, by men who hold the Christian Faith, of these spilled-out oceans of Christian blood?

That question will be settled when the Trumpet of the Great Angel sounds, and the Sea and the Earth shall give up their dead, and everyone shall answer for his deeds before the Throne of God. And until then, look to it that if you war in any cause, the cause be a just one.

"My Dierck! My little Dierck! O God! God!—--"

Standing with that tragic purple mask turned

upwards to the silent sky, and the wild eyes blazing, and the great fist at the end of the uplifted arm brandished in the Face of Heaven itself, the Boer mother demanded of her Maker why this thing had been done?

"He was so good. Never a fib since last I gave him the ox-reim end to taste. Never a lump of sugar or a cookie or a plum pilfered—he would take them as bold as brass before your face if you didn't give. He said the night-prayer regularly. For the morning, Lord, Thou knowest boys want to be up and at mischief as soon as they have rubbed the sleep out of their eyes—'tis only natural. And the father a God-fearing man, and me a woman of piety. For when have I backslidden before Thee? If any of mine have hung back when I told them to loop and do a thing, or sneaked off and hid when we were inspanned for the kerk-going, did I fail to whack them as a mother should? Nooit, nooit! And now—Death has fallen out of the sky upon the Benjamin of my bosom. Oh, blasted be the eyesight and withered be the hand of the man that sighted and laid and fired the gun!"

She cursed the Kaiser's blue-and-white-uniformed gunner in every function of his body and every corner of his soul, waking and sleeping, dying and dead, with fluent Scriptural curses. The crowded faces about her went white. Some of the women were crying, others shook their heads:

"Thim that puts the Bad Black Wish on odhers finds sorra knock harrd at their dure," said an Irish voice oracularly. "An' who but herself did be callin' down all manner av' misfortune on ivery wan that crassed her?"

"It's a judgment—my opinion," agreed the thin young

woman who had been peeling potatoes, and who wore a wisp of draggled crape round a soiled rush hat. "Never a shell busted but you'd a-heered her say she hoped that one had sent another parcel of verdant rooineks to Hell. And me sitting over against her with crape on for my husband and baby. 'Tis a judgment, that's what I say."

"Oh, hush, Mrs. Lennan!" said the Mother-Superior. "Be pitiful and forget. She did not think—she had not suffered. Be pitiful, now that her hour has come!"

The thick voice of the Boer woman broke out again:

"Did ever I miss of the Nachtmaal? Alamachtig, no! Virtuous as Sarah have I lain in the marriage-bed—never a sly look for another, and my husband with dropsy-legs as thick as boomstammen, and sixty years upon his loins. Thou knewest, and yet the joy of my life is taken from me. Where wert Thou, O God of Israel, when they killed my little Dierck?"

The Mother-Superior leaned to her, and threw a strong, tender arm about the fleshy shoulders. She said, speaking in the Taal:

"Hush, hush! Remember that He gave the joy before He sent the sorrow. And we must submit ourselves to the Holy Will."

The Boer woman snorted:

"As if I didn't know that better than a Papist. Look you, have I shed one tear?" She blinked hard bright eyes defiantly. The Mother went on in that velvet voice of hers, making the uncouth dialect sound like the cooing of an Irish dove:

"Better that you had tears, poor mother! Ah! best to

weep. Did not our Lord weep over His dearest city, and for His beloved friend? And when He pitied the Widow of Nain, do you think His eyes were dry? Ah! best to weep."

She strove to wrench herself away, shouting:

"He raised Lazarus from the dead for Mary his sister, and she had been a shameless wench. And He gave the other back her boy. What has He done for me?"

The sisterly arm held her fast; the great grey eyes looked into hers, wet with the tears that were denied to her.

"He has given you an Angel to pray for you in Heaven."

She snorted rebelliously:

"His mother wants him down here.... And what is Heaven to little Dierck, when he could be sailing his boat in the river-pools, and playing at driving the span?"

But she let the Mother-Superior take him from her, and dropped her great arms doggedly at her sides, watching still dry-eyed as they laid him down, and Saxham stooped above him, feeling at the pulseless heart. She saw the doktor shake his head and lay down the little hand. She saw the Mother-Superior coax down the eyelids with tender, skilful fingers, and put a kiss on each, making the Sign of the Cross on the still, childish breast, and murmuring a little prayer. She would have screamed to avert the defiling, heathen thing from him, but the memory of the sister-embrace and the sister-look held her dumb.

It was only when they were stripping him for the last

sad toilet, and the cherished top and half a dozen highly-prized marbles rolled out of the pocket in the stumpy little round jacket she had made out of a cast-off garment of his father's that her bosom heaved, and the fountains of her grief sprang from the stony soil. She wept copiously, and found resignation. Soon she was sufficiently herself to scold a prodigally-minded spinster relative who had proposed that Little Dierck should be coffined in his new black Sabbath suit.

"But you old maids have no sense, no more than so many cabbages. Little angels in the hemel can fly about in clean nightgowns—look in the grandfather's big picture-Bible if you don't believe me. But live boys can't loop about without breeches. So I'll lay these by for the next one."

XXXIII

Roasting hot Christmas has gone by, with its services and celebrations, its sports and entertainments, its meagre feasting, and its hearty cheer, a bloodless triumph followed by the regrettable defeat sustained in the battle of Big Tree Fort. To-day the Union Jack hangs limp upon the flagstaff that rears its slender height over Nixey's, and the new year is some weeks old. The blue, blue sky of January is without a single puff of cloud, and the taint from the trenches is less sickening, unmingled with the poisonous fumes of the lyddite bursting-charges, and the acrid odour of smokeless powder. It is Sunday, when Briton and Boer hold the Truce of God, and the church-bells ring to call and not to warn the people, and sweet Peace and blessed Silence brood over the shrapnel-scarred veld. The aasvogels feast undisturbed on bloated carcasses of horses and cattle lying on the debatable ground between the Line of Investment and the Line of Defence, the barbel in the river leap at the flies, and partridge and wild guinea-fowl drink in the shallows, and bathe in the dry hot sand between the boulder-stones.

The Market Square is populous with a chatting, sauntering crowd of people, who enjoy the luxury of using their limbs without being called on to displays of acrobatic agility in dodging trundling shell. There are Irregulars and B.S.A.P., Baraland Rifles and Town Guardsmen. There are the Native Contingent from the stad, and a company of Zulus, and the Kaffirs and the Cape Boys with their gaspipe rifles that do good

service in default of better, and bring down Oom Paul's Scripturally-flavoured denunciations upon Englishmen, who arm black and coloured folk to do battle for their own sable or brown or yellow rights. These have donned odd garments and quaint bits of finery to mark the holiday, and every white man has indulged in the luxury of a comprehensive wash, a shave with hot water, and a change of clothing, if it is obtainable. Also, drooping feminine vanity revives in hair-waves and emerges from underground burrows of Troglodytic type, arrayed in fluttering muslins, and crowned with coquettish hats, which walk about in company with ragged khâki and clay-stained duck and out-at-elbows tweed, and are proud to be seen in its brave company.

Husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, sons and mothers, lovers and sweethearts, meet after the week whose separating days have seemed like weeks, and visit the houses whose pierced walls and roofs, that let the white-hot sunshine in through many jagged holes, may one day, so they whisper, holding one another closely, shelter them again in peace. Home has become a sweet word, even to those who thought little of home before. And many who were sinful have found conviction of sin and the saving grace of repentance, and many more who denied their God have learned to know Him, in this village town of battered dwellings, whose streets are littered with all the grim débris of War.

Nixey's has not come scathless through the ordeal. The stately brick chimneys of the kitchen and coffee-room have been broken off like carrots, and replaced by tin funnels. Patches of the universal medium, corrugated iron, indicate where one of Meisje's ninety-four-pound projectiles recently plumped in

through the soft brick of the east wall end, and departed by the west frontage, leaving two holes that might have accommodated a chest of drawers, and carrying a window with it. Mrs. Nixey, the children, and the women of the staff inhabit a bombproof in the back-yard. The waiters have developed a grasshopper-like nimbleness, otherwise things go on as usual.

It being Sunday, a large long man and another as long, but less bulky, are extended in a couple of long bamboo chairs on Nixey's longish front verandah. The blue, fragrant smoke of two long cigars curls upwards over their supine heads, and two long drinks containing a very meagre modicum of inferior whisky are contained in two long tumblers, resting in the bamboo nests cunningly devised for their accommodation in the chair-arms.

It is hot, but both the men look cool and lazy, and almost too fresh to have spent the greater part of the night, the younger upon advanced patrol-duty, and the elder at the Staff bombproof in the Southern Lines, where messages come in and where messages go out, and where reports are received and from whence orders are despatched from sunset to the peep of day, and from peep of day to sunset.

The wardrobes of both warriors are much impaired by active service, but their originally white flannel trousers, if patched, discoloured, and shrunken by amateur lavations, boast the cut of Bond Street; their shirts, if a trifle ragged, are immaculately clean, and the cracks in their canvas shoes are disguised by a lavish expenditure of pipeclay. Beauvayse has rummaged out and mounted a snowy double collar in honour of the day, with a knitted silk necktie of

his Regimental colours, and a kamarband to match is wound about his narrow, springy waist, and knotted to perfection. Both men might be basking on an English river-bank after a stiff pull up-stream, or resting after a bout at tennis on an English lawn, but for the revolver-lanyards round their strong, bronzed throats, ending in the butts of Smith and Wesson's revolvers of Service calibre, the bandoliers and belts that lie handy on a table, and the Lee-Metford carbines that lean in an angle made by the house-wall and the verandah end. Also, but for the tension of long-sustained watchfulness on both faces, making it plain that, though resting and reposeful, they are neither of them unexpectant of a summons to be the opposite of these things. It is a look that, at different degrees of intensity, is stamped on every face in Gueldersdorp. And the same uncertainty possesses and pervades even unsentient things. The Union Jack, hanging listlessly from the summit of its lofty staff, bathed in the golden, glowing atmosphere of this January day, may, in an instant's space, give place to the red signal of danger; the bugle, now silent, may at any moment blare out its loud and dismal note of warning; the bells that call with peaceful insistence, "Come to church! come to church!" in the twinkling of an eye may be clanging scared townsfolk to their burrowed hiding-places. You never know. For General Brounckers, though a God-fearing man, sometimes goes in for Sunday gun-practice, quite unintentionally, as he afterwards explains. Hence, even on the Sabbath, it is as well to be prepared.

Beauvayse is the first to break the drowsy silence by knocking the lengthened ash off his cigar, and expressing his opinion that the weed might be a worse one.

"Considerin' the price the box of fifty was knocked down to me for at Kreils' auction yesterday," states Captain Bingo, "it's simply smokin' gold. Nine pound fifteen-and-six runs me into, how much apiece?" He yawns cavernously, and gives the calculation up. "Always was a duffer at figures," he says, and relapses into silence until, in the act of throwing the nearly smoked-out cigar-butt away, he pulls himself up, and, economically impaling it on his penknife-blade, secures a few more whiffs.

"Against the Lenten days to come, when there will be no balm left in Gilead," says Beauvayse, cocking a grey-green eye at him in sleepy derision, "and no tobacco in Gueldersdorp."

"Kreils' are sellin' dashed bad cigarettes at a pound the box of a hundred now," says Captain Bingo; "and I've a notion of layin' in a stock of 'em. We smoked tea in the Sudan, and I had a shot at hemp, but it plays the very devil with the nerves. All jumps and twitches, you know, after a pipe or two. Nervous as a cat, or a woman. And, talking of women, I wonder where my wife is?"

He turns a large, pink, disconsolate face upon Beauvayse. Beauvayse responds with the air of one who has suffered boredom from the too frequent enumeration of this conjecture. "Not knowing, can't say." And there is another silence.

"How she got the maggot into her head," presently resumes Lady Hannah's spouse, "I can't think. I did suppose her vaultin' ambition to rival Dora Corr—woman who managed to burn her own and a lot of other people's fingers by meddlin' in South African politics over the Raid business—had been quenched for good that mornin' you took those fifty chaps of

the Irregulars out for what she *would* call their 'baptism of fire.'"

"That's newspaperese," yawns Beauvayse, his supple brown hands knitted at the back of his sleek golden head. "Goes with 'the tented field' and *casus belli: cherchez la femme* and *cui bono*?"

"She's got the lingo at her finger-ends and in her blood, or we wouldn't be cherchaying now," says Bingo dolorously. "I asked her if she was particularly keen on gettin' killed...."

"Shouldn't have done that. Put her on her mettle not to show funk if she felt it," mumbles Beauvayse.

"A man can't always be diplomatic," grumbles Bingo. "Anyhow, she'd seen a bit of a scrap at the outset of affairs, when the B.S.A. went out with the Armoured Train, and was wild with me for wantin' to deprive her of another 'glorious experience.' ... And next morning she rides out with a Corporal and two troopers, both chaps beastly sensible of their responsibility, and wishin' her at Cape Town, she in toppin' spirits and as keen as mustard. It was about six o'clock, morning, and she hadn't been gone five minutes before we heard you fellows poundin' away and bein' pounded at like Jimmy O! I was on the roof with the Chief, the sweat runnin' down into the binoculars, until the veld seemed swarmin' with brown mares and grey linen habits and drab smasher hats, with my wife's head under 'em, and hoverin' troopers. But I did make out that your party had got into difficulties——"

"We opened on 'em at a thousand yards, and pushed to within five hundred, and if the fellows in charge of the Hotchkiss could have got her into play,"

Beauvayse interrupts rather huffily, "we'd have been as right as rain."

"Possibly. If I hadn't been on special duty that day, and as nervous as a cat in a thunderstorm, I'd have volunteered to bring No. 2 Troop of A out to the rescue, instead of Heseltine. As it was, I nearly fell off the roof when I saw my wife coming, one trooper, as pale with fright as a piece of soap, supportin' her on his saddle, another man leading the mare, dead lame and the Corporal's hairy. Plugged in the upper works, the Corporal, poor beggar! but he'd managed to stick on somehow until they got to the Hospital. Have you ever had to deal with a woman in hysterics?"

Beauvayse nods sagely.

"Once or twice."

"Once is an experience that lasts a man all his lifetime. Phew!" Captain Bingo mops his large pink face. "Never had such a dressing-down in my life."

"But what had you to do with the Corporal getting chipped?"

"The Lord only knows!" says Bingo piously. "But, if you'd heard her, all the rest of the day and half through the night!..."

"I did," Beauvayse says with a faint grin. "Mine's the next bedroom to yours, you know."

"'Oh, the blood! Oh, the blood!' ..." Not unsuccessfully does the spouse of Lady Hannah attempt to render the recurrent hiccough and the whooping screech of hysteria. "'Damn it, my dear!' I said, tryin' to reason with her, 'what else did you

expect the fellow had got in him? Sawdust?' That seemed to rouse her like nothing else.... Turned on me like a tigress, by the living Tinker!—called me everything she could lay her tongue to, and threatened that she'd apply for a separation if I continued to outrage every feeling of decency that association with such a thundering brute hadn't uprooted from her nature."

"Whe—ew!"

Beauvayse's comment is a shrill-toned whistle.

"Of course, her nerves were knocked to smithereens, and a man can overlook a lot, under the circumstances. She was a mere jelly when the bombardment began——" goes on rueful Captain Bingo.

"—Rather!" confirms Beauvayse.—"Lived in the hotel cellar for the first fortnight, only emergin' from among the beer-barrels and wine-casks and liqueur-cases after dark——"

"—To blow me up and forgive me, turn and turn about, until daylight did appear. Luckily," reflects Bingo, with a rather dreary chuckle, "I had plenty of night-duty on just then, and so escaped a lot."

"*That* gave her her chance to shoot the moon!" hints Beauvayse, in accents muffled by his long tumbler.

"By the Living Tinker!" asseverates Captain Bingo, jerked out of his reclining attitude by vigorous utterance of the expletive, "you could have bowled me over with a scent-squirter when I came back to brekker and found her gone, and a cocked-hat note of farewell left for me on the dressing-table pincushion, in regular elopement style; and another

for the Chief, sayin'—he read it to me—that she'd gone to retrieve the Past, with a capital 'P,' and hoped to convince him ere long that one of her *despised sex*—underlined, 'despised sex'—can be useful to her country."

"'Can be useful to her country,'" repeats Beauvayse "Question is, in what way?"

"Damme if I can imagine!" bursts explosively from the deserted husband. "All I know up to date, and all *you* know, is that before it was quite light she drove out of our lines in Nixey's spider, his mouse-coloured trotter pullin', and her German maid sittin' behind, wavin' a white towel tied to the end of a walkin'-stick of mine, and went straight over to the enemy. We hear in the course of things from a Kaffir despatch-runner that she's stayin' in a hotel of sorts at Tweipans, where Brounckers has had his headquarters since he shifted Chief Laager from Geitfontein. And for any further information we may knock our rotten heads against a brick wall and twiddle our thumbs. Never you marry, Toby, my boy!"

A V-shaped vein swells and darkens between the handsome grey-green eyes and on the broad forehead, white as a girl's where the sun-tan leaves off. Beauvayse takes his cigar again from his mouth, and knocks the ash off deliberately before he responds:

"Thanks for the advice."

"Be warned," says Captain Bingo sententiously, "by me. Know when you're well off, as I didn't. Take the advice of your seniors, as I was too pig-headed a fool to do, and don't put it in the power of any woman to

make you as rottenly wretched as I am at this minute."

"Why! women *can* make you rottenly wretched," admits Beauvayse, with a confirmatory creak of the bamboo chair. "But, on the other hand, they can make you awfully happy—what?"

Captain Bingo throws his long legs off their resting-place, and sits sideways, staring rather owlishly at his young friend. He shakes his head in a dismal way several times, and sucks hard at his cigar as he shakes it.

"For a bit, but does it last? When I came down to hunt you up last June at the cottage at Cookham ——"

"Look here, old man!" The bamboo chair creaks angrily as Beauvayse in his turn sits up and drops his own long legs on either side of it, and drives the foot-rest back under the table seat with a vicious punch. "Don't remind me of the cottage at Cookham, will you? It's one of the things I want to forget just now."

"You were as proud as Punch of it last June. Have you let it?" pursues Bingo, ignoring his junior's request.

Beauvayse yawns with ostentatious weariness of the subject.

"No; I haven't let it."

"Ought to go off like smoke, properly advertised. Somethin' like this: 'To let, Roselawn Cottage, Cookham: a charmin' Thames-side bijou residence. Small grounds and large cellar, a boathouse and a

houseboat, stables, a pigeon-cote, and a private post-box. Duodecimo oak dinin'-room, boudoir by Rellis. Ideal nest for a honeymoon, real thing or imitation. Might have become the real thing if owner hadn't been whisked off in time to South Africa.' And a dashed good job for him. For you've had a decentish lot of narrow escapes, Toby, my boy!" pursues the oracular Captain Bingo, disregarding his junior's forbidding scowl, "and come out of a goodish few tight places, and you've got out of 'em, if I may say so, more through luck than wit; but that little entanglement I'm delicately alludin' to was one of the closest things on record in the career of a Prodigal Son."

"Thanks. You're uncommonly complimentary to-day." Beauvayse pitches away his cigar, knocks a feather of ash from his clean silk shirt, and folds his arms resignedly on his broad flat chest.

"Upon my word, I didn't mean to be. Does it ever strike you," goes on Captain Bingo doggedly, "that if that wire from the Chief asking for your address hadn't found me at the Club, and if I hadn't run down and dug you out at the—I won't repeat the name of the place, since you don't seem to like it—you'd have been married and done for, old chap—any date you like to name between then and the beginning of the war? And, to put things mildly, there would have been the mischief to pay with your people."

"Yes," Beauvayse agrees rather dreamily; "there would have been an awful lot of bother with my people."

"Not that I object to the stage myself," Captain Bingo says, waving a large, tolerant hand; "and it seems getting to be rather the fashion to recruit the female

ranks of the Peerage from Musical Comedy, and a prettier and cleverer little woman than Lessie ... What are you stoppin' your ears for?"

"I'm not," says a muffled, surly voice. "It's a—twinge of toothache."

"All I've got to say is," declares Captain Bingo, "that marriage with one's equal in point of breedin' is sometimes a blank draw, but marriage with one's inferior is a howling error. And if you had done as I'd stake my best hat you would have done, supposin' you'd been left to loll in the lap of the lovely Lessie ——"

Beauvayse jumps up in a rage.

"Wrynche, how much longer do you think I can go on listening to this? You're simply maundering, man, and my nerves won't stand it."

"Oh, very well! But you haven't the ghost of a right to lay claim to nerves," Captain Bingo obstinately asseverates. "Now look at me."

"I'm hanged if I want to!" declares Beauvayse. "You're not a cheering object." He drops back into the bamboo chair again.

"Flyblown, do I look?" inquires Bingo, with dispassionate interest.

"Well, yes, decidedly," Beauvayse agrees, without removing his eyes from the whitewashed verandah-pillar at which they blankly stare.

"Streaky yellow in the whites of the eyes, and pouchy under 'em?" Captain Bingo demands of his young friend with unmistakable relish. "'Yes' again? And I grouse and maunder? Of course I do, my dear chap!

How can I help it? A married man who, for all he knows, may be a widower——"

"I wish to God I knew I was one!"

"My good fellow?"

"You heard what I said," Beauvayse flings over his shoulder.

Captain Bingo, his hands upon his straddling knees, regards his junior with circular eyes staring out of a large, kind, rather foolish face of utter consternation.

"That you wished to God you were a widower?"

"Well, I mean it."

XXXIV

"Good Lord!"

There is a gap of silence only broken when Captain Bingo says heavily:

"Then you did marry the Lavigne after all? When was it——"

"We'd pulled off the marriage at the local Registrar's a fortnight before you came down with—*his* wire."

"By the Living Tinker, then it *was* a genuine honeymoon after all!" A faint grin appears on Captain Wrynche's large perturbed face.

"Don't be epigrammatic, Wrynche." The dull

weariness in the young voice gives place to quick affront. "And keep the secret. Don't give me away."

"Did I ever give you, or any other man who ever trusted me, away? Tell me that."

Captain Bingo gets up and covers the distance between the deck-chairs with a single stride, and puts a big kind hand on the averted shoulder.

"Of course you never did." The boy reaches up and takes the hand, and squeezes it with the shyness of the Englishman who responds to some display of solicitude or affection on the part of a comrade. "Don't mind my rotting like this. There are times when one must let off steam or explode."

"I thought—and so did a few others, the Chief among 'em—that South Africa had saved you by the skin of your teeth," says Captain Bingo, smoking vigorously, and driving his hands very deep into his pockets. "Confoundedly odd how taken in we were! I could have sworn, my part, that you'd just stopped short at ——"

"At making a blithering idiot of myself," interpolates Beauvayse. "If you'll go back and sit decently in your chair, instead of standing behind me rattlin' keys and coins in your pocket, and dropping hot cigar-ash on my head, I'll tell you how it happened. Nobody listening?"

"Not a soul," says Captain Bingo, padding back after a noiseless prowl to the coffee-room window.

Beauvayse grips either arm of the chair he sits in so fiercely that they crack again.

"I—I was desperately hard hit over Lessie a year ago

——"

"So were a lot of other young idiots."

"That's a pleasant reflection. They were."

"Of course, I"—Bingo's large face becomes very red—"I inferred nothing in any way against Miss Lavigne's chara—— Dash it, I beg your pardon! I ought to call her Lady Beauvayse."

"Don't trouble. I think I'd rather you didn't. It would rub things in rather too much," says Beauvayse, paling as the other has reddened.

"Wouldn't it be as well," hints Captain Bingo, "to get used to it?"

"No," Beauvayse throws over his shoulder. "And don't assume a delicacy in speaking of the—the lady, because it's unnecessary. As I've said, I was very much in love. She had—kept house with a man I knew, before we came together, and there may have been other affairs—for all I can tell, at least—I should say most probably." Something in Captain Bingo's face seems to say "uncommonly probably," though he utters no word. "But she was awfully pretty, and I lost my head." He shuts his eyes and leans back, and the lines of his young face are strained and wan. "I—I lost my head."

"It's—it's natural enough," volunteers Captain Bingo.

There is another short interval of silence in which the two men on Nixey's verandah see the same vision—lime-lights of varying shades and colours thrown from different angles across a darkened garden-scene where impossible tropical flowers expand giant petals, and a spangled waterfall tumbles over the

edge of a blue precipice in sparkling foam. The nucleus of a cobweb of quivering rays, crossing and intersecting, is a dazzling human butterfly, circling, spinning, waving white arms like quivering antennæ, flashing back the coloured lights from the diamonds that are in her hair and on her bosom, are clasped about her rounded waist and wrists, gleam like fireflies from the folds of her diaphanous skirts, and sparkle on her fingers. A provoking, beguiling Impertinence with great stage eyes encircled by blue rims, a small mouth painted ruby-red, a complexion of theatrical lilies and roses, and tiny, twinkling feet that beat out a measure to which Beauvayse's pulses have throbbed madly and now throb no more.

"It began in the usual way," he goes on, waking from that stage day-dream, "with suppers and stacks of flowers, and a muff-chain of turquoise and brilliants, and ended up with——"

"With an electric motor-brougham and a flat in Mayfair. Oh Lord, what thunderin' donkeys we fellows are!" groans Captain Bingo, rubbing his head, which has hair of a gingery hue, close-cropped until the scalp blushes pinkly through it, and rubbing nothing in the way of consolation into the brain inside it.

"I bought the cottage at Cookham as a surprise for her birthday," goes on the boy. "She's a year or two older than me——"

"And the rest," blurts out Captain Bingo. But he drowns the end of the sentence in a giant sneeze. "Must have caught cold last night without knowin' it. Dashed treacherous climate this," he murmurs behind the refuge of a pocket-handkerchief. "And so you bought the cottage for Lessie? Another nibble out of

the golden cheese that the old man's nursing up for you,—what? And in thingumbob retirement by the something-or-other stream you hit on the notion of splicing the lovely Lessie Lavigne. Poetry, by the Living Tinker!"

"Do you want to hear how I came to cut my own throat?" snarls the boy, with white, haggard anger alternating with red misery and shame in his young, handsome face; "because if you do, leave off playing the funny clown and listen."

"Never felt less inclined to be funny in my life. 'Pon my word, I assure you!" asseverates Bingo. "You're simply a bundle of irritable nerves, my dear chap, and that's the truth."

"You wouldn't wonder if you knew ... Oh, damn it, Wrynche!"—the young voice breaks in a miserable sob—"I'm so thundering miserable. And all because there—there was a kid coming, and I did the straight thing by its mother."

"Whew!" Captain Bingham Wrynche gives vent to a long, piercing, dismal whistle, which so upsets a gaunt mongrel prowling vainly for garbage in the gutters of Market Square that he puts up his nose and howls in answer. "Was that how you fell into the ——" He is obviously going to say "trap," but with exceeding clumsiness substitutes "state." And wonders at the thing having been pulled off so quietly in these days, when confounded newspapers won't let you call your soul your own.

"That's because I signed my name 'John Basil Edward Tobart,'" explains Beauvayse; "and because the Registrar—a benevolent old cock in a large white waistcoat, like somebody's father in a farcical

comedy—wasn't sufficiently up in the Peerage to be impressed."

"Weren't there witnesses of sorts?" hints Bingo.

"Of sorts. The housekeeper at the cottage and my man Saunders—the discreet Saunders who's with me here. And a fortnight later came the appointment," goes on the boy. "And—I was gladder than I cared to know at getting away. She—Lessie—meant to play her part in the 'Chiffon Girl' up to the end of the Summer Season, and then rest until ..." He does not finish the sentence.

"I suppose she's fond of you—what?" hazards Captain Bingo.

"She cares a good deal, poor girl, and was frightfully cut up at my going, and I provided for her thoroughly well, of course, though she has heaps of money of her own. And when I went to stay with my people for a night before sailing, I'd have broken the —the truth to my mother then, only something in her face corked me tight. From the moment I took the plunge, the consciousness of what a rotten ass I'd been had been growin' like a snowball. But on the voyage out"—a change comes into the weary, level voice in which Beauvayse has told his story—"I forgot to grouse, and by the time we'd lifted the Southern Cross I wasn't so much regretting what I'd done as wondering whether I should ever shoot myself because I'd done it? Up in Rhodesia I forgot. The wonderful champagne air, and the rousing hard work, the keen excitement and the tingling expectation of things that were going to happen by-and-by, that have been happening about as since October, were like pleasant drugs that keep you from thinking. I only remembered now and then, when I

saw Lessie's photograph hanging on the wall of my quarters, and the portrait she had set in the back of my sovereign-case, that she and me were husband and wife." He gives a mirthless laugh. "It makes so little impression on a fellow's mind somehow, to mooch into a Registrar's office with a woman and answer a question or two put by a fat, middle-aged duffer who's smiling himself into creases, and give your name and say, 'No, there's no impediment,' and put on the ring and pay a fee—I believe it was seven-and-six—and take a blotchy certificate and walk out—married."

"It never does take long, by Gad!" agrees Captain Bingo with fervour, "to do any of the things that can't be undone again."

"Undone ...!" Beauvayse sits up suddenly and turns his miserable, beautiful, defiant eyes full on the large, perturbed face of his listener. "Wrynche, Wrynche! I've felt I'd gladly give my soul to be able to undo it, ever since I first set eyes on Lynette Mildare!"

Captain Bingo gives vent to another of his loud, dismal whistles. Then he gets out of his chair, large, clumsy, irate, and begins:

"I might have known it, with a chap like you. Another woman's at the bottom of all your bellowing. You're not a bit sick at having brought an outsider—a rank outsider, by Gad!—into the family stud; you're not a rap ashamed at havin' disappointed the old man's hopes of you, for you know as well as I do that when you'd done sowin' your wild oats and had your fling, you'd have come in when he rang the bell and married Lady Mary Menzies. You're not a damned scrap sorry at having broken your mother's

heart, though you know in the bottom of your soul that she scented this marriage in the wind, and had an interview with the Chief, and went down on her knees to him—her knees, by the Living Tinker!—to give you the chance of breakin' off an undesirable connection!"

Beauvayse is out of his chair now. "Is that true—about my mother?" he demands, blazing.

"I'm not in the habit of lyin', Lord Beauvayse!" states Captain Bingo huffily.

"Don't fly off like a lunatic, Bingo, old man. How did you find—that—out?"

"Your cousin Townham told me."

"Damn my cousin Townham for a dried-up, wiggy, pratin' little scandalmonger!"

Captain Bingo retorts irately:

"Damn him if you please; he's no friend of mine. As yours, what I ask you is, between man and man, how far have you gone in this fresh affair?"

Beauvayse drives his hands deep into the pockets of his patched flannels, and says, adjusting a footstool with his toe over a crack in the board-flooring, as though the operation were a delicate one upon which much depended:

"I've told her how I feel where she's concerned, and that I care for her as I never cared yet, and never shall care, for anyone else."

The faint grin dawns again on Captain Wrynche's large, kindly, worried face.

"How many times have you met?"

"Only four or five times in all," says Beauvayse. "I'd set eyes on her twice before I was introduced. I couldn't rest for thinking about her. She drew me and drew me.... And when we did meet, there was no strangeness between us, even from the first minute. She just seemed waiting for what I had to own up. And when I spoke, I—I seemed to be only saying what I was meant to say.... From the beginning of the world! And you'd understand better if you'd seen her near——"

"I have seen her in the distance, walking with the Mother-Superior of the Convent. A tall, slight girl. Looks like a lady," says Bingo, "and has jolly hair."

"It's the colour of dead leaves in autumn sunshine or a squirrel's back," raves the boy, "and she's beautiful, Wrynche. My God! so beautiful that your heart stops beating when you look into her face, and nearly jumps out of your body when a fold of her gown brushes against you. And I swear there's no other woman for me in life or death!"

"I shouldn't be in such a cast-iron hurry to swear if I were you," Captain Bingo replies judicially. "And—I've heard you say the same about the others——"

"It was never true before. And she's a lady," pleads Beauvayse hotly. "A lady in manners, and education, and everything. The sort of girl one respects; the sort of girl one can talk to about one's mother and sisters ——"

"You'd talk about your mother to a Kaffir washerwoman," Captain Bingo blurts out. "Better you should, than go hanging about a Convent-bred

schoolgirl and telling her you'll never care for anybody else, when you've got a legal wife, and, for all you know, a family of twins at home in England."

The footstool, impelled by a scientific lift of Beauvayse's toe, flies to the other end of Nixey's verandah. "Is one mistake to ruin a man's life? I'll get a divorce from my wife. I will, by Heaven!"

"You told me not to maunder just now," says Bingo, with ponderous sarcasm. "Who is the maunderer, I'd like to know? By the Living Tinker, I should have thought that this siege life would have put iron into a man's blood instead of—of Crème de Menthe. Are you takin' those dashed morphia tabloids of Taggart's for bad-water collywobbles again? Yes? I thought as much. Chuck 'em to the aasvogels; stick to your work—you can't complain of its lackin' interest or variety—and let this girl alone. She's a lady, and the adopted daughter of an old friend of my wife's, and don't you forget it!" Bingo's gills are red, and he puffs and blows as large, excited, fleshy men are wont to. "If you do you'll answer to me!"

"I tell you," Beauvayse cries, white-hot with passion, and raising his voice incautiously, "that I mean to marry her. I tell you again that I will div——"

"Do you want the man in the street and every soul in the hotel to know your private affairs?" demands Bingo. "If so, go on shoutin'. As to your bein' a widower, the chances are on the other side.... Gueldersdorp ain't exactly what you would call a healthy place just now. And as to divorcin' your wife, how do you know she'll ever be accommodatin' enough to give you reason? And if she did, do you think a girl brought up in a Catholic Convent would marry you, even if you called to ask her with a copy

of the decree absolute pasted on your chest? Hang it, man, your mother's son you ought to know better! And—oh come, I say!"

For Beauvayse sits down astride an iron chair, and lays his shirt-sleeved arms on the back-rail, and his golden, crisply-waved head upon them.

"I—I love her so, Wrynche. And to stand by and see another man cut in and win what I've lost by my own rotten folly hurts so—so damnably." His mouth is twisted with pain.

"Is there another chap who wants to cut in?" Bingo demands.

"You know one gets a bit clairvoyant when one is mad about a woman," says Beauvayse, lifting his shamed wet eyes and haggard young face from the pillow of his folded arms. "Well, I'm dead certain that there is another man who—who is as badly hit as me."

"Who is the other man?"

"Saxham!"

"The Doctor! Shouldn't have supposed a fellow of that type would be susceptible now," says Bingo. "Gives an uncompromisin' kind of impression, with his chin like the bows of an Armoured Destroyer, and his eyebrows like another chap's moustaches."

"And eyes like a pair of his own lancets underneath 'em. But he's a frightfully clever beast," says Beauvayse. "And what he wants in looks he makes up in brains. And—and if he knew there was a scratch against me, he might force the running and win hands down. So hang on to my secret by your

eyelids, old fellow, and don't give me reason to be sorry I told——"

"You have my word, haven't you? And, talking about scratch entries," says Bingo, inspired by a sudden rush of recollection, "I ain't so sure that the Doctor—though, mind you, this is between ourselves—is the sort of wooer a parent of strict notions would be likely to encourage. Do you happen to have come across a goggle-eyed, potty little Alderman Brooker?—a Town Guardsman who runs a general store in the Market Place—that's his place of business with the boarding up, and the end butted in by a Creusot shell that didn't burst, luckily for Brooker. Well, this beast buttonholed me months ago, and began to spin a cuffer about Saxham."

"What had the dirty little bounder got to say?" asked Beauvayse, stiffening in disgust, "about a man he isn't fit to black the boots of?"

"Nothing special nice. Said Saxham had lost his London connection through getting involved in a mess with a woman," says the big Dragoon.

"Don't we all get into messes of that kind? What more?" demands Beauvayse.

"Said the Doctor had kicked over the traces pretty badly here. Pitched me a tale of his—Brooker's—having often acted as the Mayor's Deputy on the Police Court Bench, Brooker being an Alderman, and swore that he'd had Saxham up before him a dozen times at least in the last three years, along with the Drunks and Disorderlies."

"It sounds like a hanged lie!"

"If I didn't say as much to Brooker," responds Captain

Bingo, "I shut him up like a box by referrin' politely to glass houses, knowin' Brooker had been squiffy himself one night on guard, and by remindin' him that men who talk scandal of their superior officers under circumstances like the present are liable to be Court-Martialled and given beans. And as the Chief, and Saxham with him, dropped on Brooker in the act of smuggling lush into the trenches the other day, I fancy Brooker's teeth are fairly drawn. Though he swore to me that there isn't a saloon-keeper or a saloon-loafer in the town that doesn't know Saxham by the nickname of the Dop Doctor."

"The man don't exist who objects to hear of the disqualifications, mental and physical, of a fellow who he's thought likely to enter the lists with him in the—in the dispute for a woman's favour," says Beauvayse, with a pleasant air of candour. "And though the story sounds like a lie, as I've said, there's a possibility of its being the other thing. I'm sorry for Saxham—that goes without sayin'—though I don't like his overbearin' scientific side and his sledge-hammer manner. But that a man with a record of that kind should set his heart upon a girl like Lynette Mildare is horrible, intolerable, Wrynche; and while, for the man's own sake, I should respect his beastly secret, for *her* sake and in *her* interests, and if I consider that he's putting himself forward at the risk of my—my prospects and my hopes, I shall make use of what I know."

"You don't mean you'd split on the man!" splutters Bingo; "because, if you do——"

"All's fair in Love and War," says Beauvayse, with a ring of defiance in his pleasant, boyish voice, and a gleam of triumph in his beautiful sleepy eyes. "And

this is Love in War. You've put a trump card in my hand against Saxham, whether you meant to or not, and when the time comes, I shall play it."

He gets up and lounges away. And Captain Bingo, emitting another wailing whistle as he slews round to stare after the tall, retreating figure with the crisp, golden head, is sure of nothing so certainly as that Beauvayse will play that trump card. He is repentant for having broached the Doctor's secret as he climbs up by the narrow iron stair that leads out upon the roof of Nixey's Hotel, to relieve his commanding officer at the binoculars.

XXXV

You are invited, the very Sunday upon which the previously-recorded conversation took place, to make the acquaintance of the sprightly P. Blinders, Acting-Secretary to Commandant Selig Brounckers, Head Laager, Transvaal Republic and Orange Free State's United Forces, Tweipans.

P. Blinders, a long-bodied, short-legged young Dutch apothecary of the Free State, with short-sighted eyes behind hugely magnifying spectacles, and many fiery pimples bursting through the earthy crust of him, possibly testifying to the presence of volcanic fires beneath, had acted in the clerkly capacity to the Volksraad at Groenfontein. When Government did not sit at the Raad Zaal, Blinders, as calmly as any ordinary being might have done, dispensed jalap, castor-oil, and pill-stick over the counter of his store.

These are the three heroic besoms employed by enlightened and conscientious Boer housewives for sweeping out the interiors of their families.

Pill-stick is rhubarb-pill in the concrete. The thrifty mother buys a foot or so, and pinches off a bolus of the required magnitude thrice in the year. No dosing is allowed in between; the members of the family get it when the proper time comes round. To everyone his or her share, not forgetting the baby.

When P. Blinders came away, he left his grandfather to keep store, previously explaining to the aged man the difference between hydrocyanic acid and almond-essence for cake-flavouring, powders of corrosive sublimate and Gregory's. By a subtle transition the apothecary-clerk then became the epistolary right-hand of General Brounckers, whose wife, son, and grandson, with P. Blinders, made up his personal staff. And round the Commandant's living-waggon, where they harboured, Chaos reigned and Confusion prevailed, and disputes in many tongues—English severely excepted—made Babel. And, side by side with the domestic, decent virtues weltered all the vices rampant in the Cities of The Plain.

It goes without saying that the fresh site of Head Laager had been cunningly chosen. It occupied a shield-shaped plateau among low, flat-topped hills. The single street of Tweipans bounded it upon the east, and a rocky ridge upon the western side that might have been the vertebra of some huge reptile of the Diluvian Period, protected camp and village from British shell-practice.

Signs of this were not lacking. Waggons with shattered timbers and fantastically twisted irons,

broken carts, and guns dismounted from their carriages, were to be seen, near the dismembered or disembowelled bodies of the beasts that had drawn them. Dead horse or mule or bullock, decomposing in the sun, seemed to have nothing of offence for Republican noses. The yellow smear of lyddite was everywhere, and, looking over the rock-rampart upon the works below, you saw it like a blight, or yolk of egg spilt upon a war-map.

Family parties bivouacked in those bottle-shaped trenches where each fighting unit had his separate box of provisions sunk in the earth beside him, and his cooking-fire of chips and dry dung, and ate and slept and smoked and shot as he thought good. And in despite of such fires, the unrestricted space and pure hill-air notwithstanding, the noisome ditches wherein the cribbed, cabined, and confined defenders of Gueldersdorp alternately grilled and soaked, were alleys of musk-roses, marvels of sanitary purity compared with the works of the besiegers, and the abominable camps, where, in the absence of a nocturnally active Quartermaster-Sergeant, with his band of pioneers, stench took you by the throat and nose, while filth absorbed you over the ankles.

A whiff of peculiarly overpowering potency, reaching you, made you turn away, and then the immense disorder of the camp seized and held your eyes.

Arms, saddles, karosses, blankets, clothing, panniers of provisions and boxes of ammunition, were piled about in mountainous heaps. Of military organisation, discipline, authority, law, as these are understood by civilised nations, there was nothing whatever. Men in well-worn velveteens and felt

billycocks, hobnobbed with men in the gaudiest uniforms ever evolved by the theatrical costumier. Green velvet and gold lace, topped by cocked hats that had despoiled the ostrich to make a human biped vainly ridiculous, adorned Ginirals and Cornels that had no rigiments belongun' to 'um at all at all! and had come over from the Distressful Country to make a bould bid for glory, with the experience of warfare acquired while lurking behind hedges with shot-guns, in waiting for persons in disfavour with the Land League.

Patriarchs of eighty years and callow schoolboys of sixteen fought side by side with the fine flower and the lusty prime of Boer manhood, and many had their wives and children with them under the Transvaal colours, and not a few had brought their mothers. When an officer had any order to give his men, he prefaced it with the Boer equivalent for "Hi!" When the men had heard as much as they considered necessary, they would say, "Come on; let's be going," and slouch away.

P. Blinders, being a Dutchman of the Free State, minded smells no more than a Transvaal Boer. Yet it sometimes occurred to him as odd that the duties of a Secretary should embrace the peeling of potatoes and the performance of other duties of the domestic kind.

He was squatting in the shadow of the Commandant's living-waggon, polishing off the last of a panful, when Van Busch came along. English being an unpopular language, the big Johannesburger and the little Free Stater exchanged greetings in the Taal.

"Ging oop, and leave your woman's work there, and

walk a piece with me," said Van Busch. "I have something to say to you about my sister that married the German drummer, and is stopping at Kink's Hotel."

You can see Van Busch taking off his broad-brimmed hat, and knocking the sweat from the leather lining-band. He was dressed in a black broadcloth tailed-coat, flannel shirt, and cord breeches, wore heavy veldschoens, and carried a Mauser rifle, as did everybody else, and had a long hunting-knife as well as a heavy six-shooter in the wide canvas pouch-belt, and a bandolier heavy with cartridges. Thus panoplied, he accurately resembled ten thousand other men.

But his dark, overfed, full-blooded, whiskered face was not that of an agriculturist, and the strange light eyes, rust-coloured like those of an adder, and, like the ophidian's, set flush with the oddly-flattened edges of their orbits, were at variance with the high, rounded, benevolent temples crowned with a thinning brake of curly hair. The rapacious mouth, with the thick scarlet lips, belonged to the eyes.

He had put on his hat again, but he swept it off in a flourishing bow, as Mevrouw Brounckers, in high-kilted wincey, a man's hat of coarse straw perched on her weather-beaten, sandy-grey head, came stumping down the waggon-ladder, calling for her potatoes. What was that lazy bedelaar of a Secretary about, and it nearly eleven of the clock? Didn't he know that her Commandant liked his meals on time?

Mevrouw received the politeness less graciously than the potatoes. That man with the eyes and the greedy red mouth was a woman-eater, she knew. Not for sheep and bear would she, grandmother as she was,

trust herself in house barn alone with a klant like that. But her Commandant had uses for him, the twinkling-eyed, soft-mannered, big rogue. She watched him walking off with P. Blinders, for whom she entertained a distaste grounded on the knowledge that no good ever came of these double-tongued Free Staters.

And this one could *write* in the accursed shibboleth of England as well as in the Taal. She shook her head as the potatoes rattled into the big pot hanging over the fire. And he walked out on Sundays with the young German woman who was maid to the refugee-widow staying at Kink's Hotel, and who never showed her nose inside the Gerevormed Kerk, the godless thing! or went out except by bat-light. Of that one the Mevrouw Brounckers had her opinion also. And time would show who was right.

Meanwhile, Van Busch and P. Blinders, who had left the dorp behind them, and strolled up the almost dry bed of a sluit leading up amongst the hills, conversed, in Sabbath security from English artillery, and reassuring remoteness from Dutch eavesdroppers. And their theme was the German drummer's refugee-widow who never went to kerk.

Van Busch, who found it helpful in his business never to forget faces, had met her on the rail, months back, travelling up first-class from Cape Town. Early in October it was, while the road was still open. And men who kept their eyes skinned went backwards and forwards and round and about, getting the hang of things, and laying up accurate mental notes, because the other kind were even more risky to carry than the nuggets and raw dust that are hidden in the padded linings of the gold-smugglers' heavy

garments.

The lady, small, dark, stylishly-tailored, and with bright black, bird-like eyes, was not a German drummer's widow when Van Busch and she first met. She had chatted in her native English with her square, bulky, sleek-looking fellow-passenger, well-dressed in grey linen drill frock-coat and trousers, with blazing diamonds studding the bosom of his well-starched shirt and linking his cuffs.

The wide felt hat he politely removed as he came into the carriage revealed to Lady Hannah a tall, expansive, well-developed forehead. Below the line of the hat-rim he was burned coffee-brown, like many another British Colonial. The observant eye of "Gold Pen" took in the man's vulgarly handsome features and curiously light eyes, and twinkled at the flaring jewellery and the whiskers of obsolete Dundreary pattern that stood out on either side the jewelled one's full, smooth chin. His large, bold, over-red mouth, with the curling outward flange to it, gave her a disagreeable impression. One would have been grateful for a beard that hid that mouth.

Lady Hannah found it curiously disquieting until her fellow-traveller began to talk, in a thick, lisping voice, with curiously candid and simple intonations. He presented himself, and she accepted him at his own valuation, as a British Johannesburger, and influential member of the Chamber of Mines, possessing vast interests among the tall chimneys and white dumping-heaps of the Rand.

Van Busch called his efforts to be ingratiating "sucking up to" the lady. He sucked up, thinking at first she might be the wife of the English field officer who had been ordered down from the north to take

over the Gueldersdorp command. Then he found she was only the grey mare of an officer of the Staff....

She plied Van Busch in his triple character of politician, patriot, and mine-owner with questions. Thought she was juicing a lot of information, whereas Van Busch was the one who learned things. Kind of playing at being newspaper-woman she was, and taking notes for London newspaper articles all the time. Had laid out to be a little tin imitation of Dora Corr, or, say, nickel-plated, with cast chasings. Was burning for an opening in the diplomatic go-betweening line; wanted to dabble in War Correspondence, and so on. But Van Busch gathered that the biggest egg in the little lady's nest of ambitions was the desire to do a flutter on the Secret Service lay.

She wanted to be what he termed a "slew," and she would have called a spy. He fiddled to her dancing, and wearied before she did.

"What Woman has done Woman may do!" was the burden of her ceaseless song. And when she left the train at Gueldersdorp, "*Au revoir*" said she with a flash of her bright black eyes, nodding to the big Colonial, who was so excessively civil about handing out her dressing-case and travelling-bag. "Many thanks, and don't give me away if you should happen to meet me in a different skin one of these fine days, Mr. Van Busch."

"Sure, no; not I," said the burly Johannesburger, with an effusion of what looked like genuine admiration. "By thunder! when it comes to playing the risky game there's no daring to beat a woman's. Give me a petticoat, say I, for a partner every time."

"Bravo!" Her eyes snapped approvingly. She waved a little hand towards a large pink officer of the British Imperial Staff, who was looking into all the first-class compartments in search of a wife who had been vainly entreated to remain at Cape Town. "There's my husband, who entertains the precisely opposite opinion. But he hasn't your experience—only a theory worn thin by generations of ancestors, all chivalrous Conservative noodles, who kept their females in figurative cotton-wool. Do let me introduce you. I'd simply love to have him hear you talk."

Van Busch did not pant to make the acquaintance of the Military Authorities. He thanked the impulsive Lady Hannah, but made haste to climb back into the train. The big pink officer recognised the object of his search, and strode down the platform bellowing a welcome. As Lady Hannah waved in reply, the Johannesburger made a long arm from the window, and thrust a pencil-scrawled card into the tiny gloved hand.

"S's'h! Shove that away somewhere safe," said Van Busch, in a thrillingly mysterious whisper; "and, remember, any time you want to learn the lay of the land and follow up the spoor of movements on the quiet, that Van Busch, of the British South African Secret War-Intelligence-Bureau, is the man to put you on. A line to that address, care of W. Bough, will always get me. And with nerve and josh like yours, and plenty of money for palm-oil...." His greedy mouth made a grinning red gash in the smug brown face with the fine whiskers of blackish-brown. His cold eyes scintillated and twinkled unspeakable things at the little lady as the train carried him away.

Assuredly Van Busch understood women no less thoroughly than his near relative, Bough. He knew that you could bait for and catch the sex with things that were not tangible. Men wanted to be made sure of money or money's worth. And for the co-operation of P. Blinders in the adroit little game by which the German drummer's refugee-widow who stayed at Kink's Hotel, and only went out after dark, had been relieved of a handsome sum, Van Busch had had to part with nearly one-third of the swag. No wonder he felt and talked like a robbed man.

"All very well to talk," said P. Blinders, scratching his newest pimple, and looking with exaggerated moonish simplicity at nobody in particular through his large round magnifying spectacles. "But what could you have done without me, once the little Englishwoman smelled the porcupine in the barrel? When she drove out to your friend Bough's plaats at Haarsgrond in that spider, pretending she was your sister that had married a Duitscher drummer in Gueldersdorp, and buried him, and was afraid to be shut up in the stad with all those lustful rooineks, you thought it would be enough to tell her Staats Police or Transvaal burghers were after her to make her creep into a mousehole and pay you to keep her hid. And it did work nicely—for a while. Then the Englishwoman got angry—oh, very angry!—and told you things that were not nice. Either you should put her in the way of getting the information she wanted, or good-bye to her dear brother, Hendryk Van Busch, and his friend Bough."

"For a pinch of mealies I'd have let the little shrew go, by thunder!" said the affectionate relative. "But my good heart stopped me. The country wasn't safe for a couple of women to go looping about," he

added. "And one of them with two hundred pounds in Bank of England notes stitched into the front of her stays...."

"*Five* hundred pounds," said the Secretary, with pleasantly twinkling spectacles. Van Busch's stare was admirable in its incredulity.

"Sure, no, brother; not so much as that?"

"Trudi told me," smirked P. Blinders.

"You and her seem to be great and thick together," said Van Busch, with a flattering leer. The little ex-apothecary placed his hand upon his chest, and said, with a gleam of tenderness lighting up his spectacles:

"I have sighed, and she has smiled." He went on, "If your friend Bough had been brave enough to try and take away that wad of banknotes from the little Englishwoman, he would have met trouble. For in a pocket of her gown she carries a revolver, and sleeps with it under her pillow by night; that is another thing that Trudi has told me." He kissed his fingers, and waved them in the direction of Kink's Hotel. "She is a lovely maiden!" He blew his nose without the assistance of a pocket-handkerchief, and continued:

"Of course, Bough might have put some stuff in the Englishwoman's coffee that would have made her sleep while he stole that money, or he might even have killed her quietly, and buried her on the farm. But a man who does that is not so clever and so wise as the man who makes a plan that gets the money and keeps friends all round, and makes everybody happy—is he, now? And that man is me, and that plan was mine. From P. Blinders you have genuine information to sell the Englishwoman, and when she

has bought it, paying well for it, and written it all down in her despatches to the Commandant at Gueldersdorp, she hands the letters back to you to be smuggled through the lines, and pays through the nose for that also. And who shall say she is cheated? For the letters do get through"—the pimply countenance of P. Blinders was quite immobile, but the eyes behind the great spectacles twirled and twinkled with infinite meaning—"a week or so after date, perhaps, but what is that? Nothing—nothing at all."

"Nothing," agreed Van Busch. The two men smiled pleasantly in each other's faces for a minute more. Then said Van Busch, with a loud sigh:

"But what I have to tell you now is something. The Englishwoman has got no more money. Ask Trudi, if you think I lie. And, of course, the plan was a good plan, and you were a smart fellow to hit on it; but now the two hundred pounds is gone——"

"Three hundred remain to get." P. Blinders briskly held up five stumpy red fingers and tucked down the thumb and little finger, leaving a trio of mute witnesses to the correctness of his arithmetic.

"No more remains to get. The cow has run dry."

The brow of P. Blinders grew scarlet as a stormy sunrise.

"Hoe? What is this I hear?" he demanded with indignation. "Nothing left, and I have not had but a hundred and fifty out of the five hundred. There has been dishonesty somewhere. There have been tricks, unbefitting the dealings of scrupulous Christian men. Foei, foei!"

Van Busch stuck his thumbs into his belt and smiled amiably down into the indignant eyes behind the spectacles. Then he said, with his most candid look and simplest lisp:

"No tricks, brother; all fair and above-board. Ask the Commandant whether Van Busch is square or not? He knows that the hundred and fifty was paid you honestly on his account, and that I kept but fifty for myself. And you're not the chap to bilk him of his due. Sure no, you'll never do that, never! Go and see him now, and settle up. I had a talk with young Schenk Eybel this morning, and he says the answer to the screeve you wrote to the Officer in Command at Gueldersdorp—to patch up an exchange of the Englishwoman for that slim kerel of a Boer's son they got their claws on at the beginning of the siege—has come in under the white flag this morning. Schenk Eybel has a little plan he can't put through without Walt Slabberts, he says. Loop, brother. You'll find the old man on his grey pony near the Field Hospital."

The eyes behind the spectacles whirled in terror. The ex-apothecary faltered:

"What—what is this you say? The money paid me on the Commandant's account—when it was to be a secret between us.... Foei, foei! This is unfair. And suppose I have spent it, how shall I replace it? Do you wish to ruin an honest man?"

Van Busch grinned, and P. Blinders gave up hopelessly. At least, it seemed so, for he turned sharp round, and trotted off with sorrowfully-drooping black coat-tails, in search of the meek grey pony and the terrible old man.

But the front view of the Secretary displayed a

countenance whose pimples radiated satisfaction, and spectacles that were alight with joy. Much—very much—would P. Blinders have liked to have kept that hundred and fifty, but his fear had proved greater than his desire.

He had paid every tikkie of the money faithfully to Brounckers, and his hands were metaphorically clean, and his neck comfortably safe. He was the poorer by a hundred and fifty pounds, but the richer in wisdom and experience; and—he chuckled at the thought of this—in the joy of knowing himself, in postscripts appended to those despatches of the Englishwoman's, to have poked sly sarcasm at the British Lion. Whose spiny tail P. Blinders imagined to be lashing, even then, at the prick of the goad.

For another thing, very pleasant to think of, he had successfully pitted the cunning behind his giant spectacles against the superior villainy of Mr. Van Busch of Johannesburg.

XXXVI

The German drummer's refugee-widow, who lived behind two green-shuttered, blinded windows at Kink's Hotel, and was a sister of that good Boer Mijnheer Hendryk Van Busch—"*a sister indeed!*" snorted Mevrouw Kink; and never went to the kerk-praying, or put her nose out of doors at all before dark, and had a maid who did her hair, and wore her own in waves, the impudent wench! and whose portmanteau, and bag, and boots, and shoes, and

skirt-bands, had fashionable London tradesmen's labels inside them, was the only person in the village of Tweipans and for a mile round it—good Nederlands measure—who did not know that she was an English prisoner-of-war.

Her foray in quest of Secret Information had had its hardships, as its alarms and excursions, but she plumed herself on having accomplished something of what she had set out to do. Van Busch, not counting a week of days when she had found reason to suspect his entire good faith, had behaved like a staunch Johannesburger of British blood and Imperial sympathies. But his valuable services had been rendered for so much more than nothing that Lady Hannah found herself in the condition her Bingo was wont to describe as "stony." She had sent for Van Busch to tell him that the position was untenable. She would evacuate it, when he could manage to get hold of Nixey's mouse-coloured trotter and the spider, left in the care of Van Busch's good friend Bough, at Haargrond Plaats.

A dash for freedom then. In imagination she could hear the mouse-coloured trotter's hoofs rattling over the stony ground, and the crack, crack of the sentries' Mausers, followed by a hail of bullets from the trenches.... She could see the headlines of the latest newspaper sensation, flaming on the greenish gloom of the room with the closed shutters and drawn-down blinds:

"STIRRING STORY FROM THE SEAT OF HOSTILITIES: LADY WAR-CORRESPONDENT RUNS THE GAUNTLET OF BOER RIFLES."

"Speshul. Hextry Speshul!"

* * * * *

Perhaps she would be mortally wounded by the time she got through the lines, so as to hang in bleeding festoons over the splashboard, and sink into the arms of the husband loved better than aught save Glory, gasping, as her heroic spirit fled——

* * * * *

"Did the gracious lady say she would have her boots on?"

Trudi got up from the flattest and most uncomfortable of the two forbidding beds Kink's principal guest-chamber boasted, and ran her unoccupied needles through her interminable knitting, a thick white cotton sofa-cover or counterpane of irritating pattern—and stood over against her employer in an attitude of sulky submission. She was a square-shouldered, sturdily-built young woman of twenty-five, with round eyes of pinky-blue garnished with white eyelashes, no eyebrows, and a superb and aggressively-brilliantined head of fair hair elaborately dressed, waved, and curled.

The hair was all attached to Trudi's scalp. Lady Hannah had lain in bed morning after morning, for weary weeks, and watched her "doing it," and wondered that any young feminine creature with such arms, such skin, and such hair should be so utterly unattractive. But she had lived all these weeks in this one room with Trudi, had languished under her handmaid's lack of intelligence, had seen her eat, wielding her knife with marvellous dexterity, and, wakeful, tossed the while she snored.

And every morning, after Mevrouw Kink had brought in coffee, snorting whenever Trudi's hair caught her virtuous eye, or whenever the German drummer's widow struck her as being more foreign of manners and appearance than usual, Lady Hannah would call for her boots, attire herself as for a promenade outdoors, lift the corner of a blind, steal a glance at the seething, stenching single street of Tweipans between the slats of the green shutters, and—unpin her veil and take off her hat without a word....

By eleven o'clock at night the polyglot confusion of tongues would have ceased, the gaudily-uniformed swaggerers, the velveteen-coated, wide-awaked loafers, the filthy tatterdemalions of all nations and their womenkind would have turned in. Then Lady Hannah, attended by the unwilling Trudi, was accustomed to venture out for what she called, with some exaggeration, "A whiff of fresh air."

Except for the gnawing, prowling dogs, the pickets at either end of it, and the sentries posted at longish intervals all down its length, the street of new brick and tin, and old wooden houses that made Tweipans, belonged to Lady Hannah then. Accompanied by Trudi, whose quality of being what I have heard called "deaf-nosed" with regard to noisy smells, she arrived at the pitch of envying, she would stumble up and down amongst the rubbish, or wade through the slush if it had been wet, and stop at favourable points to search with her night-glass for the greenish-blue glow-worm twinkles of distant Gueldersdorp, and wonder whether anybody there was thinking of her under the white stars or the drifting scud?...

But what was Trudi saying?

"The gracious one cannot have her boots."

"Why not?" asked Lady Hannah, with languid interest. Trudi struck the blow.

"Because she has none."

"No boots? Well, then, the walking-shoes."

Trudi smiled all over her large face. This placidity should not long endure.

"The gracious one has no shoes either. Boots and shoes—all have been taken away. Nothing remains except the quilted bedroom slippers the gracious one is wearing. And it is impossible to walk out in bedroom slippers."

"I suppose it is." Lady Hannah yawned. "Well, suppose you go and look for the boots. They may have been carried away by mistake, like——" She wondered afresh what could have become of that transformation coiffure?

"There is no mistake." Trudi announced. "And—the gracious lady forgot her little gun beneath her pillow this morning. That also is missing," volunteered Trudi, who had had her instructions and scrupulously acted up to them.

"My revolver has been stolen?" Lady Hannah sprang from her chair, made rapid search, and was convinced. The Browning revolver had been certainly spirited away.

Red patches burned in her thin little face, and her round black eyes regained some of their lost brightness. Nothing like a spice of excitement for bringing you up to the mark. Just now she had felt positively mouldy, and here she was, herself again.

"Nobody came into the room in the night. I sleep

with the key round my neck, and if they had opened the door with another, I should have awakened on the instant. Nobody has been in the room to-day except the Frau Kink"—you will remember that a German drummer's widow would naturally converse in her defunct spouse's native language—"the Frau Kink, with the coffee-tray. She did not come near the bed...." The suddenness and force of the suspicion that shot up in Lady Hannah's mind lifted her up out of her chair, and set her upon her feet. "It must have been you. Was it you?"

She looked hard at Trudi, and Trudi sank upon her bed and dissolved in noisy weeping.

"Ach, the wickedness!" she moaned. "To suspect of such shamelessness a poor young maiden brought up in honesty.... Ach, ach!"

But Lady Hannah went on:

"Yesterday morning, when you were so long in coming back with hot water, and I opened the door and looked out into the passage, I saw you whispering with a little stumpy, pimply man, in a long-tailed black coat and large spectacles. Who is he, and of what were you talking?"

Trudi did not at all regard the verbal sketch of P. Blinders as a correct one, but though her love was blind to his pimples and ignored his stumpiness, she could not deny the spectacles, which were to her as peepholes affording visions of a blissful married future.

"He is a Herr who brought me news from my Mutti at home in Germany. She is sick, and my father also, and all my little brothers and sisters are sick too,"

gulped Trudi, sobbing and wallowing and rasping her flushed features against the knobbly counterpane of the most uncomfortable of the two beds, "because they hear that I am in this place, and they so greatly fear that I will be dead."

"You aren't dead yet. And you told me when I engaged you that you were an orphan brought up by an aunt."

"Pay me my vage," demanded Trudi, lifting a defiant and perfectly dry countenance, and launching the utterance in the forbidden English language, "and I vill now go. I vish not to stop here longer."

"Very well, but where are you going?"

"That," remarked Trudi, tossing her elaborately-dressed head and relapsing into her native language, "has nothing to do with the gracious lady."

There was insolent triumph and unveiled spite in the large face attached to the elaborate coiffure. The gracious lady, realising that Trudi formed the one link between herself and the rough, strange, suspicious, unfriendly male world outside, pocketed her pride to temporise. Let Trudi remain as companion and attendant to the German refugee-widow yet another week, and the month's due of wages, already trebled in virtue of a service involving risk, should be substantially increased.... But Trudi only snorted and shook her head, and Lady Hannah found herself confronting not only a rat determined upon abandoning a sinking ship, but malignantly inclined to hasten the vessel's foundering.

What was to be done? It is quite possible to be brave,

adventurous, and daring without a revolver, its absence may even impart a faint sense of relief to one, as being no longer under the necessity of shooting somebody with it at a pinch, but without boots or shoes, and a Trudi to put them on, Lady Hannah found herself at a nonplus. To conceal the fact from the rejoicing Trudi, she moved to the window and drew the blind aside, and was instantly confronted with a row of round, staring eyes, the nose belonging to each pair being flattened eagerly against the glass.

"Oh!" exclaimed Lady Hannah, dropping the blind in consternation at this manifestation of public interest. A snorting chuckle from the malignant Trudi fanned the little lady's waning courage into flame. She crossed the room and turned the door-handle.

The door was locked from the outside, the key having been removed to accommodate the eye of Mevrouw Kink, who reluctantly removed it to unlock the door, and announce that Myjnheer Van Busch had asked to see his sister, as she ushered the visitor in.

Sisters are not sensitive as a rule to subtle alterations in the regard of their brothers, but the German drummer's refugee-widow could not but read in the face and demeanour of her relative a perceptible diminution of interest in a woman who had no more money.... He kept on his broad-brimmed hat and pulled at his bushy whiskers as he exchanged a palpable wink with Trudi, who was accustomed, when the gracious lady's brother called, to retire with her knitting behind the shiny American cloth-covered screen that coyly shielded the washstand from a visitor's observation.

Those flat, light eyes of the visitor's twinkled oddly as Lady Hannah's indignant whisper told of the missing footgear and the vanished revolver, and her conviction that the screened knitter was the active agent in their spiriting away.

"You believe the girl's slewed on you, eh, and that things are going to pan out rough? Well, sure, that's a pity!" The big man lolled against the deal table, covered with a cloth reproducing in crude aniline colours, trying to the complexion, but gratifying to the patriotic soul of Mevrouw Kink, the red, white, and blue stripes of the Vierkleur, with the green staff-line carried all round as an ornamental border. "And I'd not wonder but you were right." He stuck his thumbs in his belt, and asked, with his hatted head on one side and a jeering grin on his bold red mouth: "So, now, and what did you think to do?"

Lady Hannah controlled an impulse to knock off the big man's broad-brimmed felt, and even smiled back in the grinning face.... One very little lady can hold a great deal of anger and resentment without spilling any over, if she is thoroughly convinced that it would be imprudent as well as useless to display either.

"As you gather, I intend returning to Gueldersdorp to-morrow at latest. I shall not take my maid, as she wishes for her own reasons to remain behind. Please have the mare and spider here by mid-day coffee-time. We can drive north towards Haargrond and double back when we're beyond the lines, as the coursed hare would do."

Van Busch's red mouth gleamed, curved back from his tobacco-stained teeth. He said with meaning:

"Boers shoot hares—not run them."

"They may shoot or not shoot," proclaimed Lady Hannah. "I start to-morrow."

"Without boots or shoes?" asked the red-edged, yellow-fanged smile.

"Barefoot if I must," she answered, with all the more spirit that she felt like the hare struggling in a wire. "Please send for the mare and the trap. I leave this place to-morrow."

"The mare and the spider have been commandeered for the use of the United Republics," said Van Busch. As the angry colour flamed up in Lady Hannah's small, pale cheeks, he added, shrugging his shoulders and spreading his hands: "Bough did his best to save them for you, no bounce! But could one man do anything against so many? Sure no, nothing at all!"

She lost patience, and stamped her little foot in its quilted satin slipper.

"Do you suppose I haven't guessed by this time that Bough the Africander and Van Busch the British-Johannesburger are one Boer when it suits them both?"

His hand, copper-brown as his face, and with the marks of old tattooing obliterated by an acid burn, jerked as he raised it to stroke and feel his whiskers. Something else upon the hand, in the sharpened state of all her senses, struck out a spark of old association, and recalled a name once known. She went on.

"How many men are you, Mr. Van Busch or Bough? You provoke the question when I see you wearing

the Mildare crest and coat-of-arms."

He had turned the deeply-engraved sard with his brown thumb and clenched his fist upon it, but as swiftly changed his mind, and took off the ring and handed it to her.

"I had this ring off Bough, that's a real live man, and a thundering good pal of mine, for all your funning. The chap it belonged to died at a farm Bough owned once. Somewhere in Natal it might have been. And the bloke who died there was a big bug in England, Bough always thought. But he came tramping, and hauled up with hardly duds to his back or leather to his feet. Sick, too, and coughing like a sheep with the rinderpest. Bough was kind to him, but he got worse and worse. One night Bough was sitting up with him reading the Bible, when he made signs. 'Take this ring off of my finger and keep it,' says he. 'I've got nothing else to give you, but I reckon the Almighty'll foot your bill, for you're a first-class Christian, if ever there was one.' Then he went in, and Bough buried him in regular fancy style——"

"And sent the girl to the nuns at Gueldersdorp, or was she there already?"

Van Busch was in the act of taking back the sardonyx signet-ring. His hand jerked again, so sharply that the ring was jerked into the air, fell to the floor, and rolled under the table. He stooped and reached for it, and asked, with his face hidden by the patriotic tablecloth:

"What girl do you mean?"

His dark face was purple-brown with the exertion of stooping as he rose up. Lady Hannah answered:

"The Mother-Superior of the Convent of the Holy Way at Gueldersdorp has an orphan ward, a singularly lovely girl of nineteen or twenty, whose surname is Mildare. And it struck me just now—I don't know why now, and never before—that she might be——"

"Bough never said nothing to me about any girl. What like is this one?" Van Busch twisted the ring about his little finger, and spoke with a more sluggish lisp and slurring of the consonants than even was usual with him. "Is she short and square, with black hair and round blue eyes, and red cheeks and thick ankles?"

Lady Hannah, despite all her recently-gained experience of Van Busch, had not yet mastered his method of eliciting information.

"Miss Mildare is absolutely the opposite of your description," she declared. "She is quite tall, and very slight and pale, with slender hands and feet, and reddish-bronze hair, and eyes the colour of yellow topaz or old honey, with wonderful black lashes.... I have never seen anything to compare——" She stopped.

What strange eyes the man had, full of lines radiating from the pin-point pupils, scintillating like a snake's.... He said, in his thick, lisping way:

"A beauty, eh? And how long might the nuns have had her?"

"The Mayor's wife told me she has been under the care of the Convent ladies for some seven years."

His brown full face looked solid, and his eyes veiled themselves behind a glassy film. He was thinking, as

he said:

"And her name is Mildare, eh? And you know her?"

"I have met her once. She was introduced to me as Miss Lynette Mildare. But just now I find my own affairs unpleasantly absorbing. I am suspected in this place, Mr. Van Busch, and if not actually a prisoner, am certainly under restraint. For how much money down will you undertake to extricate me from this position, and convey me back to Gueldersdorp?"

He shook his head, and for once the scent of gain did not rouse his predatory appetite. He was wondering how it should never have occurred to him before that the scared little white-faced thing might have fallen into kindly hands, and been nursed and cockered up and made a lady of? He was puzzled to account for her remembering the name that had belonged to the man whose grave was at the foot of the Little Kopje. He was conscious of an itching curiosity to find out for his friend Bough whether it really was the Kid or no? What was the little fool of a woman saying in her shrill voice?

"It would be burning your boats, I am quite aware. But if it *pays* to burn them——" she suggested, with her black eyes probing vainly in the shallow ones.

He roused himself.

"A thousand pounds, English. You've not the money here?"

"No."

"Or a cheque?"

Her laugh jangled contemptuously.

"Do you Boer spies carry cheque-books—upon Secret Service?"

"I am no Boer, but an honest, square-dealing Britisher. How often have I to tell you that? Do you suppose you are a prisoner here because I slewed on you? Wrong, by God! Perhaps I kept things back a bit for fear you would cut up, as women do, and go into screeching-fits. Sure now, that's what any man would have done." His tone of injury was excellently feigned, and his lisp was simplicity itself. "And to call me a dirty spy, when I got you first-hand information, and ran your letters through to Gueldersdorp, at the risk of my blooming neck.... Well, you'll be ashamed when you get back there and see those letters, that's what you will, sure!"

"The letters got through—yes. But did they get through in time to be of use?"

The little she-devil suspected the truth. He stroked his whiskers and scraped his foot upon the floor, and said in his blandest lisp:

"They got through in useful time. I'll kiss the Book and swear it, if you want me."

How deal with a knave like this, who popped in and out of holes like a rabbit, and wriggled and writhed like a snake? Lady Hannah knew an immense yearning for the absent Bingo, husband of limited intellectual capacity, man of superior muscular development, doughty in the use of that primitive weapon of punishment, the doubled human fist.

"In useful time? Useful Gueldersdorp time or useful Tweipans time? That is what I want to get at."

"Oh, hell! how do I know?" He had turned sulky and

scowling, but her blood was fairly up.

"I know that you have successfully swindled me out of five hundred pounds. I know that when I met you on the train four months back you shaped your plans and baited a trap——"

"To catch a silly woman." His scarlet lips rolled back from his tobacco-stained teeth. His jeering eyes were intolerable. "Ay, maybe I did. And what's to say now?"

"I say you are a blackguard, Mr. Bough Van Busch!"

The dark face with the light eyes underwent a murderous change. He glanced over his shoulders right and left, and took a step towards her, carrying out the movement suddenly, as a tarantula darts upon its prey. Before the thick brown muscular fingers had choked the scream that rose in her throat, the key crashed in the lock, and the door was violently kicked open, admitting ...

No portrait is required of that burly, bald-browed, sharp-eyed, grizzle-bearded, square-jawed farmer, of the bronzed and sun-cracked countenance, implacable under the slouch-hat with the orange-leather band. We know the old green overcoat, and coarse corduroy breeches, and roughly tanned leather boots, with heavy, old-fashioned spurs, to have been the husk of a fierce, and indomitable, and relentless warrior, twinned with a quiet family-man of bucolic tastes and patriarchal habits.

Van Busch, broader by inches and taller by half a head, dwindled, seen in juxtaposition with this man of the iron will and the leader's temperament, to a flabby, dwarfish, and petty being. The fierce grey

eyes took him in, and read him, and dropped him, and fastened on the little Englishwoman, as the great boots tramped heavily across the floor, and the great voice roared, speaking in the Taal:

"Pull up that blind! Voor den donder! Shall we be mice, that sit and squeak in the dark?"

Down came the Mevrouw Kink's square of glazed yellow calico, roller, cord, and all, at the impatient wrench of the big, heavy hand.... The window was blocked with heavy bodies, topped by brown, white, or yellow faces; the street was a sea of them, all staring with greedy, curious eyes at the little Englishwoman who was a prisoner, and the big man who ruled them by Fear. His angry grey eyes blazed at the gapers, and the crowd surged back a foot or two. Then the fierce eyes darted back at pale Lady Hannah, and the roaring voice began again:

"You who came here in disguise, with a false story and false hair——"

Lady Hannah jumped in her bedroom slippers, and crimsoned to her natural coiffure, as the missing transformation, appallingly out of wave, was plucked from the baggy pocket of the old green overcoat, and brandished before her astonished eyes. Struggling to restrain the dual impulse to shriek and clutch, no wonder she appeared a conscience-stricken creature in that great man's watchful eyes. His big voice shook her and shook the room as he thundered:

"Woman, you are no widow of a Duitscher drummer, but the vrouw of a field-cornet of the Army of Groot Brittanje. He holds a graafschap in Engeland"—a mistake on the part of the General's informant—"and is hand-in-glove with the Colonel Commandant at

Gueldersdorp." Not so far from the truth! thought Lady Hannah. "Would he spy out the land, let him come himself next time. Boers hide not behind their wives' petticoats when there is such business to be done!"

In defence of blameless Bingo the hysterical little woman found voice to say:

"He—didn't know I was coming."

"What says she?"

Before Van Busch could bestir himself to interpret, Lady Hannah had repeated her words in faulty Dutch.

"So! Engelsch mevrouws disobey their husbands, it seems?" Were the fierce, bloodshot grey eyes really capable of a twinkle? "We Boers have a cure for that. Green reim, well laid on, after the third caution, teaches our wives to fib and deceive no more."

"You're wrong, sir."

"Wrong, do you say? Hoe?"

"What the green reim does teach them," explained Lady Hannah, secretly aghast at her own temerity, "is, not to be found out next time."

He gave a wooden chuckle, but his regard was as menacing and his voice as gruff as ever.

"I make no mouth-play with words. I talk in men and guns, and there are half a dozen among the Engelsch, niet mier, that know how to talk back. There are one or two others that are duyvels, and not men. And the worst duyvel of all"—he waved the big hand westward—"is he over there at Gueldersdorp."

She mentally registered the compliment.

"You are a woman who writes for the Engelsch newspapers that are full of shameless tales about the Boers." He spat copiously upon the floor, and the big voice became a bellow. "Lies, lies! I have had them read to me, and the people who make them should be shot. Hear you now. You shall write to them and say: 'Selig Brounckers is a merciful man and a just. He is not as zwart as he is painted. He caught me mousing round his hoofd laager at Tweipans—and what does he do?'" The pause was impressive. Then the roaring voice resumed:

"'He sends me marching down to the gaol at Groenfontein, that is packed with dirty white and dirty coloured schelms until there is not room for one more——"

He named the homely parasite hymned by Burns ...

—"'Or he packs me up to Oom Paul at Pretoria, chained to the waggon-tail like the others.' ..."

Lady Hannah wondered, while the stuffy room spun round her, who the others were.

"Geen, I will tell you what he does." He pitched the crumpled transformation contemptuously into the corner. "He writes to the Engelsch Commandant at Gueldersdorp and says: 'I have here a silly female thing that is no use to me. Take her you, and give me in exchange a man of mine.' ..."

"And he ... what does ...?" She could get out nothing more.

"He agrees. Mevrouw Vrynks"—"Dutch for Wrynche," thought Lady Hannah dizzily—"you will now pay the

Mevrouw Kink what is owing for her amiable entertainment, and you will start for Gueldersdorp in ten minutes' time."

The roaring voice of the stern, fierce-eyed man, sounded lovelier than the swan-song of De Rezke. She faltered, with her joyful heart leaping at the gates of utterance:

"The—mare and spider. You will be so kind as to return them——?"

His face became as a human countenance rudely carved in seasoned oak.

"I know nothing of a mare and spider," blared the great voice.

She looked him straight between the hot fierce eyes, and spoke out pluckily.

"They are not my property. I hired the trap and the trotter from a hotel-keeper at Gueldersdorp. And Mr. Van Busch tells me that they have recently been commandeered for the service of the United Forces of the Transvaal and Orange Free State."

"So!... Well, that is what I would have done, if they were worth having. Where is Van Busch?" The angry glance pounced on that patriot in the remote corner to which he had modestly retired. Van Busch cringed forwards, hat in hand, explaining:

"The English Mevrouw mistakes, Myjnheer. Sure, now, I never told her anything of that kind. How could I, when there was no mare and no spider? Didn't I drive her and the other woman over from Haargrond, with Bough's little beast pulling in a cart of my own? Call the other woman, and she will tell

you it was as I say."

Lady Hannah, supremely disdainful, turned her back upon the liar....

"So, then, you are not willing to go back in a veld waggon?" demanded the bullying voice.

"I'm willing to go back in anything that isn't a coffin," she declared.

He gave the wooden chuckle, swung about and trampled to the door, calling to Van Busch in the tone of a dog's master:

"Here, you ...!"

Van Busch followed, wriggling as obsequiously as the dog with a stolen mutton-chop upon his conscience. The door slammed, the key turned roughly in the lock. Lady Hannah, oblivious of the absence of outdoor footwear, flew joyously to cram a few belongings into her travelling-bag and resume her discarded hat.

Outside in the street, the motley crowd having melted away upon his appearance, General Selig Brounckers was saying to Van Busch:

"It is a pity that the Engelschwoman's story was not true about that mare and spider. For if a mare and spider there had been, you might perhaps have kept them for your trouble——"

—"Now I come to think of it, Myjnheer Commandant," said Van Busch in a hurry, "perhaps the woman was not lying, after all. Bough has a

mouse-coloured trotter in the stables at Haargrond Plaats, and a spider stands under the waggon-shed in the yard. If they are hers, I'll let Bough know Myjnheer Commandant said I was to have them. He'll make no bones about parting then. Sure, no! he'll never dare to."

"I will send a couple of my burghers with you to take care he does not," said the Commandant, in what was for the redoubtable Brounckers an easy tone. "It is unlucky," he added less pleasantly, "that you were such a verdoemte clever knave as to tell the Engelschwoman I had commandeered both beast and vehicle for Republics' use. Because now I will do it, look you! No Boer's son that lives, by the Lord! will I suffer to make Selig Brounckers out a liar." He added, as Van Busch salaamed and squirmed with more than Oriental submissiveness, "Least of all a sneaking Africander schelm like you. And now, about the money?"

"Excellentie——" lisped Van Busch, smiling his oily brown face into ingratiating creases ...

"I am no Excellentie.... Of how much money, properly belonging to the Republics' war-chest, have you cheated this little fool of an Engelschwoman?"

"Five weeks back, Myjnheer Commandant," bleated Van Busch, "I had from her one hundred and fifty pounds, which I swear as an honest man has been handed over to Myjnheer Blinders——"

"He has accounted to me."

"Five weeks back——?" Van Busch hinted.

"He has accounted for it five weeks back."

There are men who possess all the will to be rogues, but have not the requisite courage. Such a man was Blinders, who emerged plus a sweetheart, the approval of his Commandant, and the *éclat* of having chaffed the British Lion, out of the affair that was to prove so expensive to Mr. Van Busch.

"And"—the big voice trumpeted, as Van Busch, like a stout pinned butterfly, quivered, transfixed by the glare of the savage eyes—"you will now account to me for the rest."

Van Busch faltered with a sickly smile:

"Fifty more, Myjnheer, that I was bringing you myself——"

"One hundred and fifty you have paid me, and fifty you were going to pay me. Ik wil het—but where are the other hundreds you have paid Van Busch?" bellowed the roaring voice. "Does not my old man-baboon at home pouch six walnuts for every one that his wife gets to share with her youngster? When I want to make the big thief spit them out, I squeeze him by the neck. So, voor den donder! will I do to you. Only, geloof mij, I will not do it in play. Pay Blinders the other five hundred pounds before kerk-time. If you haven't got the cash about you, he and young Schenk Eybel shall ride with you to Haargrond, where lives your friend Bough. They can bring back the money and the mare and spider, too. Moreover, Eybel, who is a bright boy, and has a head upon his shoulders, wants a slim rogue of a fellow that talks Engelsch to worm himself in over yonder"—he jerked his gnarled thumb in the direction of Gueldersdorp—"and bring back a plan of the defences on the west, where the native stad lies. Perhaps I will let you keep two hundred of that five

hundred if you are the man to go.... But whether you go or stay, by the Lord! you will find it best to be square with Selig Brounckers."

And the redoubtable Brounckers stumped off. Verily, in times of scarcity, when the lion is a-hungered, the jackal must lose his bone.

It would be well, thought the dispirited jackal ruefully, to remove the unfavourable impression made, by a valuable service rendered to the United Republics. It would be a good thing to stand well with Myjnheer Schenk Eybel, who would, when Brounckers went south, be left in sole command. It would be as well, also, to get a look at that girl that was living with the nuns at Gueldersdorp.

"Mildare ..." That was the puzzle—her having the name so pat. But these little frightened, white-faced things were sly, and kids remembered more than you thought for....

Grown up a beauty, too, and with the manners of a lady. He swore again, the thing seemed so incredible, and spat upon the dust. A pretty green shining beetle crawled there. He set his heavy foot upon the insect, and its beauty was no more.

XXXVII

As the Captain's heavy cavalry stride shakes Nixey's roof, the upright, lightly-built soldierly figure in khâki turns and comes towards him, giving the binoculars in charge to the Sergeant-Major of

Irregulars, who is his orderly of the day.

"I want a word with you, Wrynche. Rawlings will take the glasses. Come in here under cover."

He leads the way. The cover is a canvas shelter, perhaps a protection from the blazing sun, but none at all from shell and bullets. There are a couple of wooden chairs under its flimsy spread and a little table. The Chief sits down astride on one of the chairs, accepts a cigar from Captain Bingo's enormous crocodile-leather case, and says, as the first ring of blue smoke goes wavering upwards:

"You'll be glad to know that Monboia's Barala runner has got through with good news *for you*." The last two words are rather strongly emphasised. "Just before dawn and after Beauvayse relieved you at Staff Bombproof South."

Captain Bingo swallows violently, runs a thick finger round inside his collar, and his big face goes through several changes of complexion, ranging from boiled suet-dumpling paleness to beetroot red. He looks away and blinks before he says in a voice that wobbles:

"Then my wife's—all right?"

"Lady Hannah and her German attendant, as far back as the day before yesterday, when Monboia's man saw them, were in the enjoyment of excellent health."

"Poof!" Captain Bingo blows a genuine sigh of relief, and the latent lugubriousness departs from him. "Good hearing. I've had—call it hippopotamus on the chest this two months, and you'll about hit the mark. Uncertainty and suspense get on a man's nerves, in

the long-run. Bound to. And never a word—the deuce a line—all these—— Poof!" He blows again, and beams. The Colonel, watching him out of the corner of one keen eye, says, with a twitching muscle in the cheek that is turned away from him:

"My good news being told, I have a slice of bad for you. But first let me make an admission. Since Nixey's pony pulled Nixey's spider out of Gueldersdorp with Lady Hannah and her maid in it, I have had three communications from your wife."

"You're pullin' my leg, sir, ain't you?" queries Bingo doubtfully.

"Not a bit of it."

In confirmation of the statement he takes out a shabby pocket-book, fat with official documents, and, unstrapping it, selects three, and hands them to Bingo. They are flimsy sheets of tissue-paper covered with spidery characters in violet ink, and Bingo, taking them, recognises the handwriting, and is, as he states without hesitation, confoundedly flabbergasted.

"For they are in my wife's wild scrawl," he splutters at last. "How on earth did they reach you, sir?"

"The first was brought in by a native boy who said he belonged to the kraals at Tweipans," says the Chief. "Boiled small and stuffed into a quill stuck through his ear in the usual way. He trumped up a glib story about his cow having been killed and his new wife beaten by Brounckers' men, and his desire to be revenged, and oblige the English lady who'd been kind to him——"

"Umph! Native gratitude don't run to being skinned

alive with sjamboks—not much!" the other comments. "Chap must have been lyin', or a kind of nigger Phœnix."

"Exactly. So I couldn't find it in my heart to part with him. He's on the coloured side of the gaol now, with two others, who subsequently landed in with the documents you have in hand there."

"Am I to read 'em?" Bingo queries.

His commanding officer nods, with the muscle in his lean cheek twitching.

"Certainly. Aloud, if you'll be so good."

Bingo reads, with haltings on the way, for the tissue sheets stick to his large fingers, which are damp with suppressed agitation:

"HAARGROND PLAATS,
"NEAR TWEIPANS,
"*October 30th.*

"*To the Colonel Commanding Her Majesty's Forces in Gueldersdorp.*

"SIR,—I beg to report myself arrived at the above address, twelve miles distant from the head laager of the Boer Commandant, General Brounckers. I have to inform you that an attack will be made on Maxim Kopje South by a large force of the enemy with guns in the beginning of November.

"I have the honour to be,
"On Secret Service,
"Yours most obediently,
"H. WRYNCHE."

Bingo stares blankly at his Chief, the sheets of crumpled tissue wavering between his thick, agitated fingers.

"I got that letter exactly a week after the attack had been made and successfully resisted," says the Colonel's dry, quiet voice. "Read the four lines in a different hand and ink, that are underlined at the bottom, and tell me what you think of 'em."

Bingo obeyed, and read:

"*Lady's information perfectly correct. We hope this intelligence will reach you in time to be useful.*

"*I have the honour to be,*
"P. BLINDERS,
"*Acting-Secretary to General*
"*Brounckers.*"

"By the Living Tinker!" exploded Bingo.

"Don't be prodigal of emotion," the Colonel's quiet voice warns the excited husband. "There are two more letters following. Read 'em in the proper sequence. That one with the inky design at the top, that might be the pattern for a pair of fancy pyjamas —that's the next."

Bingo reads as follows:

"KINK'S HOTEL,
"TWEIPANS,
"*November 28th.*

"To the Colonel Commanding H. M. Forces in Gueldersdorp.

"SIR,—I beg to report myself arrived at

Tweipans. I have the honour to enclose herewith a sketch-plan of the village and the disposition of General Brounckers' laager. Trusting you may find it useful,

"I have the honour to be,
"On Secret Service,
"Yours most obediently,
"H. WRYNCHE."

The sarcastic P. Blinders had appended an italicised comment:

"*His Honour considers the above sketch-plan remarkably faithful. The building next the Gerevormed Kerk, indicated by an X, is the gaol. Comfortable cells at your disposal, which we are keeping vacant.*

"P. BLINDERS."

"D-a-a——"

The Chief does not happen to be looking Bingo's way as the infuriated husband menaces with a large clenched fist an imaginary countenance attached to the conjectural personality of the sportive P. Blinders.

"Swear—it will bring the blood down from your head," advises the dry, quiet voice. "But don't tear up the papers!—they're too amusing to lose."

"Amusin'!" growls Bingo, with smarting eyes, and a lumpy throat, and a tingling in his large muscles which P. Blinders, being out of reach, can afford to provoke. "You wouldn't think it amusin', sir, if it were your wife, making herself a—a figure of fun for those Dutch bounders to shy at."

This is the third letter:

"*December 23rd.*

"*To the Colonel Commanding, Gueldersdorp.*

"SIR,—I have to report that the sortie you have planned to take place on the morning of the 26th, for the capture of the enemy's big gun, is known to General Brounckers, and that the menaced position will be strengthened and manned to resist you.

"Obediently,
"H. WRYNCHE."

Underneath is the sarcastic comment:

"*December 27th.*

"*Nice if you had got this in time, eh? And we wanted those boots and badges.*

"*P. B.*"

"She got hold of a nugget that once, anyway," says Captain Bingo, blowing his nose emphatically; "and —by the Living Tinker! if it *had* reached us in time, we'd have saved a loss of twenty-one killed and stripped, and twenty-two wounded, and the stingin' shame of a whippin' into the bargain."

"Perhaps," says the Colonel, with a careworn shadow on the keen, sagacious face, and both men are silent, remembering an assault the desperate, reckless valour of which deserves to be bracketed in memory with the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, "If Defeat is ever shame, perhaps, Wrynche. But if you could put the question to each of that handful of brave men sleeping side by side over there"—he nods

in the direction of the Cemetery, where the aftermath of Death's red harvest has sprung up in orderly rows of little white crosses—"they would tell you it can be more glorious than victory."

"Of course, you're right, sir. I gather now what your bad news is," says Bingo, who has been dejectedly rubbing his finger along the bristly edges of his sandy moustache, for a minute past. "Judgin' by the marginal annotations of this man Blinders—brute I'd kick to Cape Town with pleasure—my wife's a prisoner in Brounckers' hands?"

"An unconscious prisoner—yes. Give 'em their due, Wrynche. I shouldn't have credited 'em with the sense of humour they have displayed in their dealings with her."

If it were possible for Bingo to grow redder in the face, one would say that he has done so, as he bursts out, in a violent perspiration, striding up and down over Nixey's sheet-leaded roof.

"Confound their humour! It's the humour of tom-cats playin' with a—a dashed little silly dicky-bird. It's the humour of aasvogels watchin' a shot rock-rabbit kick. It's the humour of the battledore and the shuttlecock. And I'm the dicky-bird's mate and the bunny's better-half, and the other shuttlecock of the pair, and may I be blessed if I can take it smilin'!" He mops his scarlet and dripping face, and puffs and blows like a large military walrus on dry land.

"Perhaps you'll manage a smile when you've read this?"

Bingo stops in his stride, wheels, and receives an official document on blue paper. Under the date of

the previous day, it runs as follows:

"HEAD LAAGER,
"TWEIPANS,
"*January —th.*

"*To the Colonel Commanding the British Forces in Gueldersdorp.*

"SIR,—In reply to your communication I am instructed by General Brounckers to inform you that our prisoner, the Englishwoman who came here in the character of a German drummer's refugee-widow to act as your spy, will be exchanged for a free Boer of the Transvaal Republic, by name, Myjnheer W. Slabberts, who is at present confined under the Yellow Flag in Gueldersdorp gaol. The exchange will be effected by parties under the White Flag at a given point North-East between the lines of investment and defence one hour before Kerk-time to-morrow, being the Sabbath.

"I have the honour to be yours truly,

"P. BLINDERS,
"*Acting-Secretary to General*
"*Brounckers.*"

"P.S.—*The young lady of German extraction who accompanied the Englishwoman has entered into an engagement to remain here.*

"*P. B.*"

"P.SS.—*The engagement is with yours truly, the young lady having conformed to the faith of the*

Gerevormed Kerk. We are to be married next Sunday. Would you like us to send you some wedding-cake?

"*P. B.*"

Blinders has certainly had the last dig, but his principal victim fails this time to wince or bellow under the point of his humour. With his big face changing from red to white, and from white to crimson half a dozen times in as many seconds, Captain Bingo says, refolding the paper and returning it with a shaky hand:

"Then she—she——"

A lump in his throat slides down and sticks.

"Gerevormed Kerk-time is eleven o'clock." The Colonel looks at his shabby Waterbury, as the brisk clatter of cantering horse-hoofs breaks up the Sabbath stillness of the Market Square, and an orderly, leading an officer's charger, halts before Nixey's door. "The B.S.A. escort, with their man, are due to leave the gaol in ten minutes' time. Here's your orderly with your mount, and you've eight minutes to change in."

"One minute, sir," Captain Bingo utters with an effort. "This man—this Slabberts—is a well-known spy—a trump card in Brounckers' hand, or he wouldn't be so anxious to get hold of him. And therefore—by this exchange—and a woman's dashed ambitious folly—you may lose heavily in the end...."

"I don't deny it." The haggard shadow is again upon the Colonel's face, or is it that Bingo's radiance dulls neighbouring surfaces by comparison? "But don't let the thought of it spoil your good hour." The smile in

the eyes that have so many lines about them is kind, if the mouth under the red-brown moustache is stern and sorrowful. "We don't have many of 'em. Off with you and meet her!"

Captain Bingo tries to say something more, but makes a hash of it; and with eyes that fairly run over, can only grip the kindly hand again and again, assuring its owner, with numerous references to the Living Tinker, that he is the most thundering brick on earth. Then, overthrowing the small table and one of the chairs, he plunges down the narrow iron stairway to get into what he calls his kit. Six minutes later, correct to a buckle and a puttee-fold, he salutes his commanding officer, nodding pleasantly to him from Nixey's roof, and buckets down the street at a tremendous gallop, the happiest man in Gueldersdorp, with this shout following him:

"My regards to Lady Hannah. And tell her that the Staff dine on gee-gee at six o'clock sharp, and I shall be charmed if she'll join us."

XXXVIII

The little Olopo River, a mere branch of the bigger river that makes fertile British Baraland, runs from east to west, along the southern side of Gueldersdorp, swelled by innumerable thready water-courses, dry in the blistering winter heat, that the wet season disperses among the foothills that bristle with Brounckers' artillery. Seen from the altitude of a balloon or a war-kite, the course of the

beer-coloured stream, flowing lazily between its high banks sparsely wooded with oak and blue gum, and lavishly clothed with cactus, mimosa, and tree-fern, tall grasses, and thorny creepers, would have looked like a verdant ribbon meandering over the dun-and-ochre-coloured veld, where patches of bluish-green are beginning to spread. The south bank, where the bush grows thinnest, was frequently patronised by picnic-parties, and at all times a place of resort for strolling sweethearts. The north bank, much more precipitous, was clothed with a tangled luxuriance of vegetation, and threaded only by native paths, so narrow as to prove discouraging to pedestrians desirous of walking side by side. Where the outermost line of defences impinged upon the river-bed, the trees had been cut down and the bush levelled. But east of Maxim Outpost South, and the rifle-pits that flanked Fort Ellerslie, all was as it had been for hundreds of years, in the remembrance of the great granite boulder that stood on the south shore.

The great boulder had known changes since the old Plutonic forces cast it upwards, a mere bubble of melted red granite, solidifying as it went into a stone acorn thirty feet high, which the glacier brought down in a slow journey of countless ages, and set upright like a phallic symbol, amongst other boulders of lesser size. The channel the glacier had chiselled was now full of shining honey-coloured water, hurrying over the granite stones and blocks of quartz and pretty vari-coloured pebbles, while the boulder sat high and dry, with the tall-plumed grasses, and the graceful tree-fern, and the yellow-tasselled mimosa crowding about its knees; and remembered old times, long before the little Bushfellow had outlined the koodoo and the buffalo,

and the hunter-man with the spear, in black pigments on its smooth flank, ere he ground up the coprolites gathered from the river-bed for red and yellow paint to colour the drawings. On the western side the great boulder was dressed in crimson lake and yellow-umber-hued lichens from base to summit, and in August, when the aloes flowered in magnificent fiery clusters upon its crown and at its base; and in May, when the sweet-scented clematis wreathed it in exquisite trails, and white and rose and purple pelargoniums made a carpet for its feet; and in July, when the yellow everlastings bloomed in every cranny of the rocks, King Solomon in all his glory held less magnificence of state.

Insects and beasts and birds loved the boulder. The sun-beetle and the orange-tip and peacock butterflies loved to bask on its hottest side, while the old dog-faced baboon squatted on top and chattered wisdom to his numerous family, and the finches and love-birds built in its crannies and bred their young, too often as food for the giant tarantula and the tree-snake; while the francolin and grouse dusted themselves in the hot sand at the base of its throne of rocks, and the springbok and the wart-hogs came down at night to drink; and the woolly cheetah and the red lynx came after the springbok and the wart-hog.

The boulder had seen War—War between black-skinned men and brown-skinned men, adventurers with great hooked noses and curled beards, with tassels of silk and gold plaited into them and into the hair of their heads, terrible warriors, mighty hunters,

and great miners, who came for slaves and ivory and gold, and hollowed strongholds out of the mountains, and worshipped strange bird-beaked gods, and passed away. Yet again, when these ceased to be, there had been War; and this time the black men of the soil fought with white strangers, who wanted the same things—slaves, and skins, and ivory, and the yellow metal of the river-sands and of the rocks.

Now white men fought with white. The black men owned little of the country: they hid in the kloofs and thickets in terror, while the European conquerors shed each other's blood for gold, and land, and power. The boulder was so very old. It could afford to wait patiently until these men, like all that went before, had passed.

Every seventh day the guns ceased bellowing and throwing iron things that burst and scattered Death broadcast, and the rifles stopped crack-cracking and spitting steel and lead. Then the scared birds came back: the waxbills, and love-birds, and finches, and sparrows darted in and out among the bushes, and the partridge, and quail, and francolin ventured down to drink. The old baboon had retired to the hills with his family; the springbok and the wart-hog had moved up Bulawayo way; the cheetah and the lynx had followed them....

But as long as human lovers came and whispered to each other, standing beside the big boulder, or sitting

in its shadow, the boulder would be content. They spoke the old language that it had learned when the world was comparatively young. Black or yellow or white, African or Oriental or European, this speech of theirs was always the same; their looks and actions never varied. Either they met and kissed and were happy, or they met and quarrelled and were miserable. When no more lovers should come, the boulder knew that would be the end of the world.

There was a gaudily dressed, white-faced young woman waiting now beside the big stone upon this seventh day. Her blue eyes were large and wistful. She had taken off her big flaunting hat and hung it on a bush, and her face was not unpretty, topped by its aureole of frizzy yellow curls. She leaned against the sun-warmed granite, and cried a little. That was the way of women when the man was late at the tryst. Then she dried her eyes and hummed a song, and, finally, taking a stump of pencil from her pocket, she began to scribble on the smooth red stone—all part of the old play, the boulder knew. The first woman whom he remembered had drawn a figure meant for a portrait of her lover, with a sharpened flake of flint.

The young woman, as she sucked her lead-pencil, was quite unconscious that the boulder thought at all. She wrote in an unformed hand, and in letters that began by being large and round, and tailed off into a slanting niggle. "W. Keyse, Esquer." Then she bit the pencil awhile, and dreamed dreams. Then she wrote again, "Jane Keyse" and "Mrs. W. Keyse," and blushed furiously, and then grew pale again in anticipation of the Awful Ordeal to come. For she had made up her mind to tell him all, and chance it.

Yesterday had been his birthday. She had sent him, per John Tow, a costly gift. The four-ounce packet of honeydew, cheap at five dollars in these days of scarcity, had been opened, and the new pipe filled. A slip of paper coquettishly intimated that the sender had rendered the recipient this delicate little service. She meant to sign "Jane Harris," but her courage failed her, and her trembling pen faltered for the last time, "Fare Air."

Oh! how she hated that Other One, whom, perhaps, he liked the best, though he had never kissed her! She would be done with the creature, she thanked her Gawd, after to-day! Oh, how many times she had made up her mind to tell him the truth, and never done it! But if she took and died of it, tell him she would this time.

How would he take the revelation? Possibly swearing. Probably he would be angry enough to hit her, *when he knew*. If he only would, and make it up afterwards! Oh! how cruel she did suffer! She thought she would not tell him just yet. It was too hard. And then it seemed quite easy, and then she cried out in agony: "Is that 'im comin'? Oh, my Gawd, it is!"

She clasped her hands over a brand-new blowse, with something under it that jumped and fluttered orful. Mother used to 'ave such palpitytions when her and father 'ad 'ad what you might call a jar. And he was coming, coming....

Surely W. Keyse looked stern and imposingly tall of stature, seen from her lower level, as he appeared among the blue gum-trees on the top of the bank, and began to descend into the ferny gorge where the great boulder sat and sunned himself beside the beer-

coloured river, whose barbel kept on rising at the flies. Something W. Keyse dragged behind him, not by a rope, but by a pigtail; an animated bundle of clean blue cotton, topped by the impassive, almond-eyed countenance of John Tow, the letter-carrying Chinaman, who in the unlawful pursuit of tikkies, finding the letter written by the foreign lady-devil to the male one eagerly paid for on the nail, had offered for half as much again to induce her for the future to write two instead of one. Towing Tow, the smarting victim of feminine duplicity came crashing down upon the guilty girl who had betrayed him.

"See 'ere! You know this 'ere young lady, and you remember what you've bin and told me. Say it over again now," thundered W. Keyse, "so as she can 'ear you. Tell me before 'er as wot she wrote them—these letters"—he rapped himself dramatically upon the breast-pocket—"and how you see her doing of it, before I kick your backbone through your hat."

All was lost. The Chinaman had up an' give Emigration Jane away. Certainly he had saved her trouble, but what was he sayin' now, the 'orrible slant-eyed 'eathen? She could hardly hear him for the roaring in her poor bewildered head.

"S'pose John tell, can catchee more tikkie? Plenty tikkie want to buy chow, allee so baddee times."

"Always on the make, ain't you?" commented W. Keyse. With a strong, imperious shove, he dumped the blue bundle down among the cowslips in which the feet of the guilty fair were hidden, saying sternly: "I give you three minutes to git it off your chest, else kickie is wot you'll catch instead o' tikkie." He furnished a moderate sample on account.

"Oh, ki—ah. Oh, ki—ah!" moaned the tingling John.

"Don't you be 'ard on him, William"—he hardly knew the voice, it was so weak and small—"it's Gawspel truth. To pay you out—at first, for juggin' Walt, I did write them letters—every bloomin' screeve."

"An' sent the pipe and baccy for a birthday present, to make a blushin' fool o' me?" yelled the infuriated Keyse. "All for the crimson sake of a fat 'og of a Dutchman!"

The patriot to whom he referred, mounted on an attenuated mule, and escorted by a Sergeant and six men of the B.S.A., under the superintendence of a large pink officer of the Staff, was at that moment being conducted at a sharp trot out of the lines, to meet a smallish waggon pulled by a span of four that was being brought down from Tweipans by half a dozen Boers in weathered tan-cord and velveteen, battered pot-hats and ragged shooting-jackets, carrying very carefully-tended rifles, mounted on well-fed, wiry little horses, and accompanied by a White Flag. If she had known, what would it have mattered to her? All her thoughts were centred in this furious little man, whose pale, ugly eyes fairly blazed at her, as he repeated:

"To pay—me out. You brawsted little Treachery, you ——"

She crimsoned to her hair; you could see the red blood rushing and rushing up from under the peekaboo embroidery in front of the tawdry blowse, in a hurry to tell her tingling ears what cruel names he called her.

"To pay you out at first it was. An' afterwards"—her

throat hurt her, and her eyes did smart and burn so —"afterwards I—I wanted ... O Gawd!..." she shook all over—"you'll never walk out wi' me no more after this!"

"You may take your dyin' oath I won't." He was bitterly sarcastic. "Strite, an' no kid, didn't you know when you done—*that*—I'd never forgive you as long as I lived?"

He plucked the stout package of letters signed "Fare Air" from his indignant bosom, and threw them at her feet, with the new pipe, her hapless gift. His wrath was infinitely more terrible than she had imagined. Her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. Everything kep' a-spinnin' so, she couldn't 'ardly tell whether she was on 'er 'ead or 'er 'eels. She will remember that day to the last breath she draws....

"Didn't you know it?" the voice of her judge demanded again.

John Tow, finding himself no longer an object of attention, had discreetly vanished.

"Oh, I did, I did!" Her agony was frantic. "Oh, let me go away and hide and die somewhere! Oh, crooil, to break a pore gal's 'art! Wot—wot loves the bloomin' earth under your feet!"

"Garn!"—the scorn of W. Keyse was something awful —"you an' your love——"

She wrenched the cotton lace away from her thin throat, and tore some of her hair out in the strenuous hysteria of her class, and screamed at him:

"Me an' my love!... Go on!... Frow it in me face, an' 'ave no pity! Me an' my love!... Sneer at it, take an'

spit on it—ain't it yours all the syme? Oh, for Gawd's syke forgive me!"

He struck an indomitable attitude and thundered:

"So 'elp me Jiminy Cripps, I never will!"

She knew that the oath was irrevocable, and with a faint moan, turned to the great boulder that was behind her, and clung to its hard red bosom as if it had been a mother's. She moaned to him as her thin figure flattened itself against the stone, to let her go away and die somewhere. He stood a moment looking at her, and exulting in his power, meaning her to suffer yet a little longer ere he relented. Secretly, he knew relief that the golden pigtail and the provoking blue eyes of Miss Greta Du Taine had vanished out of Gueldersdorp before the first Act of War. He would have felt them in the way now. Those shining, tearful eyes and the mouth that kissed and clung to his had done their work on the night of the Grand Variety entertainment in the empty Government store. He would pretend to go away and leave her. He would come back, enjoy her astonishment, be melted by renewed entreaties, stoop to relent, overwhelm her with his magnanimity, and then proceed to love-making.

But as a preliminary he swung round upon his heel and strode upwards through the short bush and the tall grasses, the scandalised flowers thrashing his boots. She saw him, although her back was turned. If he could have known how tall he seemed to Emigration Jane as he strode away, W. Keyse would have been tickled to the core. But he turned when he felt sure he was well out of sight, and hurried back.

She was not there.

He was indifferent at first, then angry, then anxious, then disconsolate. Repentance followed fast on the heels of all these moods. He picked up the packet of letters and the rejected pipe, cursing his own cruelty, and sought her up and down the banks, calling her in tones that were urgent, affectionate, upbraiding, appealing; but not for all his luring would the flown bird come back to fist. No more beside the river, or in other places where they had been wont to meet, did W. Keyse encounter Emigration Jane again.

XXXIX

But even without W. Keyse and the vanished author of "Fare Air's" letters the ferny tree-fringed kloof at the bottom of which the beer-coloured river ran over its granite boulders and quartz pebbles, was not empty and void. On Sundays, when the birds returned from the hills, to which they had been scared by the hideous tumult of War, thither after High Mass in the battered little Roman Catholic church in the stad, the Mother-Superior and the Sisters would come, bringing with them such poor food as they had, and picnic soberly. All the week through they had laboured, nursed, and tended the sick and wounded in the Hospitals, and washed and fed and taught the numberless orphans of the siege, and upon this day the Mother-Superior had ruled that they were to be together. And all the week through the thought of it kept them going, as she had hoped. You are to see her holding her little court beside the river upon a certain February afternoon,

receiving friends in her sweet, stately fashion, and dispensing hospitality out of the largest and most battered Britannia-metal teapot that ever brewed, what was later originally referred to in the weekly "Social Jottings" column of the *Gueldersdorp Siege Gazette* as the cheering infusion. The *Siege Gazette* was an intermittent daily, issued from a subterranean printing-office, for the dissemination of general orders and latest news, fluctuations in the weight and quality of the meat-rations, and the rise and fall of the free-soup level, being also recorded. To its back-files I must refer those who seek a fuller account of the function described by the brilliant journalist who signed herself "Gold Pen," as highly successful. She gives you to understand that the company was distinguished, and the conversation vivid and unflagging. And when you realise that everybody present was suffering more or less from the active pinch of hunger, that social gathering of men and women of British blood becomes heroic and historic and fine.

"Dr Saxham, Attached Medical Staff, was observed," we read. "Gold Pen" also notes "the presence of the Reverend Julius Fraithorn, son of the Bishop of H ——, and second curate—on leave—of St. Margaret's, Wendish Street; now happily recovered, thanks to the skill of Dr. Saxham, from an illness, held at no recent date to be incurable. Mr. Fraithorn has undertaken the onerous duties of Chaplain to the Hospitals in charge of the Military Staff. It was gratifying to observe," she continues, "that the Colonel commanding graced the occasion by his martial presence. He was attended by his junior aide, Lieutenant Lord Beauvayse. We also saw Lady Hannah Wrynche with her distinguished husband, Captain Bingham Wrynche, Royal Bay Dragoons,

Acting Senior Aide," etc., etc.

"Late apricots from the garden of the ruined Convent, and peaches from its west wall, gathered in the dead of night by Sister Cleophée and Sister Tobias," "Gold Pen" goes on to say, "were greatly appreciated by the guests, each of whom brought his or her own bread."

A most villainous kind of bannock of unleavened mealie-meal and crushed oats, calculated to try the strongest teeth and trouble the toughest digestion, "Gold Pen" might have added. But the game was to make believe you rather enjoyed it than otherwise. If you had no teeth and no digestion, you were allowed a pint and a half of sowens porridge instead; and thus helped your portion of exhausted cavalry mount or your bit of tough mule-meat down. And so you went on like your neighbours, playing the game, while your eyes grew larger and your girth less, and your cheekbones more in evidence with every day that dawned.

Cheekbones have a strange, unnatural effect when they appear in childish faces. There was a child in a rusty double perambulator that had been a stylish baby-carriage only a little while ago, whose wizened face and shrunken hands were pitiable to see. He was wheeled by a sallow woman, with hollow, grey-blue eyes—a woman whose black alpaca gown hung loosely on her wasted figure, and whose shabby, crape-trimmed hat was pinned on anyhow. Siege confinement and siege terrors, siege smells and siege diet, had made strange havoc of the plump comeliness of a matronly lady who once rustled in purple satin befitting a Mayor's wife. She had lost one of her children through diphtheria, and she knew, unless a miracle happened, that she would

also lose the boy.

Only look at him! She told you in that dull, toneless voice of hers how sturdy he had been, how strong and masterful—how pretty, too, with his plume of fair hair tumbling into his big, shining, grey eyes! The eyes were bigger than ever now, but the light and the life had sunk out of them, and his round face was pinched, and the colour of old wax. And the arm that hung idly over the side of the little carriage was withered and shrunken—the hand of an old man, and not of a child. The other, under the light shawl that tucked him in, hugged something that bulged under the coverlet.

"His father can't bear to look at him," the Mayor's wife said, glancing at the Mayor's carefully-averted back. "And I'm sure it's no wonder. He just lies like this, day and night, and doesn't want to move, or answer when you speak to him, and he won't eat. The food is dreadful, but still he might try, just to comfort his mother——"

"I does twy," piped Hammy weakly, "and ven my tummy shuts, and it isn't no use twying any more."

The Mother-Superior brought a gaily-coloured little china cup of that rare luxury, new milk, and bent over him, saying cheerfully, as she held it to the colourless mouth, "Not always, Hammy. Taste this."

"No, fank you." He turned his head away, tightly shutting his eyes.

"It's real milk, Hammy, not condensed," the soft voice pleaded. He shook his head again, and knit his childish brows.

"I saided it wasn't no use. My tummy just shuts."

"I think I would not bother him any more just now," Saxham interposed, noting the droop of the piteous, flaccid mouth, and feeling the flutter of the uneven pulse. The Mayor's wife broke into helpless sobbing. The Mother-Superior drew her swiftly out of the sick child's hearing and sight. And a shadow fell upon the thin light coverlet, and a crisp, decided voice said:

"Then Hammy's tummy is a mutinous soldier, and must be taught to obey the Word of Command."

"Mister Colonel ..." The dull, childish eyes grew a very little brighter, and the claw-like hand went up in shaky salute to the limp plume of fair hair, not glistening and silky now, but dull and unkempt, that fell over the broad, darkly-veined waxen forehead. —"It is Mister Colonel.... And I haven't seen you for ever an' ever so long. An' Berta's deaded, an', an'——" The whisper was almost inaudible.... "Vere's something I did so want to tell!" The hidden arm came from under the coverings "It's about my Winocewus, vis beast what you gived me, ever so long ago." He displayed the treasured toy.

"You shall tell me about Berta and the rhinoceros when I have told you something. A Certain Person can come out of this vehicle, I suppose, Saxham? It will make no difference, in the long-run, to a Certain Person's health?"

"Why, nothing in Heaven or upon earth will make any difference at this juncture," returned Saxham, speaking in the same tone, "unless a Certain Person can be roused to the necessary pitch of desiring food. To administer it forcibly would, in my opinion, be worse than useless."

The Certain Person was lifted out of his cramped

quarters by vigorous but gentle hands. The Colonel Commanding sat down with him upon a camp-stool, and as the wasted legs dangled irresponsibly from his supporting knees, and the hot head rolled helplessly against the row of coloured bits of medal-ribbon that were sewn on the left breast of the khâki jacket, he began to talk, holding the limp little body with a kind, sustaining arm.

"You've seen how my men obey me, Hammy? Well, your brain and your eyes, your arms and legs, and hands and feet, as well as your tummy, are your soldiers. And it's mutiny if they refuse to carry out the Officer's orders. And you're the Officer, you know."

"Am I ve Officer, weally?"

Interest was quickening in the heavy eyes.

"You're the Officer. And I'm the Colonel in Command. And when I say to you, 'Lieutenant Hammy, drink this milk,' why, you'll pass along the order to Sergeant Brain and Corporal Eyes and Privates Hands and Mouth and Tummy, and see that they carry it out. Where is——? Ah! thank you, ma'am; that was what I wanted."

For the Mother-Superior had deftly put the gaily-coloured little china cup into the lean, brown, outstretched hand, and, seeing what was coming, the Lieutenant shed an unsoldierly tear and raised a feeble whimper.

"Please, no, Mister Colonel! My tummy——"

"Private Tummy is a shirker, who doesn't want to do his duty. But it's your duty as his Commanding Officer to show him that it must be done. And that's

the game we're playing. You'll employ tact before you have recourse to stringent measures. Not make the fellow dogged or furious by angry words or threats. When it's necessary to shoot, shoot straight. But, first, you give the order."

"Oughtn't ve officer to have a wevolver?"

"Wait a second, and you shall have mine."

The deft fingers twirled out and pocketed the cartridge-packed chambers, and put the harmless weapon into the childish hands.

"It's veway heavy," Hammy said dolefully, as the shining Army Smith & Wesson wobbled in his feeble clutches, then wavered and sank ingloriously down upon his lap.

"If you had drunk the milk you might have found it lighter. Suppose we try now. Attention!"

—'"Tention!" piped Hammy.

"Hands, catch hold. Mouth, do your duty. And if Private Tummy disobeys, he'll have to take the consequences."

"Please, what are ve confequences?"

"Drink down the milk, and then I'll tell you."

The gay little china cup was slowly emptied. Hammy blinked eyes that were already growing sleepy, and sucked the moustache of white from his upper-lip with relish, remarking:

"I dwinked it all, and my tummy never shut. Now tell me what are ve confequences?"

"A mother without a son, for one thing." The keen,

hawk-eyes were gentle. "But drink plenty of milk and eat plenty of bread and porridge and minced meat, and you'll live to see the Relief marching into Gueldersdorp one fine morning, boy."

"Unless I get deaded like Berta. And that weminds me what I wanted to tell so bad." The lips began to quiver, and the eyes brimmed. "Soldiers mustn't cwy, must vey?"

"Not while there's work to be done, Hammy. Would you like to wait now and tell me another day?" For the little round head was nodding against the row of medal-ribbons stitched on the khâki jacket, and the big round eyes kept open with difficulty.

"No, please. It's about the beasts—my beasts what you gived me. Winocewus, an' Lion, an' Tawantula, an' Tsetse, an' Black Bee—just like a weal Bee, only not so sharp at ve end.... Don't you wemember, Mister Colonel?"

"Of course I remember. The toy beasts I brought down from Rhodesia and gave to a little boy."

"I was the boy. And—you saided I was to let Berta have her share wof dem. And I did let her play wif all ve ovvers. But Winocewus had to be tooked such care wof for fear of bweaking his horn—an' Berta was such a little fing, vat—vat——"

"That you wouldn't let her play with Rhinoceros. And you think it wasn't quite fair, or quite kind, and now you're sorry?"

Hammy sniffed dolorously, and two large tears splashed down.

"I'm sowwy. An' I fought if I was deaded too, like

Berta, I could go an' tell her I never meaned to be gweedy. An' I wouldn't eat my bweakfust, nor my dinner, nor nothing—and at last my tummy shut, and I didn't want nuffing more."

The Mother-Superior and the Colonel Commanding exchanged a glance over the little round head before the man's voice answered the child.

"That wouldn't have made Bertha happy. She might have thought you a little coward for running away and leaving your mother and all the other ladies behind, shut up in Gueldersdorp. For an officer and a gentleman must go on living and fighting while he has anything left to fight for, Hammy. Remember that."

"Yes, Mister Colonel...." The drowsy eyes closed, the little head nodded off into slumber against the kind, strong shoulder. The Mother-Superior wheeled the perambulator near, and the Colonel, rising, laid the now soundly-sleeping boy back upon his cushions.

"What mysteries children are!" he said, as the Mother replaced the light covering, screening the sleeping face with tender, careful hands from sun and flies. "Imagine remorse for an act of selfishness leading a boy of six to such a determination—and a normal, healthy boy, if ever I met one."

"He has been living for some time under abnormal conditions," the Mother said softly, looking at the quiet rise and fall of the light shawl covering. "He will take a turn for the better now."

"And forget his trouble and its cause." The Chief's observant glance had lighted on Rhinoceros, lying upside down in a little clump of flowering sword-

grass, into which he had been whisked as the Mother shook out the little shawl. "I think," he said, and pocketed the horned one, "that this gentleman had better go into the fire."

"Perhaps. And yet it would be a continual reminder to conquer selfishness in great as in little things." She smiled, meeting the keen hazel eyes with her great pure grey ones.

"If you think so, I will leave it."

"I will not take the responsibility of advising you to. You have already shown more tact than I can lay claim to in dealing with children. And that has been the business of the greater part of my life, remember."

He looked at her full, and said:

"I may possess and employ tact when dealing with men and with children, possibly. But not long ago I was guilty of—and have since bitterly reproached myself for, I beg you to believe me! a gross and lamentable blunder as regards a woman——"

She put out her fine hand with a quick, protesting gesture, as if she would have begged him to say no more. He went on:

"She is a lady whom you intimately know, and whom I have, like everyone else in this town, learned to esteem highly and to profoundly respect. For the terrible shock and the deep pain I must have given that lady in breaking to her ignorantly and hastily the news of the death of a friend who was dear to me, and infinitely dearer to—another with whom she is acquainted—I humbly entreat her pardon."

He had not known her eyes were of so deep a purple-grey as to be nearly black. Perhaps they seemed so by contrast with the absolute whiteness of her face. The eyes winced, and the mouth contracted as she entreated, voicelessly:

"I beg you, say no more!"

"I have but little more to say," he returned. "I will only add that if at any time you wished in kindness to make me forget what I did that day, you would apply to me in some difficulty, honour me with some confidence, trust me in any unforeseen emergency in which I might be of use to you. Or to—anyone who is dear to you, and in whom for the sake of old associations and old ties I might even otherwise be deeply interested."

He had spoken with intention, and now his deliberate glance dropped to the level of the strip of sandy shore beside the river, where the giant Convent kettle boiled upon a disproportionately little fire, and Sister Hilda-Antony presided in the Reverend Mother's place at the trestle-supported tray where the Britannia-metal teapot brooded, as doth the large domestic hen, over an immense family of cups and saucers. Busy as ants, the other Sisters hurried backwards and forwards, attending to the wants of their guests, who sat about on rocks and boulders, or with due precautions taken against puff-adders and tarantulas, lay upon the grass of the high bank in the shade of the fern and bush. And as vivid by contrast with their black-robed, white-wimpled figures, as a slender dragon-fly among a bevy of homely gnats, the graceful, prettily-clad figure of Lynette showed, as she shared the Sister's hospitable labours.

She had her share of girlish vanity. She had put on a plain tailor-made skirt of fine dark green cloth, short enough to show the dainty little brown buckled shoes that she specially affected, and a thin white silk shirt and knitted croquet-jacket of white wool. A scarlet leather belt girt her slender waist, and a silver châtelaine jingled a gay tune at her side, and about her white slim throat was a band of scarlet velvet, and her wide-brimmed straw hat had a knot of purple and white clematis in it, and a broad, vivid, emerald-green wing-quill thrust under the knot. And the hair under the green-plumed hat gleamed bronze in the sunshine that filtered through the thick foliage of the blue gum-trees that grew on either bank of the river, and stretched their branches out to clasp across the stream, like hands. She was too pale and too thin, and her eyes were feverishly bright, but she looked happy, carrying her tray of steaming teacups in spite of Beauvayse's anxious attempts to relieve her of the burden, and the Chaplain's diffident entreaties that she should entrust it to him. Their voices, mingled in gay argument, were borne by a warm puff of spice-scented air to the ears of the elder people, standing in the shade of the trees at the summit of the high, sloping bank, with the rusty perambulator between them.

"I thank you," the Mother said, in her full, round tones. The eyes of both, travelling back from that delicate, slight young figure, had met once more. "Believing that you speak in perfect sincerity, I thank you, and shall not hesitate to call upon you, should the need arise."

Her voice was very calm, and her discreet glance told nothing. He would not have been a man of woman born if he had not been a little piqued. He said, with

an air of changing the subject:

"Miss Mildare strikes me as a very beautiful girl."

"Is she not?"

Her eyes grew tender, and her whole face was irradiated by the splendour of her smile. She looked down the bushed and grass-covered slope to where Lynette, all the guests supplied, had thrown herself down to rest on a stone under a tree. She had taken off her hat, and her hair was flecked with sunshine as she leaned her head back with a little air of lassitude and weariness against the scarred bark. But in spite of weariness she was smiling and content. The rest was delicious, the peaceful quiet enchanting, the air sweet after the fetid odours of the town; and it was sweet, too, whenever she glanced at the Reverend Julius Fraithorn, who was lying at her feet, or Beauvayse, who fanned her alternately with a leafy branch and the tea-tray, to behold her own beauty reflected in the admiring eyes of two young and handsome men.

The Mother had never seen her thus before. She had been absent from the scenes of Lynette's little social triumphs. Now a great tenderness swelled in her bosom, and a great pity gripped her throat, and wrung the bitter, slow tears into her eyes.

"She is happy," she whispered in her heart. "She has forgotten just for a little while, and her kingdom of womanhood is hers, unspoiled, and the present moment is sweet, and the future she has no thought of. My poor, poor love! Let her go on forgetting, even if it is only for a day."

His voice beside her made her start. He was still

speaking of Lynette.

"Her type is unusual—amongst Colonials."

She returned: "She was born in the Colony, I believe."

"Ah! but of British parents, surely? I once knew an English lady," he went steadily on, "whom she resembles strikingly."

Her eyes were inscrutable, and her lips were folded close.

"She was the wife of the Colonel commanding my old Regiment—Sir George Hawting. A grand old warrior, and something of a martinet. He married a third daughter of the Duke of Runcorn—Lady Lucy Briddwater."

She said without the betraying flicker of an eyelash: "I have seen the lady named...."

He said, with a prick of self-reproach for having again turned the barb that festered in her bosom:

"Lady Lucy was a very lovely creature, and a very impulsive one. She lived not happily, and she died tragically."

There was the ring of steel and the coldness of ice in the Mother's words:

"She met the fate she chose."

He thought, looking at her:

"What a woman this is! How silent, how resourceful, how calm, how immeasurably deep! And why does she think of me as an opponent?" He went on, stung by that quiet marshalling of all her forces against him:

"Unhappily, the fate we choose for ourselves sometimes involves others. The death of that unhappy woman and the father of her child left an innocent creature at the mercy of sordid, evil hands."

"In evil hands, indeed, judging by—what you have told me."

"I would give much to be able to trace her." There was a heavy line between his eyebrows, and his eyes were stern and sad. "It would be something to know what had become of her, even if she were dead, or worse than dead."

A violent, sudden scarlet dyed her to the edge of the white starched coif. Her mouth writhed as though words were bursting from her; but she nipped her lips together, and controlled her eyes. And still her silence angered and defied him. He went on:

"If I seem to you to harp painfully upon this subject, pardon me. You have my word that, without encouragement from you, I will not refer to it after to-day." His close-clipped brown moustache was straightened by the tension of the muscles of his mouth. He passed his palm over it, and continued speaking without moving a muscle of his face or taking his searching eyes from the Mother's.

"The name of the young lady who is so fortunate as to be your ward, and even more, the striking likeness I spoke of just now, have led me to hope that my dead friend's daughter was led by a Hand, in whose Divine guidance I humbly believe, to find the very shelter he would have chosen for her. Pray answer, acquitting me in your own mind of persistence or inquisitiveness. Am I right or wrong?"

She might have been a statue of black marble, with wimple and face and hands of alabaster, she stood so breathlessly still. Her heart did not seem to beat; her blood was stagnant in her veins. She felt no faintness. Her observation was unnaturally keen, her mind dazzlingly clear; her brain seemed to work with twice its ordinary power. She thought. He glanced at the shabby watch he wore upon the steel lip-strap, and waited. She was aware of the action, though she never turned her head. She was weighing the question, to tell or not to tell? Her soul hung poised like a seagull in the momentary shelter of a giant wave-crest. Another moment, and the battle with the raging gale and the driving halberds of the sleet would begin again.

She looked again towards Lynette, and in an instant her purpose crystallised, her line of action was made clear. She saw a little bunch of wax-belled white heath fall from the girl's scarlet belt in the act of rising. She saw Beauvayse snatch it greedily from the grass and read the glance that passed between the golden-hazel and the green-grey eyes, and understood with a great pang of jealous mother-pain that she was no longer first in her beloved's heart. Then came a throb of unselfish joy at the knowledge that Richard's girl had come into her kingdom, that the divine right and heritage and crown of Womanhood were hers at last.

Were hers? Not yet, but might be hers, if every clue that led back to that tavern upon the veld could be broken or tangled in such wise that the keenest and most subtle seeker should be baffled and lost. It all lay clear before her now, the manipulation of events, the deft rearrangement of actual fact that might best be used to this end. As her clear brain planned, her

bleeding heart trailed wings in the dust, seeking to lead the searcher away from the hidden nest, and now her motherhood and her pride and all the diplomacy acquired in her long years of rule rose up in arms to meet him.

They were not of equal height. Her great, changeful eyes, purple-grey now, dropped to encounter his. She regarded him quietly, and said:

"No one of your wide experience needs to be reminded that resemblances between persons who are not allied by blood exist, and are strangely misleading. But since you have conveyed to me in unmistakable terms your conviction that Miss Mildare is the daughter of—a mutual friend who bore that surname—is actually identified in your idea with that most unhappy child who was left orphaned some seventeen years ago—at—I think you said a veld hotel in the Orange Free State?"

He bowed assent, biting the short hairs of his moustache in vexation and embarrassment.

"Hardly an hotel—a wretched shanty of the usual corrugated-iron and mud-wall type, in the cattle-grazing country between Driepoort and Kroonfontein. And—it seems my fate to be continually bringing our conversation back to a—most unhappy and painful theme."

"I acquit you of the intention to pain or wound. When I have finished what I have to say, we will revert to the subject no more. It will be buried between us for ever, though the memory of the Dead live in our pardoning and loving thoughts, and in our prayers."

The vivid colour that had flamed in her cheeks had sunk and left them marble. The humid mist of tears that veiled her eyes gave them a wonderful beauty.

He answered her:

"Your thoughts could not be otherwise than noble and generous. Prayers as pure as yours could not be unheard."

"No prayers are unheard, though all are not granted."

She made the slight gesture with her large, beautiful hand that put unnecessary speech from her, and let the hand drop again by her side. Her bosom rose and fell quietly with her even speaking. None could have guessed the tumult within, and the doubts and convictions and apprehensions that battled together, and the religious fears and scruples that rent and tore her suffering soul. But for the sake of Richard's daughter she rallied her grand forces, and nerved herself to carry out her hated task.

"I will tell you how I came to be interested in the young lady who is now my adopted daughter, and whom you know as Lynette Mildare. At the end of the winter of 18— the Reverend Mother of our Convent died, and I was sent up from the Mother-House at Natal, by order of the Bishop, to take her place as Superior. Two Sisters came with me. It was the usual slow journey of many weeks. The wet season had begun. Perhaps that was why we did not encounter many other waggons on the way. But one party of emigrants of the labouring class—we never really learned where bound—trekked on before us, and generally outspanned within sight. There were three rough Englishmen—two middle-aged and one quite old—a couple of tawdry women, and a young

girl. They used to ill-treat the girl. We heard her crying often, and one of the Kaffir voor-loopers of their two waggons told a Cape boy who was in our service that the old Baas would kill the little white thing one of these days. She was used as a drudge by them all—a servant, unpaid, ill-fed, worse-clothed than the Kaffirs—but the old man, according to our informant, bore her a special grudge, and lost no opportunity of wreaking his malice on her."

"I understand," he said. She went on:

"We would have helped the child if we could have reached her; but it was not possible. If she had run away and taken refuge with us, and the men had followed her, I do not think we should have given her up for any threats of theirs, or even for threats carried out in action."

"I know you never would have."

She made the slight gesture with her hand that put all inferred praise aside.

"The waggons of the emigrants were no longer in sight, one morning when we inspanned. They had headed south as if for the Diamond Mines, and we were trekking west...." There was a slight hesitation, and her lashes flickered, then she took up her story. "Perhaps we were a hundred and fifty miles from Gueldersdorp, perhaps more, when we came upon what we believed at first to be the dead body of a young girl, almost a child, lying among the karroo bush, face downwards, upon the sand. She had been cruelly beaten with the sjambok—she bears the scars of that terrible ill-usage to-day.... We judged that she had fainted and fallen from one of the emigrants' trek-waggons. Months afterwards, when her wounds

were healed"—her steady lips quivered slightly —"and she had recovered from an attack of brain-fever brought on by alarm and anxiety and the ill-usage, she told me that she had run away from people who were cruel to her—from a man who——"

"This distresses you. I am grieved——"

He noted the sickness of horror in her face, and the starting of innumerable little shining points of moisture on her white, broad forehead and about her lips. She drew out her handkerchief and wiped them away with a hand that shook a little.

"I have very little more to say. She was quite crushed and broken by cruelty and ill-usage. No native child could have been more ignorant—she could not even tell us her name when we asked it. She probably had never had one. And Father Wix, who is our Convent Chaplain, and has charge of the Catholic Mission here, baptised her at my instance, giving her two names that were dear to me in that old life that I left behind so long ago. She is Lynette Mildare.... Are you surprised that in seven years a young creature so neglected should have become what you see? Those powers were inherent in her which training can but develop. We found in her great natural capacity, an intelligence keen and quick, a taste naturally refined, a sweet and gentle disposition, a pure and loving heart——" Her voice broke. Her eyes were blinded by a sudden rush of tears. She moved her hand as though to say: "There is no more to tell."

"You shut the door upon my hope," he said.

It was to her veritably as though the gates of her own deed clashed behind her with the closing of the sentence. For she had stated the absolute truth, and

yet left much untold. She saw disappointment and reluctant conviction in his face, coupled with an immense faith in her that stung her to an agony of shame and self-reproach. What had she suppressed?

Nothing, but that the waggons of the emigrants had turned south for Diamond Town a fortnight before the finding of that lost lamb upon the veld. And her scrupulous habit of truth, her crystal honour, her keen, clear judgment no less than her rigorous habit of self-examination, told her that the half-truth was no better than falsehood, and that she, Christ's Bride and Mary's Daughter, had deliberately deceived this man.

Yet for his own sake, was it not best that he should never know the truth! And for the sake of Richard's daughter, was it not her sacred maternal duty to shield that dearest one from shame? She steeled herself with that as he bared his head before her.

"Ma'am, you have more than honoured me with your confidence, and I need not say that it is sacred in my eyes, and shall be kept inviolate. And for the rest ——"

XL

"Reverend Mother," sounded from below.

"They are calling us," she said, as though awakened from a dream.

"May I take you down?"

He offered his arm with deference, and she touching it lightly, they went down together. Lynette came to them laughing, a cup in either hand, her aides-de-camp following with plates that held the siege apology for bread and butter and familiar-looking cubes of something....

"Thank you, Miss Mildare. What have you here, Beau? Cake, upon my word! Or is it a delusion born of long and painful abstinence from any form of pastry?"

"Cake it is, sir, and thundering good cake," proclaimed Beauvayse. "Made from Sister Tobias's special siege recipe, without candied peel or plums or carraways, or any of the other what-do-you-call-'ems that go into the ordinary article. Go in and win, sir. I've had three whacks. Haven't I, Miss Mildare?"

He spoke with the infectious enjoyment of a schoolboy, and Lynette's laugh, sweet and gay as a thrush's sudden trill of melody, answered:

"I think you have had four."

She flushed as she met the Colonel's eyes, reading in them masculine appreciation of her delicate, vivid beauty, and put her freed hand into the lean palm he held out, saying, with a shy, sweet smile that lifted one corner of the sensitive mouth higher than the other:

"I didn't come to say How do you do? before, because I saw you were busy talking to Mother." Her quick glance read something amiss in another face. "Mother, how tired you look! Please bring that little camp-stool, Mr. Fraithorn. Oh, thank you, Dr.

Saxham; that one with arms is more comfortable. Colonel, we're all under your command. Won't you please order the Mother to sit down and rest? She will be so tired to-morrow. Dearest, you know you will."

She took the Mother's hand, confidently, caressingly. The end of the thin black veil, that was shabby now, and had darns in many places, was wafted across her face by a vagrant puff of cooled air from the river, and she kissed it, bringing the tears very near the deep, sad eyes that looked at her, and then turned away. Saxham, in default of any excuse for lingering near her, went back to Lady Hannah, who had been diligently mining in him with the pick and shovel of Our Special Correspondent, and getting nothing out, and sat himself doggedly upon a stone beside her.

"That is a sweet girl." She nibbled bannock, sparsely margarined, and sipped her sugarless, milkless tea, sitting on a little bushy knoll, warranted free from puff-adders and tarantulas. Saxham answered stiffly:

"Many people here seem to be under—the same impression."

"Don't you share it? Don't you think her sweet?"

"I have seen young ladies who were—less deserving of the adjective."

Lady Hannah jangled a triumphant laugh. She wore the tailored garb the average Englishwoman looks best in, at home and abroad, an alpaca coat and skirt of cool grey; what the American belle terms a "shirt-waist" with pearl studs, and a big grey hat with a voluminous blue silk veil. Her small face was smaller than ever, but her eyes were as round and as bright

as a mouse's or a bird's, and her talk was full of glitter and vivacity.

"'Praise from Dr. Saxham.' ... If I were a man," she declared, "I should *perdre la boule* over that girl. I don't wonder where she gets her lovely manners from, with such a model of grace and good breeding as Biddy Bawne before her eyes, but I do ask how she came by that type of beauty? And Biddy——"

"Biddy?" repeated Saxham, at a loss.

Her laugh shrilled out.

"I forgot. She is the Reverend Mother-Superior of the Convent to all of you. But I was at school with her, and I can't forget she used to be Biddy. She was one of the great girls, and I was a sprat of ten, but she condescended to let me adore her, and I did, like everybody else. To be adored is her *métier*. The Sisters swear by her, and that girl worships the ground under her feet. If I had a daughter I should like her to look at me in that way—heart in her eyes, don't you know, and what eyes! Topaz-coloured, aren't they? She has no conversation, of course. *I* hadn't at her age—nineteen or twenty, if I am any guesser. What she will be at thirty, if she don't go off! That little Greek head, and all those waves of rusty-coloured hair. Quite wonderful! And her hands and feet and skin—marvellous! And that small-boned slenderness of build that is so perfectly enchanting. Paquin would delight to dress her. And"—her jangling laugh rang out, waking echoes from hollow places—"it looks—do you know?—it looks as though he would get the chance."

"Why does it?" demanded Saxham, turning his square face full upon Lady Hannah, and lowering his heavy

brows.

"Mercy upon us, Doctor, do you want me to be definite and literal? Can't you do as I do, and use your eyes?" Her own round, sparkling black ones were full of provocation. "They look as if they could see rather farther into a mud wall than most people's. Please get me one of those peaches. No, I won't have a plate. I am beginning to find out that most of the things Society regards as indispensable can be done without. I'm beginning to revert to Primitive Simplicity. Isn't there a prehistoric *flair* about most of us? If there isn't, there ought to be. For what are we from week-end to week-end but grimy male and female Troglodytes, eating minced horse and fried locusts in underground burrows by the light of paraffin lamps! Another peach.... Thanks. Can't you see those dear things, the Sisters, gathering them by lantern-light, and being shelled by Brounckers' German gunners. Wretches! Beasts! Horrors!"

"I hope," said Saxham, with rather heavy irony, "that you acquainted them with your opinion of them while you had the opportunity?"

She gaily flipped him with the loose tan gloves she had drawn off. Her bangles clashed, and her eyes snapped sparks under the brim of her hat, whose feathers nodded and swished, and her jangling laugh brought more echoes from the high banks.

"Ha, ha, ha! Do you know, Doctor, I call that thoroughly nasty—to remind me, on such a fine day too, of the Frightful Fiasco. When my own husband hasn't ventured to breathe a hint even.... Do you know, when he rode out to meet me with the Escort, all he said was, 'Hullo, old lady; is that you? The Chief wants to know if you'll peck with us at six, and

I told him I thought you'd be agreeable.' And when we met, *he*—— Why do handkerchiefs invariably hide when people want to sneeze behind them?" She found the ridiculous little square of filmy embroidered cambric, and blew her thin little nose, and furtively whisked away a tear-drop. "He never moved a muscle; Just shook hands in his kind, hearty way, and began to tell the news of the town.... Never, by look or word or sign, helped to rub in what a beetle-headed idiot I'd been." She gulped. "I could have put my head down on the tablecloth and cried gallons"—she blew her nose again—"knowing 'd lost him a rook at least. For, of course, that flabby Slabberts creature counted for something in the game, or Brounckers wouldn't have wanted him. And Captain—my Captain!..." She threw a sparkling eye-dart tipped with remorseful brine at the spare, soldierly figure and the lean, purposeful face. "If you were to say to me this minute, 'Hannah Wrynche, jump off the end of that high rock-bluff there, down on those uncommonly nasty-looking stones below,' I vow I'd do it!"

Saxham's blue eyes were kind. Here was a fellow hero-worshipper.

"I believe you would do it, and—that he believes it too."

She tapped him on the sleeve with the long cherry-wood stick of her white green-lined umbrella.

"Thank you. But don't get to making a habit of saying charming things, because the rôle of Bruin suits you. Your Society women-patients used to enjoy being bullied, tremendously, I remember. We're made like that." Her shrill laugh came again. "To *sauter à pieds joints* on people who are used to being deferred to, or

made much of, is the best way to command their cordial gratitude and sincere esteem, isn't it? Don't all you successful professional men know that?"

"The days of my professional successes are past and gone," said Saxham, "and my very name must be strange in the ears of the men and women who were my patients. It is natural and reasonable that when a man falls out of the race, he should be forgotten—at least, I hold it so."

"You have a patient not very far away who lauds you to the skies." Lady Hannah indicated the slender pepper-and-salt clad figure of Julius Fraithorn with the cherry-wood umbrella-stick. "You know his father, the Bishop of H——? Such a dear little trotty old man, with the kind of rosy, withered-apple face that suggests a dear little trotty old woman, disguised in an episcopal apron and gaiters, and with funny little bits of white fur glued on here and there for whiskers and eyebrows. We met him with Mrs. Fraithorn at the Hôtel Schwert at Appenbad one June. Do you know Appenbad? Views divine: such miles of eye-flight over the Lake of Constance and the Rhine Valley. To quote Bingo, who suffered hideously from the whey-cure, every prospect pleases, and only man is bile—and woman, too, if seeing black spots in showers like smuts in a London fog, only sailing up instead of coming down, means a disturbed gastric system. I'm not sure now that the Bishop did not mention your name. Can he have done so, or am I hashing things? Do set my mind at rest?"

Saxham said with stiffness:

"It would be possible that the Bishop would remember me. I operated on him for the removal of

the appendix in 18—"

"If you had taken away his Ritualistic prejudices at the same time, you would have made his wife a happy woman. Her soul yearns for incense and vestments, candles, and acolytes, and most of all for her boy. Well, she will thank you herself for him one day, Doctor." The little dry hand, glittering with magnificent rings, touched Saxham's gently. "In the meantime let a woman who hasn't got a son shake hands with you for her."

"You make too much of that affair." Saxham took the offered hand. It pressed his kindly, and the little lady went on:

"You're still a prophet in your own country, you know, though it pleases you to make yourself out a—a kind of medical Rip Van Winkle. In June last year—when I did not guess that I should ever know you—I heard a woman say: 'If Owen had been here, the child wouldn't have died.' And the woman was your sister-in-law, Mrs. David Saxham."

Saxham's blue eyes shot her a steely look. The wings of his mobile nostrils quivered as he drew quickened breath. He waited, with his obstinate under-lip thrust out, for the rest. If he did not fully grasp the real and genuine kindliness that prompted the little woman, at least he did her the justice of not shutting her up as an impudent chatterbox. She went on, a little nervously:

"I don't think I ever mentioned to you before that I had met your brother and his wife? She is still a very attractive person, but—it is not the type to wear well, and the boy's death cut them both up terribly."

"There was a boy—who died?"

"In the spring of last year. Of—meningitis, I think his mother said, and she declared over and over that if you had been there, you would have saved him."

"At least, I should have done my best."

She had turned her eyes away in telling him, or she would have seen the relief in his face. He understood now why his mother's trustees had prompted the solicitors' advertisement. He was his nephew's heir, under the late Mrs. Saxham's will. Seven thousand in Consols and Home Rails, and the little freehold property in North Wales, that brought in, when the house was let, about one hundred and fifty pounds a year, counted as wealth to a man who had possessed nothing. He lifted his square head and threw back his heavy shoulders with the air of one from whom a heavy burden has been taken. His vivid eyes lightened, his heavy brows smoothed out their puckers, and the tense lines about his lips relaxed. His own words came back to him:

"The Past is done with. Why should not the Future be fair?"

He knew, as he looked towards Lynette Mildare, who personified the Future for him, and his mood changed. He had loved her without hope. Now a faint grey began to show in the blackness of his mental horizon. It might be a false dawn, but what a lightening of the heavy heart—what a leap of the stagnant blood—answered to it! He was no longer penniless. He had never loved money or thirsted for estate, but the thought of that sum of seven thousand pounds solidly invested, and the house that stood in its walled garden on the cliffs at Herion, looking out

on the wild, tumbling grey-white waters of Nantavon Bay, was dear to him.

Plas Bendigaid had been a Convent once. Its grey, stone-tiled, steep-pitched roof and solid walls of massive stone had sheltered his mother's infancy and girlhood. Perhaps they might cover a lovelier head, and echo to the voices of his wife and his children. He gave sweet fancies the rein, as Lady Hannah chattered beside him. He dreamed of that Future that might be fair, even as he filled up the little lady's pauses with "Yes's" and "No's."

Love at first sight. He had laughed the possibility to scorn, in other days, holding the passion to be the sober child of propinquity, sympathy, consonance of ideas, similar tastes, and pursuits, and fanned into flame, after due time to kindle, by the appearance of a rival.

A rival! He laughed silently, grimly, remembering the resentful, jealous impulse that had prompted his interruption when the boyish, handsome face of Beauvayse had leaned so near to hers, and the blush that dyed her white-rose cheeks had answered, no doubt, to some hackneyed, stereotyped, garrison compliment.

He had seen them together since then: once crossing the veld from the Women's Laager on foot, in the company of the Mother-Superior; once here beside the river, under the chaperonage of all the Sisters; once in the Market Square, and always the sight had roused in him the same intolerable resentment and gnawing pain that rankled in him now as he watched

them.

What was Beauvayse whispering, so close to the delicate little ear that nestled under the red-brown hair-waves? Something that set his grey-green eyes gleaming dangerously, and lifted the wings of the fine nostrils, and opened the boldly-curved mouth in audacious laughter, under the short golden hairs of the clipped moustache. Somehow that laughter stung Saxham. His muscular hand gripped the old hunting-crop that he carried by habit even when he did not ride, and his black brows were thunderous as he vainly tried to listen to the little woman who chattered beside him.

"Look about you," she bade him, putting up her tortoiseshell-rimmed eyeglasses as though she were in a picture-gallery or at a theatre. "Wouldn't the ordinary unimaginative person suppose that Love would be the last flower to blossom in the soil of this battered little bit of debatable ground? But we know better. So does Miss Wiercke, the German oculist's daughter, and so does that tallow-candle-locked young man who plays the harmonium at the Catholic Church. And that other pretty girl—I don't know her name—who used to keep the book-registers at the Public Library. She is going to marry that young mining-engineer—a Cornishman, judging by his blue eyes and black hair—do you happen to be Cornish, too?—next Sunday. And the uncertainty about living till then or any time after Monday morning will make quite a commonplace wedding into something tremendously romantic. But you don't even pretend to look when you're told. Aha!" she cried; "I've caught you. You were watching another pair of lovers—the couple I kept for the last."

"Not at all," said Saxham, inexpressibly wearied by the voluble little woman's discourse. Ignoring the conventional disclaimer, Lady Hannah went on:

"They're in the early stage—the First Act of the dear old play. Pretty to watch, isn't it? Though it makes one feel chilly and grown old, as Browning or somebody says. Only the other day one was tipping that boy at Eton, and he looking such a Fourth of June darling as you never saw, got up in duck trousers and a braided blue jacket, and a straw hat with a wreath of white and crimson Banksia roses round it for the Procession of Boats. And now"—she sighed drolly—"he's a long-legged Lieutenant of Hussars, with a lady-killing reputation. Though, in the present instance, I'm ready to back my opinion that the biter is fairly bit. What regiments of women will tear their hair—real or the other thing—when Beau becomes a Benedick."

Saxham saw red, but he gave no sign. She turned down her little thumb with a twinkle of triumph.

"*Habet!* And I'm not sorry he has got it badly. His *leitmotif* in the music-play has been 'See the Conquering Hero' up to now; one isn't sorry to see one's sex avenged. But one *is* sorry for Mary Fraithorn's boy." She indicated the Chaplain with a twirl of her eyeglasses. "She used to visit him with the Sisters when he was ill, and, of course, he has been bowled over. But *il n'a pas un radis*, unless the Bishop comes round, and don't you think that little Greek head of hers is aware that a great deal of money goes with the Foltlebarre title, and that the family diamonds would suit it to a marvel?"

Saxham said gratingly, and with a hostile look:

"Do you infer that Miss Mildare is vain and mercenary?"

"Good mercy, my dear man!" she screamed; "don't pounce. I infer nothing, except that Miss Mildare happens to be a live girl, with eyes and the gift of charm, and that the young men are attracted to her as naturally as drones to a honey-pot. Also, that, if she's wise, she will dispose of her honey to the best advantage." Her beady bright eyes snapped suddenly at Saxham, and her small face broke up into laughter. "Ha, ha, ha! Why, I do believe ..." She screamed at him triumphantly. "You, too! You've succumbed. She carries your scalp at her pretty waist with the rest of 'em. How perfectly delightful!"

Possibly Saxham had always been a bear, as her little ladyship had stated, but the last five years had certainly scraped off whatever social veneer had adhered to his manners. The power of facial self-control, the common tact that would have carried things off with a laugh and a jest, were his no longer, if he had ever possessed them. He got upon his feet and stood before the woman whose six ounces less of brain-matter had been counterbalanced by so large an allowance of intuition, dumbly furious with her, and so unspeakably savage with himself for not being able to hide his anger and annoyance that, as he stood before her with his hulking shoulders hunched and his square, black head sullenly lowered, and his eyes blazing under their heavy brows, he suggested to Lady Hannah's nimble wit and travelled experience the undeniable analogy between a chaffed and irate Doctor and a baited Spanish bull, goaded by the stab of the gaudy paper-flagged dart in his thick neck, and bewildered by the subsequent explosion of the cracker. He only wanted a tail to

lash, she mentally said, and had pigeon-holed the joke for Bingo when it became none.

"Do, please, forgive me!... What you must think of me!..." she began contritely.

Repentance gave place to resentment. Saxham, without even an abrupt inclination of the head, had swung about and left her. She saw the heavily-shouldered, muscularly-built figure crossing the drift a little way down, stepping from boulder to boulder with those curiously small, neat feet, twirling his old horn-handled hunting-crop as he went, with a decidedly vicious swish of the doubled thong. Now he was knee-deep in the reeds of the north shore; now he was climbing the bank. A black-and-white crow flew up heavily, and was lost among the intertwining branches of the oaks and the blue-gums, and a cloud of finches and linnets rose as the covert of tree-fern and cactus and tall grass, knitted with thorny-stemmed creeper, received him and swallowed him. She saw by the shaking of the foliage that he turned up the stream, and then no more of him. Feather-headed idiot that she had been! Inconsiderate wretch! How, in Heaven's name, after reminding the man of the perfidy of that underbred *passée* little person with the passion for French novels and sulphonal tabloids, who had thrown the Doctor over, years before, in favour of his brother the Dragoon—how could she have charged him with being a victim to the charms of another young woman? If Mrs. David's desertion rankled still, as no doubt it did, there being no accounting for masculine taste, he would, of course, resent the accusation almost as an insult. Men were such Conservatives in love. And, besides, she had just been telling him about the child. She loathed herself for having

perpetrated such a blunder. Saxham had murdered politeness by quitting her abruptly; but hadn't she deserved the snub? She deserved snubbing. She would go, for the health of her soul, and talk to dearest Biddy, who always made you feel even smaller than you had thought yourself before.

She stood up, shaking the sand-grams and grass-burrs from her dress and the folds of the white umbrella. It was nearing six o'clock. The heat was lessening, and the pale turquoise sky overhead was flecked and dappled with little puffs of rosy cloud, bulking in size and deepening in colour to the westward, where their upper edges were pure gold. And the river looked like a stream of liquid honey, upon which giant rose-leaves had been scattered, and a breeze was stirring in the grasses and among the leaves. The Sisters were busily repacking their baskets. Little Miss Wiercke, and her lank-haired young organist, sat under a bush, gazing in each other's eyes with the happy fatuity of lovers in the second stage, while the young lady who had kept the registers at the Public Library was teaching her Cornish mining-engineer to wash up cups and saucers in a tin basin—a process which resulted in the entanglement of fingers of different sexes, and made Sister Tobias pause over her task of wiping crockery to shake her head and laugh.

Little Miss Wiercke was to lose her lank-haired organist a few days later, the prevalent complaint of shrapnelitis carrying him off. And the girl who screamed coquettishly as the mining-engineer amorously squeezed her wet fingers under the soapsuds was shortly to be represented in the Cornishman's memory by another white cross in the Cemetery, a trunk full of pathetic feminine fripperies,

and a wedding-ring that had been worn barely two months. But they did not know this, and they were happy. We should never love or laugh if we knew.

Two other people had passed along the path that ran by the margin of the sand and reed-patches, and were lost to sight. Lady Hannah glanced towards the Mother-Superior, who was being gracious to Captain Bingo and the Chaplain, and hoped Biddy would not miss the owner of the little Greek head and the enchanting willowy figure quite yet.

Nuns were frightfully scrupulous and gimlet-eyed where their charges were concerned. And certainly, if young people never got away together without *qu'il ne vous en déplaise!* there would be fewer engagements. And Biddy must know that it was a Heaven-sent chance for the girl.

The Foltlebarres had sat too long on thorns to grumble at Beau's marrying a girl without a *dot*, who was not only lovely enough to set Society screaming over her, but modest and a lady. Up to the present his tendency had been to exalt Beauty above Breed, and personal attractiveness above moral immaculateness.

As in the most recent case of that taking but extremely terrible little person with the toothy, photographic smile, Miss Lessie Lavigne of the Jollity Theatre, the affair with whom might be counted, it was to be hoped, as the last furrow of a heavy sowing of wild oats. As this would be a match *d'égal à égal*—in point of blood and education, at any rate —certainly the Foltlebarres would have reason to bless their stars.

Somebody came over to her just then, saying:

"Bingo seems in excellent spirits."

She looked, a little apprehensively, across to where the Mother Superior and the wistful-eyed, pepper-and-salt-clad Chaplain were patiently listening to the recital of one of Bingo's stock anecdotes.

"What is he telling the Reverend Mother?" Her tone was anxious. "I do hope not that story about the unwashed Boer and the cake of soap!"

"Don't be alarmed. It's a recent and completely harmless anecdote about the despatch-runner from Diamond Town who got in this morning."

Her eyes sparkled.

"Really ...? And with news worth having?"

"Mr. Casey might be disposed to think so."

"Who is Mr. Casey?"

"That's a question nobody can answer satisfactorily."

"But is the intelligence absolutely useless to anybody who doesn't happen to be Mr. Casey?" she insisted.

"Not unless they happened to be deeply interested in Mrs. Casey."

"There is a Mrs. Casey, then?"

"So says the man who travelled two hundred miles to bring her letters and the message that she is, as Mr. Micawber would put it, *in statu quo*."

"I understand." The bright black eyes were compassionate. "She has written to her husband—she doesn't know that he has been killed——"

"Nor do we. As far as we can ascertain, the garrison has never included a Casey."

"Then you think——"

"I think"—he glanced aside as a stentorian bellow of laughter reached them—"that, judging by what I hear, Bingo has got to the soapy story."

She frowned anxiously.

"Bingo ought to remember that nuns aren't ordinary women. I shall have to go and gag him." She took a dubious step.

"Why? The Reverend Mother does not seem at all shocked, and Fraithorn is evidently amused." He added, as Bingo's rapturous enjoyment of his own anecdote reached the stamping and eye-mopping stage: "And undoubtedly Bingo is happy."

"He has got out of hand lately. One can't keep a husband in a proper state of subjection who may be brought home to one a corpse at any hour of the day." Her laugh jangled harshly, and broke in the middle. "The soil of Gueldersdorp being so uncommonly favourable just now to the production of weeds of the widow's description."

"It grows other things." His eyes were very kind. "Brave, helpful, unselfish women, for instance."

"There is one!"

She indicated the tall, black-robed figure of the Mother with a quick gesture of her little jewelled hand.

"And here is another." He touched her sleeve lightly with a finger-tip.

"Brave.... Helpful." Her voice was choky. "Do you think I shall ever forget the hindrance I have been to you? Didn't I lose you your Boer spy?"

"Granted you did." His moustache curved cheerfully at the corners. "But that's Ancient History, and look what you brought back!"

"A unit of the despised majority who is thoroughly convinced of her own superfluousness. Hannah Wrynche, with the conceit so completely taken out of her that she feels, say, like a deflated balloon; Hannah Wrynche, who believed herself born to be a War Correspondent, and has come down to scribbling gossipy paragraphs for a little siege newspaper printed in a damp cellar."

He laughed.

"Collectors will pay fancy prices for copies of that same little siege newspaper, at auctions yet to be."

"I've thought of that," she confessed. "But, oh! I could make it so much more spicy if you'd only give me a freer hand."

His hazel eyes had a smile in them. "I know you

think me an editorial martinet."

"You blue-pencil out of my poor paragraphs everything that's interesting."

"No personalities shall be published in a paper I control."

"The Reading Public adore personalities and puerilities."

"They can go to the *Daily Whale* for them, then."

"Isn't that rather a personal remark?"

"Let me say that if you are occasionally personal, you are never, under any circumstances, anything but clever."

"Thank you. But, oh! the difference between what I am and what I aspired to be!"

"And, ah! the difference between what I have done and what I meant to do!" he said.

Her black eyes flashed. "You have never really felt it. Achievement with you has never hit below the mark. You, of all men living, are least fitted to enter into the rueful regrets and dismal disillusions of a Hannah Wrynche."

"Hannah Wrynche, who is content to do a woman's work and fill a woman's place; Hannah Wrynche, who has atoned for a moment of ambitious—shall I say imprudence?—splendidly and nobly, has no reason to be rueful or regretful. Don't shake your head. Do you think I don't know what you are doing, day after day, to help and cheer those poor fellows at the Convalescent Hospital?"

Her eyes were full of tears. "You make too much of my poor efforts. You underestimate the effect of praise from you."

"I said very little in the last cipher despatch that got through to Colonel Rickson at Malamye, but what I did say was very much to the purpose, believe me."

She gasped, staring at him with circular eyes of incredulity. "You've mentioned—me—in your despatches. ME?"

"Just so!" he said, and left her groping for the ridiculous little gossamer handkerchief to dry the tears of pride and gratitude that were tumbling down her cheeks.

XLI

"Clang—clang—clang!"

A man and a girl came back out of Paradise when the Catholic church-bell rang the Angelus. The girl's sweet flushed face had paled at the first three strokes. When the second triple clanged out, her colour came back. She rose from her seat upon a lichened slab of granite in the cool shadow of the great boulder, and bent her lovely head, Beauvayse watching her lips as they moved, soundlessly repeating the Angelic Salutation:

"*Ave María, grátia plena; Dóminus tecum! Benedícta tu in muliéribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus.*"

The wonderful simplicity of the Chosen One's reply followed, and the announcement of the Unspeakable Mystery. The little prayer followed, and the rapid signing with the Cross, and she dropped her slight hand from her bosom, and turned her eyes back upon his.

"You remind me of my mother," he told her. "She is Catholic, you know."

"And not you?"

"We fellows, my brothers Levestre and Daltham and myself, were brought up as pillars of the Established Church." His sleepy, grey-green eyes twinkled, his white teeth showed in the laugh. "The girls are of my mother's faith. It was a family agreement. Are you quite sure you have come down to earth again? Because there's such an awful lot I want to say to you that I don't know where to begin."

Though his mouth laughed, his eyes had wistful shadows under them. He had tossed aside his Service felt when she had taken off her hat, and the sunshine, piercing the thick foliage overhead, dappled the scaly trunks of the blue-gum trees, and dripped gold upon the red-brown head and the crisp-waved golden one.

"I am here. I am listening."

She stood before him with meekly drooping eyelids, feeling his ardent gaze like a palpable weight, under which her knees trembled and her whole body swayed. The great boulder rose upon her left hand like a beneficent presence. Delicate ferns and ice-plants sprang from its chinks and crannies. The long fronds of the sparaxis bowed at her small, brown-

shod feet, some bearing seed-pods, others rows of pink bells, or yellow—a fairy chime. In the damper hollows iris bloomed, and the gold and scarlet sword-flowers stood in martial ranks, and gaily-plumaged finches were sidling on overhanging boughs, or dipping and drinking in the shallows. The wattled starlings whistled to each other, or fought as starlings will. A grey partridge was bathing in the hot dry sand between the reed-beds and the bank, and in the deeper pools the barbel were rising at the flies. There was no sound but the running water. The spicy smell of aromatic leaves and the honeyed perfume of a great climbing trumpet-flower made the air languorous with sweetness.

He answered her now.

"You are here, and I am here. And for me that means everything. And I feel that I want nothing more, and, still, such a tremendous lot besides."

He breathed as though he had been running, and his sharply-cut nostrils quivered. His white teeth gleamed under the clipped golden moustache.

Perhaps it made his charm the more definite and irresistible that in these days of storm, and stress, and hardship and peril, his handsome face was never without its gay, confident smile. His tall, athletic figure, in the neat workmanlike Service dress that suited him so well, leaned towards her eagerly. He kept his clear eyes on her face, with the direct simplicity of a child's gaze, but the look bred in her a delicious terror. The perfume of youth and health, of vigour and virility, that exhaled from him, came to her mingled with the scent of the crushed spice-leaves and the perfume of the waxen-belled heaths and the breath of the giant trumpet-flower. She was

turning dizzy. She could scarcely stand.

"I—I will sit down," she murmured, and he beat the grasses at the foot of the great granite slab and prodded in chinks and crannies for snakes and tarantulas; and when she sank down with a faint sigh of relief, threw himself at her feet with a careless, powerful grace, and lay there looking up at her, worshipping the golden lights that gleamed through the thick dark eyelashes, and the sweet shadows under them, and her little pointed chin.

The lace-trimmed frills of a white cambric petticoat peeped under the hem of her green cloth skirt; below there was a glimpse of slender, crossed ankles in brown silk hose, and the little brown shoes laced with wide silk ties. She drew off one of her thin, loose tan gloves, and smoothed back a straying lock above her ear, and flushed, hearing him murmur in his caressing voice:

"Take off the other glove, too."

She was well aware how beautiful her hands were—small, and slender, and ivory-white, and exquisitely modelled, with little babyish nicks at the wrists, and at the inner edges of the rosy palms, and gleaming pink nails, of the true almond shape. She thought little of her face, though she knew it to be charming; but she ingenuously admired her slender feet, that were quite as pretty without the silk stockings and little brown shoes, and the delicate hands she bared for him now. He looked at them with ardent longing, and said:

"How dear of you to do that, because I asked you! And do you realise that we're here together alone, you and me, for the first time? Nobody saw us steal

away but Sister Cleophée, and I've a notion she wouldn't tell, blessed old soul!"

Her eyes smiled.

"You would not call the Mother that?"

"No more than I would Queen Victoria or the Princess of Wales. And a snubbing from the Religious would be rather worse, on the whole, than a snubbing from the Royalty."

"The Princess never snubbed you?"

"Didn't she? Tremendously, once. Do you want to hear about it? She had sent away her brougham while the giddy old Dean and Chapter were showing her round St. Paul's. And—acting as Extra Equerry—I'd got instructions to call her a hack conveyance, and—being young and downy, I'd picked H.R.H. the glossiest growler on the rank. But you've been bred and born here. You don't even know what a growler is. And in five years' time there won't be one left in London."

"Perhaps I shall see London before the five years are over. And a growler is a four-wheeled cab. You see, I'm not so ignorant...."

"You sweetest!" he burst out passionately. "I wish I knew all that you could teach me!"

He might have frightened her if he had stretched out his arms to clasp her then. But he mastered himself so far. Lying at full length in the grass, leaning upon his elbow, he rested his head upon his hand, and drank her in with thirsty eyes. And that something emanating from him enveloped her, delicately and yet forcefully, constraining and urging and

compelling her to meet his gaze. And the perfume of the great honeyed flower came to her in waves of sweetness, growing in strength, and the monotonous buzzing of the black honey-bees mingled with the drumming of the crickets, and the flowing of the river, and the beating of her heart, and the rushing of her blood. She leaned her fair head back against the great boulder, and said in a voice that shook a little:

"Tell me about the snubbing."

"It was High Art. Three words—and I knew I'd behaved like a bounder of the worst—I had to go back and get the other cab, with a broken front window and a cabby...." He chuckled. "I've met red noses enough but you could have seen that chap's glowing through the thickest fog that ever blanketed Ludgate Hill and wrapped the Strand in greasy mystery. Don't move, please!... There's a ray of sunshine touching your head that makes your hair look the colour of a chestnut when the prickly green hull first cracks to let it out. Or ... there's a rose grows on the pergola at home at Foltlebarre Royal, with a coppery sheen on the young leaves.... I wondered why I kept thinking of it as I looked at you. But I know now. And your skin is creamy white like the flower. Oh, if I could only gather the girl-rose and carry it home to the others!"

She was pink as the loveliest La France now.

"You ought not to talk to me in that way."

"Don't I know it?" Beauvayse groaned out. He turned over upon his face in the grass, and lay quite still. A shuddering sigh heaved the strong young shoulders from time to time, and his hands clenched and tore

at the grasses, "Don't I know it? Lynette, Lynette!"

She longed to touch the close-cropped golden head. Unseen by him, she stretched out a hand timidly and drew it back again, unsatisfied.

"Lynette, Lynette! I'm paying at this moment for every rotten act of headlong folly I've ever committed in my life, and you're making me!" He caught at a fold of her skirt and drew it to him and hid his face in it, kissing it again and again. It was one of the caresses she had been used herself to offer where she most loved. To find yourself being worshipped instead of worshipping is an experience. She touched the golden head now, as the Mother had often touched her own. He caught the hand.

"No, no!" She grew deadly pale, and shivered. "Please let me go. I—I did not——"

She tried to release the hand. He raised himself, and she started at the warm, quivering pressure of his beautiful mouth, scarcely shaded by the young, wheat-golden moustache, upon her cool, sweet flesh. She snatched her hand away with a faint cry, and sprang to her feet, and her cheeks blazed anew as she turned to go.

"You want to leave me? You would punish me like that—just for a kissed hand?"

He barred her way, taller than herself, though he stood upon the sloping lower level. She had learned always to be true in thought and speech.

"I—don't—like to be touched." She said it without looking at him.

"You put your hand upon my head. Why did you do

it if you hate me so?"

"I—don't hate you!"

"I love you! My rose, my dove, my star, my joy! Queen of all the girls that ever I saw or dreamed of, say that you could love me back again!"

"I—must not."

Her bosom heaved. He could see the delicate white throat vibrating with the tumultuous beating of her heart.

"Why not? Nobody has told you anything against me? Nobody has said to you that I have no right to love you?" he demanded.

"No."

"Look at me."

The golden hazel, dark-lashed eyes she shyly turned to his were full of exquisite, melting tenderness. Her lips parted to speak, and closed again. He leaned towards her—hung over her, his own lips irresistibly attracted to those sweetest ones....

"Lord Beauvayse——" she began, and stopped.

He begged:

"Please, not the duffing title, but 'Beauvayse' only. Tell me you love me. Tell me that you'll wait until I'm able to come to you and say: 'My beloved, the way's clear. Be my wife to-morrow!'"

His tone was masterful. His ardent eyes thrilled her. She murmured:

"Beauvayse ...!"

She swayed to him, as a young palm sways before a breeze, and he caught her in his strenuous, young embrace, and held her firmly against him. Her old terrors wakened, and dreadful, unforgettable things stirred in the darkness, where they had lain hidden, and lifted hydra-heads. She cried out wildly, and strove to thrust him from her, but he held her close. There was a shaking among the tangled growths of bush and cactus high up on the opposite bank, and Lynette realised that Beauvayse's arms no longer held her. She leaned back against the boulder, panting and trembling, and saw Beauvayse's revolver glitter in his steady hand, as something came crashing down through the tangled jungle upon the edge of the farther shore, and a heavily-built man in khâki pushed through the shoulder-high growth of reeds, and leaped upon a rock that had a swirl of water round it. It was Saxham.

"Miss Mildare!" called the strong, vibrating voice.

She faltered:

"It—it is Dr. Saxham."

"And what the devil does Dr. Saxham want?" was written in Beauvayse's angry face. But he called out as he lowered his revolver-hand:

"You've had rather an escape of getting shot, Saxham, do you know? You might have been a Boer or a buffalo. Better be more careful next time, if you're anxious to avert accidents."

Saxham was a little like the buffalo as he lowered his head and surveyed the alert, virile young figure and the insolent, high-bred face from under ominously scowling brows. He made no answer; only laid one

finger upon the butt of his own revolver, and the slight action fanned Beauvayse's annoyance and resentment to a white-heat, as perhaps Saxham had intended. He sprang upon another boulder that was in the mid-swirl of the current, and spoke again.

"Miss Mildare, I was walking on one of the native paths that have been made in the bush there"—he indicated the bank behind him—"when I heard you cry out. I am here, at your service, to offer you any help or protection that is in my power to give."

Lynette looked at him vaguely. Beauvayse, crimson to the crisp waves upon his forehead and the white collar-line above the edge of his jacket, answered for her.

"Miss Mildare does not require any help or protection other than what I am privileged to place at her disposal. You had better go on with your walk, Doctor. You know the old adage about two being company?"

He laughed, but his voice had quivered with fury, and the hand that held the revolver shook too. And his eyes seemed colourless as water against the furious crimson of his face. Still ignoring him, Saxham said, his own square, pale face turned full upon Lynette, and his vivid blue eyes constraining her:

"Miss Mildare, I am at your commands. Tell me to cross the river and take you back to the ladies of the Convent, or order me to continue my walk. In which case I shall understand that the familiarities of Lord Beauvayse are not unwelcome to you."

"By God ...! You——"

Beauvayse choked, then suddenly remembered where and how to strike. But he waited, and Saxham waited, and still she did not speak.

"Am I to go or stay? Kindly answer, Miss Mildare!"

Beauvayse's eyes were on her. He said to her below his breath:

"Tell him to go!"

She stammered:

"Th—thank you. But—I—I—had rather you went on."

Beauvayse saw his opportunity, and added, with an intolerable smile:

"My 'familiarities,' as you are pleased to term them, being more acceptable to a lady than the attentions of the Dop Doctor."

Saxham started as though an adder had flashed its fangs through his boot. A rush of savage blood darkened his face; his hand quivered near the butt of his revolver, and his eyes blazed murder. But with a frightful effort he controlled himself, lifted his hat slightly to Lynette, turned and leaped back to the stone he had quitted, strode through the reed-beds, and plunged back into the tangled boscage. That he did not continue his walk, but turned back towards the town, was plain, for his retreat could be traced by the shaking of the thick bush and the high grasses through which he forced his way. It did him good to battle even with these vegetable forces, and the hooked thorns that tore his clothes and rent his flesh left nothing like the traces that those few words of dismissal, spoken by a girl's voice, and the hateful taunt that had followed, had left upon his heart.

It was over. Over—over, the brief, sweet season of hope. Nothing was left now but his loyalty to the friend who believed in him. If that man had not stood between Saxham and his despair, Gueldersdorp would have got back her Dop Doctor that night. For the Hospital stores included a cherished case or two of Martell and Kinahan, and all these things were under Saxham's hand.

The heavy footsteps crashed out of hearing. The startled finches settled down again, except at that point, higher up on the opposite bank, to which Beauvayse's attention had first been directed. There the little birds yet hovered like a cloud of butterflies, but, practised scout as Beauvayse was, he paid no heed to their distress. She had declared for him. The Doctor's discomfiture enhanced his triumph. Gad! how like an angry buffalo the fellow was! The sort of beast who would put down his head and charge at a stone wall as confidently as at a mud one. It was a confounded nuisance that he had seen what he had seen. But a man who had eventually cut so poor a figure, had been snubbed so thoroughly and completely, might prefer to hold his tongue. And if he did not, here in Gueldersdorp, while no letters got through, while no news filtered in from the big humming world outside, it would be possible to carry things bravely off for a long time. He had told Bingo, to be sure, about—about Lessie. But Bingo, though he might bluster and barge about dishonourable conduct, would never give away a man who had trusted him. To be sure, it was not quite fair, not altogether square; it was not playing the game as it should be played, to gain her promise as a free man. Should he make a clean breast of it, and tell her the whole wretched story now?

Perhaps he might if she had not been standing, a slender green-and-white, nymph-like figure, against the background of sun-hot, shadow-flecked, lichened stone, looking at him. The rosy light bathed her in its radiance. And as she looked, it seemed to him that something was dawning in that face of hers. He watched it, breathless with the realisation of his dreams, his hopes, his desires. The prize was his. Every other baser memory was drowning within him. It seemed to him that her purity, as he bathed in it, washed him clean of stain. He forgot everything but the secret that those sweet eyes told at last.

"My beloved! I'm not good enough to tie your blessed little shoes, and yet no other man shall ever have you, hold you, call you his own.... Lynette, Lynette! Dear one, isn't there a single kiss? And I might get shot to-morrow."

It was characteristic of him that his brave, gay mouth should laugh even in the utterance of the appeal that melted her. She gave a little sob, and raised her sweet face to his, flushing loveliest rosy red. She lifted her slender arms and laid them about his strong young throat, and kissed him very quietly and purely. He had meant to snatch her to his leaping heart and cover her with eager, passionate caresses. But the strong impulse was quelled. He said, almost with a sob:

"Is this your promise? Does this mean that you belong to me?"

Her breath caressed his cheek as she whispered:

"Yes."

He was thrilled and intoxicated and tortured at once

to know himself her chosen. Ah! why was he not free? Why had Chance and Luck and Fate forced him to play a part like this?

"I wish to Heaven we had met a year ago!" he broke out impulsively. "Half-a-dozen years ago—only you'd have been a mere kid—too young to understand what Love means.... Why, Lynette darling! what is the matter? What have I said that hurt?"

Her arms had fallen from about his neck. She shrank away from him. He drew back, shocked into silence by the sudden, dreadful change in her. Her eyes, curiously dulled and faded, looked at Beauvayse as though they saw not him, but another man, through him and behind him. Her face was peaked and pinched; her supple, youthful figure contracted and bent like that of a woman withered by some wasting sickness, her dainty garments seemed to lose their colouring and their freshness, and hang on her, by some strange illusion wrought by the working of her mind upon his, like sordid rags. Against the splendid riot of life and colour over and under and about her, she looked like some slender sapling ringed and blighted, and ruined by the inexorable worm. For she was remembering the tavern on the veld. She was recalling what had been—realising what must henceforth be, in its fullest meaning. She shuddered, and her half-open mouth drew in the air in gasps, and the blankness of her stare appalled him. He called in alarm:

"Lynette dearest! what is the matter? Why do you look at me like that? Lynette!"

She did not answer. She shook like a leaf in the wind, and stared through him and beyond him into the Past. That was all. There was a rustling of leaves

and branches higher on the bank, and the sound of thick woollen draperies trailing through grass. The bush on the edge of the cleared space that was about the great boulder was parted by a white, strong hand and a black-sleeved arm, and the Mother-Superior moved out into the open, and came down with those long, swift steps of hers to where they were. Her eyes, sweeping past Beauvayse, fastened on the drooping, stricken figure of the girl, read the altered face, and then she turned them on the boy, and they were stern as those of some avenging Angel, and her white wimple, laundried to snowy immaculateness by the capable hands of Sister Tobias, framed a face as white.

"What is the reason of—this? What has passed between you to account for it? Has your mother's son no sense of honour, sir?"

The icy tone of contempt stung him to risk the leap. He drew himself to his splendid height, and answered, his brave young eyes boldly meeting the stern eyes that questioned him:

"Ma'am, I am sorry that you should think me capable of dishonourable conduct. The fact is, that I have just asked Miss Mildare to be my wife. And she consents."

A spasm passed over the pale face. So easily they leave us whom we have reared and tended, when the strange hand beckons and the new voice calls. But the Mother-Superior was not a woman to betray emotion. She drew her black nun's robe over the pierced mother-heart, and said calmly, holding out her hand to him:

"You will forgive me if I was unjust, knowing that she is dear to me. And now I shall ask you to leave

us. Please tell the Sisters"—from habit she glanced at her worn gold watch—"we shall join them in ten minutes' time."

He bowed, and lifted his smasher hat from the grass, and took up the Lee-Metford carbine he had been carrying and had laid aside, and went to Lynette and took her passive hand, and bent over it and kissed it. It dropped by her side lifelessly when he released it. Her face was a mask void of life. He looked towards the Mother in distress. Her white hand imperiously motioned him away. He expostulated:

"Is it safe for two ladies, ma'am, so far from the town, without protection? Natives or white loafers may be hanging about."

"If you desire it, you can remain within hearing of a call. But go now."

He went, lightly striding down the sandy path between the reed-beds on the foreshore. She watched the tall, athletic figure until it swung round a bend and was lost to sight.

Then she went to the girl and touched her. And at the touch Lynette dropped as though she had been shot, and lay among the trodden grasses and the flaunting cowslips face downwards. A low, incessant moaning came from the muffled mouth. Her hands were knotted in her hair. She writhed like a crushed snake, and all of her slender neck and face that could be seen and the little ears that her clutching, twining fingers sometimes bared and sometimes covered were one burning, shameful red.

"Lynette! My dear one!" The Mother, wrung and torn with a very agony of tenderness and pity, knelt

beside her, and began with gentle strength to untwine those clutching hands from the girl's hair. She prisoned both in one of hers, and passed the other arm beneath the slender rigid body, and lifted it up and held it in her strong embrace, silently until a moan, more articulate than the rest, voiced:

"Mother!"

"It is Mother. She holds you; she will not let you go."

The head lay helplessly upon her bosom. She felt the rigor lessen. The moaning ceased, and the tortured heart began to leap and strain against her own, as though some invisible hand lashed it with an unseen thong.

There were no tears. Only those moans and the leaping of the heart that shook her whole body. And it seemed to the Mother that her own heart wept tears of blood. The hour had come at last, as always she had known it would. The love of a man had wakened the woman in Lynette. She knew now the full value of the lost heritage, and realised the glory of the jewel that had been snatched by the brutal hand of a thief. Ah, Lord! the pity of it!

The pity of it! She, the stainless one, could have stripped off her own white robe of virgin purity, had it been possible, to clothe the despoiled young shoulders of Richard's daughter, cowering prostrate under her burden of guiltless shame, crushed by the terrible knowledge that ruined innocence must always pay the penalty, whether the destroyer is punished or goes free.

The penalty! Suppose at the price of a lie from lips that had never lied yet it could be evaded? The

Mother's face contracted with a spasm of mental pain. A dull flush mounted to her temples, and died out in olive paleness; her lips folded closely, and her black brows frowned over the sombre grey fires burning in their hollow caves. She rebuked a sinner at that moment, and the culprit was herself.

She, the just mistress and wise ruler of so many Sisters in the religious profession; she, so slow to judge and condemn others, was unsparing in austerity towards herself. She had always recognised her greatest weakness in her love for this adopted daughter that might have been her own if Richard Mildare had not played traitor. She had never once yielded to the clinging of those slight hands about her heart, but she had exacted forfeit from herself, and rigorously. So much for excess of partiality, so much for over-consideration, so much for lack of faith in over-anxiety, so much more of late for the keen mother-jealousy that had quickened in her to anguish at the thought that another would one day usurp her undivided throne, and claim and take the lion's share of the love that had been all hers. Her spiritual director was far too lenient, in her opinion. She was all the more exacting towards herself. What right had a nun to be so bound by an earthly tie? It was defrauding her Saviour and her Spouse to love with such excess of maternal passion the child He had given. Yet she loved on.

She reviewed all her shortcomings, even while the girl's head lay helplessly against her, and the scalding tears that had at last begun to gush from those shut, quivering eyelids wetted her breast. She had esteemed and valued perfect candour above all things. And yet of what concealments had she not been guilty in the shielding of this dearest head?

She had deceived, for Richard's child, Richard's friend, in the deft interweaving of fragmentary truths into a whole plausible fabric. She knew that, if necessary, she would deceive again, trailing her wings, fluttering on before, as the golden plover lures the footsteps of the stranger from her nest.

Perhaps you call her scruples fantastic, her sense of guilt morbid. Even the lay Catholic can with difficulty comprehend and enter fully into the mental constitution of the Religious. This was a nun, to whom a blur upon the crystal of the soul kept pure, like the virginal body, for the daily reception of the Consecrated Host, meant defilement, outrage, insult, to her Master and her Lord.

And she had always known, it seemed to her, that this terrible hour would come. When the two young figures had moved away together into the green gloom of the trees, she had felt a premonitory chill that streamed over her whole body like icy water, paralysing and numbing her strength. She had read their secret in their faces, unconscious of her scrutiny, and watched them out of sight, praying, as only such a mother can, that it might not be as she feared. This was her beloved's great hour; she would not have stretched out a finger to delay its coming,—she who had known Love, and could not forget! It might be that in this splendid boy, who was as beautiful as the Greek Alcibiades, and as brave as the young Bayard, lay the answer to all her prayers for her darling. The bridal white would not be a blasphemy, like the young nun's snowy robe and veil. And yet—and yet, in Lynette's place she knew that she could never have looked into the face of a rosy, smiling, wedded Future without seeing under the myrtle and orange-blossom garland the leering satyr-

face of the Past.

Was it wise that another should be made to share that vision? She put that question to herself, looking with great agonised, unseeing eyes over the head that lay upon her bosom, out across the slowly moving water, stained with amber from ironstone beds through which it had wound its way, tinged with ruddy crimson from the sunset. For the sky, from the western horizon to the zenith, and from thence to the serried peaks and frowning bastions of purple-black cloud that lowered in the north, was all orange-crimson now, and the moon, then at the ending of her second quarter, swung like a pale lamp of electrum at the eastward corner of the flaming tent.

"Was it wise?" She seemed to hear her own voice echoing back out of the past. And it said:

"The only just claim to your entire confidence in all that concerns your past life will rest in the hands of the man who may one day be your husband."

The perfume of the great white trumpet-flower came to her in gusts of intensified, sickening, loathsome sweetness. She glanced round and saw it on her right, clasping in its luxuriant embrace a slender young bush that it was killing. The thick, juicy green stems and succulent green leaves, the greedily embracing tendrils and great fleshy-white, hanging flowers revolted her. The creeper seemed the symbolisation of Lust battening upon Innocence.

Other like images crowded thick and fast upon her. From a mossy cranny in a stone a hairy tarantula leaped upon a little lizard that sunned itself, not thinking Death so near. A lightning-quick pounce of

the bloated thing with the fierce, bright eyes and the relentless, greedy claws, and the little reptile vanished. She shuddered, thinking of its fate.

The blue gums and oaks that fringed the river gorge and the bushes that grew about were ragged and torn with shell and shrapnel-ball. Chips and flinders had been knocked by the same forces from the boulders and the rocks. Amongst the flowers near her shone something bright. It was an unexploded Maxim-shell, a pretty little messenger of Death, girt with bright copper bands and gaily painted. And a ninety-four-pound projectile, exploded, had scattered the shore with its fragments, and doubtless the river-bed was strewn thick with others. You had only to look to see them. Once Lynette's lover knew everything there was to know, the trees and rocks and flowers of the Eden in which every daughter of Eve owns the right to walk, if only once in a whole lifetime, would be marred and broken, scorched and spoiled, like these.

Purblind that she had been. What claim had any man, seeing what the lives of men are, to this pitiful sacrifice of reticence, this rending of the veil of merciful, wise secrecy from an innocent young head? None. Not the shadow of a claim. She tossed away her former scruples. They sailed from her on the faint hot breeze lightly as thistledown. And now the tear-blurred face was lifted from her bosom, and the voice, hoarse and weak and trembling, appealed:

"Mother, you are not angry? I never meant to be underhand, or to hide—anything from you."

"No," she said, hiding the pang it gave her to realise how much had been concealed between the lines that she had read so often. "You did not mean to." The trembling voice went on:

"He never spoke to me as though we were strangers. Never, from the first. And to-day, he——" Her heart's throbbing shook her. The Mother said:

"He has told me what has passed. He said that he had asked you to marry him, and you had—agreed." The bitterness of her wounded love was in her tone.

"I—had forgotten," she panted, "*that*—until one little careless thing he said brought it all back to me in such a flood. It was like drowning. Then you came, and—and——" The quavering, pitiful voice rose to a cry: "Mother, must I tell him everything?" She cowered down in the enfolding arms. "Mother, Mother, must I tell him?"

A great wave of pity surged out from the deep mother-heart that throbbed against her own. The deep, melodious voice answered with one word:

"No."

Amazement sat on the uplifted, woebegone face of the girl. The sorrowful eyes questioned the Mother's incredulously.

"You mean that you——"

She folded the slight figure to her. Her sorrowful eyes, under their great jetty arches, looked out like stars through a night of storm. Her greyish pallor seemed a thin veil of ashes covering incandescent furnace-fires. She rose up, lifting the slender figure. She said, looking calmly in the face:

"I mean that you are not to tell him. Upon your obedience to me I charge you not to tell him. Upon your love for me I command you—never to tell him! Kiss me, and dry these dear eyes. Put up your hair; a

coil is loosened. He is waiting for us! Come!"

XLII

The tall, soldierly young figure was standing motionless and stiff, as though on guard, on the river-shore beyond the bend. Whatever apprehensions, whatever regrets, whatever fears may have warred within Beauvayse, whatever consciousness may have been his of having taken an irrevocable step, bound to bring disgrace and reproach, sorrow, and repentance upon the innocent as upon the guilty, he showed no sign as he came to meet them, and lifted the Service felt from his golden head, and held out an eager hand for Lynette's. She gave it shyly, and with the thrill of contact Beauvayse's last scruple fled. He turned his beautiful, flushed face and shining eyes upon the Mother, and asked with grave simplicity:

"Ma'am, is not this mine?"

"First tell me, do you know that there is nothing in it?"

Her stern eyes searched his. He laughed and said, as he kissed the slender hand:

"It holds everything for me!"

"Another question. Are you aware that my ward is a Catholic?"

"My wife will be of my mother's faith. I would not

have her of any other."

The Mother gave Beauvayse her own hand then, that was marred by many deeds of charity, but still beautiful.

Those two, linked together for a moment in their mutual love of her, made for Lynette a picture never to be forgotten. Then Beauvayse said, in the boyish tone that made the man irresistible:

"You have made me awfully happy!"

"Make her happy," the Mother answered him, with a tremble in her rich, melancholy tones, "and I ask no more."

Her own heart was bleeding, but she drew her black draperies over the wound with a resolute hand. Was not here a Heaven-sent answer to all her prayers for her beloved? she asked herself, as she looked at the girl. Eyes that beamed so, cheeks that burned with as divine a rose, had looked back at Lady Biddy Bawne out of her toilet-glass, upon the night of that Ascot Cup-Day, when Richard had asked her to be his wife. But Richard's eyes had never worn the look of Beauvayse's. Richard's hand had never so trembled, Richard's face had never glowed like this. Surely here was Love, she told herself, as they went back to the place of trodden grass where the tea-making had been.

The Sisters, basket and trestle-laden, were already in the act of departure. The black circle of the dead fire marked where the giant kettle had sung its hospitable song. Little Miss Wiercke and her long-locked organist, the young lady from the Free Library and her mining-engineer, had strolled away

townwards, whispering, and arm-in-arm; the Mayor's wife was laying the dust with tears of joy as she trudged back to the Women's Laager beside a husband who pushed a perambulator containing a small boy, who had waked up hungry and wanted supper; the Colonel and Captain Bingo Wrynche had been summoned back to Staff Headquarters, and a pensive little black-eyed lady in tailor-made alpaca and a big grey hat, who was sitting on a tree-stump knocking red ants out of her white umbrella, as those three figures moved out of the shadows of the trees, jumped up and hurried to meet them, prattling:

"I couldn't go without saying a word.... You have been so beset with people all the afternoon that I never got a chance to put my oar in. Dear Reverend Mother, everything has gone off so well. No clergyman will ever preach again about Providence spreading a table in the wilderness without my coming back in memory to to-day. May we walk back together? I am a mass of ants, and mosquito-bitten to a degree, but I don't think I ever enjoyed myself so much. No, Lord Beauvayse, the path is narrow, and I have a perfect dread of puff-adders. Please go on before us with Miss Mildare. No!... Oh, what ...? You haven't ...?"

It was then that Lady Hannah dropped the white umbrella and clapped her hands for joy. Something of mastery and triumph in the young man's face, something in the pale radiance of the girl's, something of the mingled joy and anguish of the pierced maternal heart shining in the Mother's great grey eyes, had conveyed to the exultant little woman that the plant that had thriven upon the arid soil of Gueldersdorp had borne a perfect blossom with a heart of ruby red.

"Oh, you dears! you two beautiful dears! how happy you look!" she crowed. "I must kiss you both!" She did it. "Say that this isn't to be kept secret!" She clasped her tiny hands with exaggerated entreaty. "For the sake of the *Gueldersdorp Siege Gazette*, and its seven hundred subscribers all perishing for news, tell me I may let the cat out of the bag in my next Weekly Column. Only say that people may know!"

As her black eyes snapped at Beauvayse, and her tiny hands dramatically entreated, he had an instant of hesitation, palpable to one who stood by. In an instant he pulled himself together.

"The whole world may know, as far as I am concerned."

"It is best," said the Mother's soft, melodious voice, "that our world, at least, should know."

"And when—oh, when Is It To Be?" begged Lady Hannah.

Confound the woman! Why could she not let well alone? A sullen anger burned in Beauvayse as he said, and not in the tone of the ardent lover:

"As soon as we can possibly manage it."

The Mother's voice said, coldly and clearly:

"I do not approve of long engagements. If the marriage takes place, it must be soon."

With the consciousness of one who is impelled to take a desperate leap, Beauvayse found himself saying:

"It cannot be too soon."

"Then ... before the Relief?" cried Lady Hannah, and Beauvayse heard himself answering:

"If Lynette agrees?"

The rapture of submission in her look was intoxicating. He reached out his hand and laid it lightly on her shoulder. Then, without another word, they went on together, and the tall, soldierly figure in brown, and the slender shape in the green skirt and little white coat, with the dainty plumed hat crowning the squirrel-coloured hair, were seen in darkening relief against the flaming orange of the sky.

"A Wedding under Fire. Bridal Ceremony in a Beleaguered City," murmured the enthusiastic journalist. Her gold fountain-pen, hanging at her châtelaine, seemed to wriggle like a thing of life, as she imagined herself aiding, planning, assisting at, and finally sitting down to describe the ceremony and the wedding-veil on the little Greek head. She babbled as her quick, bird-like gait carried her along beside the tall, stately-moving figure in the black habit:

"Dear Bridget ... I may call you that for the sake of old days?"

"If you like."

"This must make you very happy. Society mothers of marriageable daughters will tear their transformations from their heads, and dance upon them in despair, when they hear that Beau *s'est rangé*. But that I don't hold forth to worldly ears I would enlarge upon the immense social advantages of such a union for that dear child."

"Of course, I am aware that it is an excellent match."

Were her ears so unworldly? The phrase rankled in her conscience like a thorn. And in what respect were those Society mothers less managing than the nun? she asked herself. Could any of them have been more astute, more eager, more bent on hooking the desirable *parti* for their girls than she had shown herself just now? And was this, again, an unworldly voice whispering to her that the publicity ensured by a paragraph penned by this gossip-loving little lady would fix him even more securely, bind him more strongly, make it even less possible for him to retreat, should he desire it—by burning his boats behind him, so that he had no alternative but to go on? She sickened with loathing of herself. But for her there was no retreat either. Here Lady Hannah helped her unawares. With a side-glance at the noble face beside her, pale olive-hued, worn and faded beyond the age of the woman by her great labours and her greater griefs, the arched black eyebrows sprinkled of late with grey, the eyelids thin over the mobile eyeballs, purpled with lack of sleep and secret, bitter weeping, the close-folded, deeply cut, eloquent mouth withered like a japonica-bloom that lingers on in frost, the strong, salient chin framed in the snowy, starched *guimpe*, she faltered:

"You don't shy at the notion of the par—the announcement in the *Siege Gazette*, I mean?..."

"Upon the contrary, I approve of it," said the Mother, and walked on very fast, for the bells of the Catholic Church were ringing for Benediction.

"Is it good-night, or may I come in?" Beauvayse whispered to Lynette in the porch.

She dipped her slender fingers in the little holy-water font beside the door, and held them out to him.

"Come in," she answered, and held white, wet fingers out to him. He touched them with a puzzled smile.

"Am I to——? Ah, I remember!"

Their eyes met, and the golden radiance in hers passed into his blood. He bared his high, fair head as she made the sign of the Cross, and followed her in and up the nave as Father Wix, in purple Lenten stole over the snowy cotta starched and ironed by Sister Tobias's capable hands, began to intone the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. The Sisters were already in their places—a double row of black-draped figures, the Mother at the end of the first row, Lady Hannah in the chair beside her, where Lynette had always sat until now. It was not without a pang that the one saw her place usurped by a stranger; it was piercing pain to the other to feel the strange presence at her side. But something had already come between these two, dividing them. Something invisible, impalpable as air, but nevertheless thrusting them apart with a force that might not be resisted.

Only the elder of the two as yet knew clearly what it meant. The younger was too dizzy with her first heady draught from the cup of joy, held to her lips by the strong, beautifully-shaped brown hand that rested on Beauvayse's knee as he sat, or propped up Beauvayse's chin as he knelt, stiff as a young crusader on a monument, beside her. But the Mother knew. Would not the God Who had been justly offended in her, His vowed servant, that day, exact to the last tittle the penalty? She knew He would.

Rosary ended, the thin, kind-eyed little elderly priest preached, taking for the text of his discourse the Introit from the Office of Quinquagesima.

"*Esto mihi in Deum protectorum, et in locum refugii, ut salvum me facias.*"

"Be Thou unto me a God, a protector, and a place of refuge, to save me: for Thou art my strength...."

Then the *O Salutaris* was sung, and followed by the Litany of the Holy Name.

The church was crowded. A Catholic congregation is always devout, but these people, well-dressed or ill-dressed, prosperous or poor, pale-faced and hollow-eyed every one, joined in the office with passion. The responses came like the beating of one wave of human anguish upon the Rock of Ages.

"*Have mercy on us!*"

Hungry, they cried to One Who had hungered. Sinking with weariness, they appealed to One Who had known labours, faintings, agonies, and desolations.

"*Have mercy on us!*"

He had drunk of Death for them, had been buried and had risen again.

Death was all about them. They could hear the beating of his wings, could see the red sweep of his blood-wet, dripping scythe. And they prayed as they had never prayed before these things befell:

"*Have mercy on us!*"

They sang the *Tantum Ergo*, and the cloud of incense

rose from the censer in the priest's hand. Then, at the thin, sweet tinkle of the bell, and the first white gleam of the Unspeakable Mystery upheld by the servant of the Altar, the heads bowed and sank as when a sudden wind sweeps over a field of ripened corn. Only one or two remained unmoved, one of these a man's head, young and crisply-waved, and golden....

And then came the orderly crowding to the door, and they were outside under the great violet sky, throbbing with splendid stars, breathing the tainted air that came from the laagers and the trenches. But oh, was there ever a sweeter night, following upon a sweeter day?

Beauvayse's hand found and pressed Lynette's. She looked up and saw his eyes shining in the starlight. He looked down and saw the Convent lily transformed into a very rose of womanhood.

"I am on duty at Staff Bombproof South to-night. What I would give to be free to walk home with you!"

Lady Hannah's jangling laugh came in.

"Haven't you had the whole day? Greedy, unconscionable young man! Say good-night to her, and be off and get some food into you. Don't say you haven't any appetite. I am hungry enough to be interested even in minced mule and spatch-cocked locusts, after all this. Good-night! I must kiss you again, child! I hope you don't mind?"

Lynette gave her cheek, asking:

"Where is the Mother?"

The voice of Sister Tobias answered out of the purplish darkness:

"She has gone on with Sister Hilda-Antony and Sister Cleophée, dearie. She is going to sleep at the Convent with them, and I was to give you her love, and say good-night."

Say good-night! On this of all nights was Lynette to be dismissed without even the Mother's kiss? She gave back Beauvayse's parting hand-pressure almost mechanically. Then she heard his voice, close at her ear, say pantingly:

"No one will see.... Please, dearest!"

She turned her head, and their lips met under cover of the pansy-coloured darkness.... Then he was gone with Lady Hannah, and Lynette was walking home to the Convent bombproof, explaining to the astonished Sisters that the Mother knew; that the Mother approved of her engagement to Lord Beauvayse; and that they would probably be married very soon. Before the Relief ...

"'Before the Relief.' Well, no one but Our Lord knows when that's to be.... And so you're very happy, are you, dearie?"

Even as she gave her shy assent in answer to Sister Tobias's question, its commonplace homeliness, like the feeling of the thick dust and the scattered débris underfoot, brought back Lynette for a moment out of the golden, diamond-dusted, pearl-gemmed dream-world in which she had been straying, to wonder, Was she really very happy?

She asked herself the question sitting with the Sisters at their little scanty supper. She asked herself as she

knelt with them in prayer, as she lay in bed, the Mother's place vacant beside her—Was she happy after all?

She had drunk sweetness, but there had been a tang of something in the cup that cloyed the palate and sickened the soul. She had learned the love of man, and in a measure it had cast out fear, that had been her earlier lesson.

To be held and taken and made his completely, what must it be like? She glowed in the darkness at the thought. And then the recollection of a ruthless strength that had rent away the veil of innocence from a woman-child surged back upon her.

Just think. Suppose you laid your hand in the warm, strong clasp that thrilled delight to every nerve, and set your heart beating, beating, and, drawn by the shining grey-green jewel-eyes and the mysterious, wooing smile upon the beautiful lips, and the coaxing, caressing tones of the voice that so allured, you gave up all else that had been so dear, and went away with him? What then? Suppose——

Suppose the smiling face of Love should turn out to be nothing but a mask hiding the gross and brutal leer of Lust, what then? She saw that other man's dreadful face, painted in hot and living colours upon the darkness. She writhed as if to tear her lips from the savage, furious mouth. She shuddered and grew cold there in the sultry heat. The clasp of the protecting mother-arms might have driven away her terror, but she was alone. It would have been sweet to be alone that night if she had been happy.

Why had the Mother shunned her? She knew that she had. Why had she felt, even with the glamour of *his* presence about her, and the music of his voice in her ears, that all was not well?

Why, even with the lifting of her burden, in the unutterable relief of hearing, from the lips that had been her law, that her dreadful secret need never be revealed, had she felt consternation and alarm? The words were written in fiery letters, on the murky dark of the bombproof, where the tiny lamp that had hung before the Tabernacle on the altar of the Convent chapel now burned, a twinkling red star, before the silver Crucifix that hung upon the east wall.

"He is not to be told. I command you never to tell him!"

The doubt germinated and presently pushed through a little spear. Had those lips given right counsel or wrong? Ought he to be told? Was it dishonest, was it traitorous, to hide the truth? And yet, what are the lives of even the upright, and clean, and continent among men, compared with the life of a girl bred as she had been? The sin had not been hers. She, the victim, was blameless. And yet, and yet ...

To this girl, who had learned to see the Face of Christ and of His Mother reflected in one human face that had smiled down upon her, waking in the little white bed in the Convent infirmary from the long, recuperating sleep that turns the tide of brain-fever, the thought that a shadow of deceit could mar its earnest, candid purity was torture. Months back they had said to her—the lips that had given her the first kiss she had received since a dying woman's cold mouth touched the sleeping face of a yellow-haired

baby held to her in a strong man's shaking hands, as the trek-waggon rolled and rumbled over the veld:

"The man who may one day be your husband will have the right to know."

It was a different voice to the one that had commanded, "You are never to tell him!" Lynette lay listening to those two voices until the alarm-clock belled and the Sisters rose at midnight for matins. Then she lay listening to the soft murmur of voices in the dark, as the red lamp glimmered before the silver Christ upon the wall. The nuns needed no light, knowing the office by heart:

"*Delicta quis intelligit? ab occultis meis munda me, et ab alienis parce servo tuo*"—"Who can comprehend what sin is? Cleanse me from my hidden sins, and from those of others save Thy servant."

The antiphon followed the *Gloria*, and then the soft womanly voices chanted the twenty-third Psalm:

"*Quis ascendit in montem Domini?*"—"Who shall ascend to the Mount of the Lord, and who shall dwell in His holy Sanctuary? Those who do no ill and are pure.... Who do not give their heart to vain desires, or deceive their neighbour with false oaths."

Or deceive ... with false oaths. To marry a man, letting him think you ... something you were not ... did not that amount to deceiving by a false oath?

Lynette lay very still. The last "Hail, Mary!" over, the Sisters returned silently to bed. Wire mattresses creaked under superimposed weight. Long breaths of wakefulness changed into the even breathing of slumber. The only one who snored was Sister Tobias, a confirmed nasal soloist, whose customary cornet-

solo was strangely missing. Was Sister Tobias lying awake and remembering too?

Sister Tobias was the only other person in the Convent besides the Mother, who knew. She had helped her faithfully and tenderly to nurse Lynette through the long illness that had followed the finding of that lost lamb upon the veld. She was a homely creature of saintly virtues, the Mother's staff and right hand. And it was she who had asked Lynette if she was happy?

Somebody was moving. The grey light of dawn was filtering down the drain-pipe ventilators and through the chinks in the tarpaulins overhead. A formless pale figure came swiftly to Lynette's bedside. She guessed who it must be. She sat up wide awake, and with her heart beating wildly in her throat.

"Dearie!" The whisper was Sister Tobias's. She could make out the glimmer of the white, plain nightcap framing the narrow face with the long, sagacious nose and wise, kindly, patient eyes. "Are you awake, dearie?"

"Yes," Lynette whispered back, shuddering. The dry, warm, hard hand felt about for her cold one, and found and took it. Lips came close to her ear, and breathed:

"Dearie, this grand young gentleman you're engaged to be married to ..."

"Yes?"

"*Has he been told? Does he know?*"

The long, plain face was close to Lynette's. In the greying light she could see it clearly. Her heart beat

in heavy, sickening thuds. Her teeth chattered, and whole body shook as if with ague, as she faltered:

"The Mother says—he is not to be told."

There was a dead silence. It was as if an iron shutter had suddenly been pulled down and clamped home between them. Then Sister Tobias said in a tone devoid of all expression:

"The Mother knows best, dearie, of course. Lie down and go to sleep."

Then silence settled back upon the Convent bombproof, but sleep did not come to everybody there.

XLIII

The Mother was kneeling, as she had knelt the whole night through, before the dismantled altar in the battered little chapel of the Convent, with the big white stars looking down upon her through the gaps in the shell-torn roof. When it was the matin-hour she rose and rang the bell. Matins over, she still knelt on. When it was broad day she broke her fast with the Sisters, and went about the business of the day calmly, collectedly, capably as ever. Only her face was white and drawn, and great violet circles were about her great tragical grey eyes.

"The blessed Saint she is!" whispered the nuns one to the other.

If she had heard them, it would have added yet another iron point to the merciless scourge of her self-scorn.

A Saint, in that stained garment! What tears of bitterness had fallen that night upon the shameful blots that marred its whiteness! But for Richard's child, even though she herself should become a castaway, she must go on to the end. All the chivalry in her rose in arms to defend the young, shame-burdened, blameless head.

Ah! if she had known?...

Cold, light, cruel eyes had watched from across the river that day as her tall, imposing figure, side by side with the slender, more lightly-clad one, moved between the mimosa-bushes and round the river-bend. When the two were fairly out of sight, the jungle of tree-fern and cactus had rustled and cracked. Then the burly, thickset, powerful figure of a bearded man pushed through, traversed the reed-beds, and, leaping from boulder to boulder, crossed the river. Before long the man was standing on the patch of trodden grass and flowers in the lee of the great boulder, shutting up a little single-barrelled, brass-mounted field-glass that had served him excellently well.

He was Bough, *alias* Van Busch, otherwise the man who had come in through the enemy's lines as a runner from Diamond Town, bringing the letter from a hypothetical Mrs. Casey to a Mr. Casey who did not exist. His light eyes, that were set flat in their shallow orbits like an adder's, looked about and all

around the place, as he stroked the dense brake of black-brown beard that cleverly filled in the interval between Mr. Van Busch's luxuriant whiskers. Presently he stooped and picked up a little tan-leather glove, lying in a tuft of pink flowers. The daintiness of the little glove brought home to Bough more forcibly than anything else, that the Kid had become a lady.

For it was the girl, sure. No error about that little white face of hers, with the pointed chin, and the topaz-coloured eyes, and the reddish hair. The glass had brought her near enough to make that quite certain. He had been too far off to hear a word, but he had made out what had been going on very well. First, she had been giddying with the tall young English swell, drawing him on while he seemed courting her, as all women knew how to, and then the tall Sister of Mercy had come and rowed her; and she had cried, thrown down there among the grass and flowers, exactly as if somebody had beaten her with a sjambok to cure her of the G. D.'d obstinacy that had to be thrashed out of women, if you would have them get to heel when you chose it, or come at your call when you chose again.

Suppose he chose again. When a man with brains in his holy head once set them to work, there were few things he could not do. He could scare others off his property, for certain. He could exercise upon the girl herself the unlimited power of Fear. He must lie doggo because of the Doctor. It was a thundering queer chance the Doctor turning up in this place. And as one of the bosses, helping to run the show, and powerful enough to pay off old scores, if he should chance to recognise in the densely bearded face of the man from Diamond Town the features of

the Principal Witness in the once-famous Old Bailey Criminal Case: "The Crown *v.* Saxham."

Bough would lie low, and watch, and wait, and then spring, as the tarantula springs. He had cleverly blurred all trails leading back to the tavern on the veld, and he knew enough of girls and women to believe that this girl had kept secret what had happened there. He would pick up with her, anyway, and offer to marry her and make an honest girl of her. If she had a snivelling fancy for the dandy swell who had made love to her and kissed her, he would threaten to tell the fellow the truth unless she gave him up. Or he would blow on her to the nuns she lived with, and they would have nothing more to do with her.

Voor den donder! suppose they knew already? The plan wanted careful working out. A false step, and Gueldersdorp might become unhealthy for the man who had brought the letter from Diamond Town to oblige Mrs. Casey.

Suppose the spoor that led back to the tavern on the veld and the grave by the Little Kopje, not as well hidden as Bough had thought, those jewels and securities and the one thousand seven hundred pounds cash might get an honest man into trouble yet, even after the lapse of seventeen years. He breathed heavily, and the pupils of his strange light eyes dilated, and the sweat rolled off his forehead and cheeks until the skin shone like copper. He had been a reckless, easy-going young chap of twenty-six seventeen years ago. Forty-three years of life had taught him that when you are least expecting them to, buried secrets are sure to resurrect. No, Gueldersdorp was not a healthy place for Bough or

for Van Busch! That chattering little paroquet of a woman with the sharp black eyes might use them one day, to the detriment of the philanthropist who had brought in the letter from Diamond Town for Mrs. Casey.

Then the girl!... He grinned in his bushy beard, thinking how thundering scared she would look if she encountered him by chance, and recognised him. The beard would not hide him from her eyes. No, no! And he smelled at the little tan glove, that had a slight, clean, delicate perfume about it, and thrust it into his breeches-pocket, and crossed the river again, making his way back to the native town by devious native paths that snaked and twined and twisted through the tangled bush, as he himself made his tortuous progress through the world.

He was in an evil mood, made blacker by the prospect of spending a lonely night without the solace of liquor or woman. For Vice was at a low ebb in Gueldersdorp just now, and the commonest dop was barely obtainable at the price of good champagne, and it would not do for the man from Diamond Town to seem flush of dollars.

Sure, no, that would never do! He must make out with the tobacco he still had left, and the big lump of opium he carried in a tin box in a pocket of the heavy money-belt he wore under his miner's flannel shirt. He groped for the tin box, and got it, and bit off a corner of the sticky brown lump, and ate it as he went along, and his laboured breathing calmed, and the chilly sweat dried upon his copper-burned skin, that had the purplish-black tinge in it that comes of saturation with iodide of potassium. And the pupils of his colourless eyes dwindled to pin-

points, and his thick hands ceased to shake. He was not the man he had been; and he had learned the opium-habit from a woman who had managed a joint at Johannesburg, and it grew upon him—the need of the soothing, supporting deadener. He went along now, under the influence of it, scarcely feeling the ground under his heavy leather veldschoens.

He trod on something presently, lying on the path. It moved and whimpered. He struck a match with a steady hand, and held the glimmering blue phosphorus-flame downwards, and saw a Kaffir girl, a servant of the Barala, who had crept out with a bow strung with twisted crocodile-gut and a sheaf of reed arrows, to try and shoot birds. The Barala, though they were sorely pinched, like their European fellow-men, did not starve. They earned pay and rations. They helped to keep the enemy out on the south and west sides of the town, and dug most of the trenches—often under fire—and ran the despatches, and sometimes brought in fresh meat. But their slaves, and the native hangers-on at the kraals, suffered horribly. They ate the dogs that had been shot, and the other kind of dog, and fought with the live ones for bones, and picked up empty meat-tins and licked them. They stalked about the town and the native stad like living skeletons. They dropped and died on the dust-heaps they had been rummaging for offal. Soup-kitchens were started later on, when it was found how things were going with them, and hides and bones and heads of horses and mules were boiled down into soup, and they were fed. But a time was to come when even that soup was wanted to keep the life in white people. You saw the famine-stricken black spectres crawling from refuse-pile to refuse-pile, and dying in that pitiless, beautiful sunshine, under the blue, blue

February sky, because white people had got to keep on living.

The native girl had been too weak to kill anything. Death had come upon her in the midst of the teeming life of the jungle, and she had fallen down there in her ragged red blanket among the tree-roots that arched and knotted over the path. Her eyes were already rolled up and set. They stared blindly, horribly, out of the ashen-black face. When she heard the steps of a shod person the last spark of life glimmered feebly up in her. Her wild, keen, savage power of scent yet remained. She smelled a white man, and her cracked and swollen lips moved, and a voice like the sound made by the rubbing of dry canes together uttered the word that is the same in Dutch and English:

"Water!"

Bough's pale, flat, scintillating eyes were quite expressionless, but his thick lips parted, and his strong yellow teeth showed in his thick brake of beard. With the caution of one who knows that a single glowing match-end dropped among dry vegetation may cause a devastating conflagration, he blew out the lingering flame, and rolled the little charred stick between his tough-skinned fingers before he threw it down. Then he raised himself up, and stepped over the dying creature, and went upon his way, humming a dance-tune he liked. He was not changed. It was still a joy to him to have feebler beings in his power, and taunt and torture and use them at his will.

He had assumed the skin of the man from Diamond Town in the well-paid service of that bright boy of Brounckers', who had, it may be remembered, a plan.

The plan involved a feint from the eastward, and an attack upon that weakest spot in the girdle of Gueldersdorp's defences, the native stad. The Barala might be incorruptible; the weak spot was the native village, nevertheless. And the business of the man from Diamond Town was to lounge about its neighbourhood, using those sharp light eyes of his to excellent purpose, and storing his retentive memory —for it would not do for a stranger to be caught putting pencil to paper in a town under Martial Law, and bristling with suspicion—with the information indispensable for the putting in effect of young Schenk Eybel's ingenious plan.

The jackal had had to yield his bone to the hungry lion. Still, it was wise to be in good odour with the Republics; that was why Van Busch had taken on the job. He had not been impelled to risk his skin, and get shut up in this stinking, starving hole by anything the sharp-eyed little Englishwoman, so unpleasantly awake at last regarding the genuine aims and real character of the chivalrous Mr. Van Busch of Johannesburg, had dropped. Hell, no! That unripe nectarine had been plucked and eaten years ago. And yet how the ripe fruit allured him to-day, seen against its background of dull green leaves, its smooth cheeks glowing under the kisses of the sun.

The swell English officer had kissed them too. As she meant, the sly little devil, slipping away for her bit of fun. Grown a beauty, too, as anybody but a thundering, juicy, damned fool might have known she would! He swore bitterly, thinking what a gold-mine a face and figure like that might have proved to an honest speculator up Johannesburg way.

His case, he thought, was somewhat similar to that of

old Baas Jacobs, the Boer who found the first great South African diamond on his farm near Hopetown, and threw it down beside the door, with other pretty shining pebbles, for his child to play with. The child's mother tossed it to Van Niekirk as a worthless gift. Van Niekirk passed it on to J. O'Reilly. When the English Government mineralogist pronounced the stone a diamond, and the Colonial Secretary and the French Consul sent it to the Paris Exhibition, and the Governor of the Colony bought the jewel, old Baas Jacobs must have felt mighty sick. All the world hungering, and admiring, and coveting the beautiful thing he had thrown down on the ground.... Small wonder that to the end of his days he had talked as a robbed man.

The jewel Bough had left on the veld had belonged to him once. Well, it should be his again. He swore that with a blasphemous oath. Thenceforward he proceeded warily, feeling his way, formulating his plan, a human tarantula, evil-eyed and hairy-clawed, calculating the sudden leap upon its prey; an adder coiled, waiting the moment to strike....

XLIV

Saxham was shooting on the veld, north of the Clayfields, in a ginger-hued dust-wind and a grilling sun. Upon his right showed the raw red ridge of the earthworks, where two ancient seven-pounders were entrenched in charge of a handful of Cape Police. The pits of the sniping riflemen scarred across the

river-bed some fifty yards in advance. Upon his left, some two hundred yards farther north, the recently resurrected ship's gun, twelve feet of honeycombed metal, stamped on the flank "No. 6 Port," and casting solid shot of eighteenth-century pattern, projected a long black nose from Fort Ellerslie, and every time the venerable weapon went off without bursting, the Town Guards occupying the Fort and manning the eastern entrenchments raised a cheer.

Saxham, emptying and filling the magazine with cool, methodical regularity, kept changing his position with a restlessness and recklessness puzzling alike to friends and foes. Now he aimed and fired, lying "doggo" behind his favourite stone, while bullets from the enemy's trenches flattened themselves upon it, or buried themselves harmlessly in the dry hot soil. Now he moved from cover, and shot squatting on his heels, or sprawled lizard-like in the open, courting the King of Terrors with a calm indifference that was commented upon by those who witnessed it according to their lights.

"Begob!" said Kildare, ex-driver of Engine 123, who, with the Cardiff man, his stoker of old, was doing duty at Fort Ellerslie *vice* two Town Guardsmen permanently resting, "'tis a great perfawrumance the Doc is afther givin' as this day!" He coolly borrowed the gunner's sighting-glasses, and, with his keen eyes glued to them and his ragged elbows propped on the Fort parapet, he scanned the distant solitary figure, dropping the words out slowly one by one. "Twice have I seen the fur fly off av' wan av' thim hairy baboons av' Boers since he starrtud, an' supposin' the air a taste thicker, 'tis punched wid bullet-holes we'd be seem' ut all round 'um, the same as a young lady in the sky-in-terrific dhressmakin' line would be

afther jabbin' out the pattern av' a shoot av' clothes."

"And look you now, if the man is not lighting a pipe," objected the Cardiff stoker, whose religious tendencies were greatly fostered by the surroundings and conditions of siege life. "Sitting on a stone, with the rifle between his knees and the match between his two hands, as if the teffel was got tired of waiting, and had curled up and gone to sleep." The speaker sucked in his breath and solemnly shook his head, adding: "It is a temptation of the Tivine Providence, so it is!"

"Sorra a timpt," rejoined Kildare, reluctantly surrendering the glasses to the gunner, a grey ex-sergeant of R.F.A., "sorra a timpt, knowin', as the Docthur knows, that do what he will and thry as he may, no bullut will do more than graze the hide av him, or sing in his ear."

"And how will he know that, maybe you would be telling?" demanded the Cardiff stoker incredulously.

"I seen his face," said Kildare, jerking a blackened thumb towards the gunner's sighting-glasses, "minnits back through thim little jiggers, an' to man or mortal that's as sick wid the hate av Life, an' as sharp-set with the hunger for Death as the Docthur is this day, no harrum will come. 'Tis quare, but thrue."

"I've 'ad a try at several kinds of 'ungers," said the R.E. Reserve man, who acted as gunner's mate. "There's the 'unger for glory, combined with a smart uniform wot'll make the gals stare, as drives a man to 'list. There's the 'unger for kisses an' canoodlin' wot makes yer want to please the gals. There's the 'unger for revenge, wot drives yer to bash in a bloke's face, and loses you yer stripes if 'e 'appens to be your

Corp'ril. Then there's the 'unger for gettin' under cover when you're bein' sniped, an' the 'unger for blood, when you've got the Hafridis, or the Fuzzies, or the Dutchies, at close quarters, and the bay'nits are flickerin' in an' out of the dirty caliker shirts or the dirty greatcoats like Jimmy O! There's the 'unger for freedom and fresh hair when you're shut up in a filthy mud cattle-pound like this 'ere Fort, or a stinkin' trench, with a 'andful of straw to set on by day an' a ragged blanket to kip in by nights. But the 'unger to die is a 'unger *I* ain't acquainted with. I'm for livin' myself."

"I was hungry when you began to jaw," snarled the man who had been clerk to the County Court. His lips were black and cracking with fever, and his teeth chattered despite the fierce sunshine that baked the red clay parapet against which he leaned his thin back. "I'm hungrier now, and thirsty as well. Give the bucket over here." He drank of the thick, yellowish, boiled water eagerly and yet with disgust, spilling the liquid on his tattered clothing through the shaking of his wasted hands. Then he turned to the wall, and lay down sullenly, scowling at the lantern-jawed sympathiser who tried to thrust a rolled-up coat under his aching head.

"They'll be bringin' us our foddher at twelve av the clock," said Kildare, with a twinkle of inextinguishable humour in his hollow eyes. "Shuperannuated cavalry mount stuped in warrum kettle-gravy, wid a block av baked sawdust for aich man that can get ut down. 'Tis an insult to the mimory av the boiled bacon an' greens I would be aiting this day at Carricknavore, to say nothin' av' the porther an' whisky that would be washing ut down. Lashin's and lavin's there 'ud be for ivery wan, an'

what was over, me fadher—God be good to the ould boy alive or dead!—would be disthributin' amongst the poor forninst the dure——"

"Beg pardon, sir." Another of the famine-bitten, ragged little garrison addressed the question to the officer in charge of the Fort battery, as he stepped down from the lookout with his field-glass in his hand. "Can you tell us the difference of time between South Africa and England?"

"Two hours at Capetown. I'm not quite sure about the difference at Gueldersdorp." The Lieutenant went over to the ancient smooth-bore, and conferred with the gunners standing at her breech. The winches groaned, the heavy mass of metal tilted on the improvised mounting, as the man to whom the Lieutenant had replied said, with a quaver of longing in his voice:

"'Two hours! My God, suppose it only took that time to get home!"

"It 'ud be a sight easier to 'ang on 'ere," said the R.E. Reserve man who acted as gunner's mate, "if there was such a thing as a plug o' baccy to be 'ad. Wot gives me the reg'lar sick is to see them well-fed Dutchies chawin' an' blowin', blowin' an' chawin', from mornin' till night——" He spat disgustedly.

"When honust men," groaned Kildare, "would swop a year av life for a twist av naygurhead. Wirra-wirra!"

There was a dry and mirthless laugh, showing teeth, white or discoloured, in haggard and bristly faces. Then a short young Corporal, who had been leaning back in an angle of the earthwork, hugging his sharp knees and staring at nothing in particular with pale-

coloured, ugly, honest eyes, grew painfully crimson through his crust of sun-tan and grime, and said something that made the lean bodies in ragged, filthy tan-cord and dilapidated khâki, or torn and muddy tweed, slew round upon the unclean straw on which they squatted. All eyes, were they hunger-dull or fever-bright, sought the Corporal's face.

"Dessay you'll think me a greedy 'ound," said the Corporal, with a painful effort that set the prominent Adam's apple in his lean throat jerking, "when you tyke in wot I've got to s'y. It makes me want to git into me own pocket and 'ide, to 'ave to tell it. For me an' you, we've shared an' shared alike, wotever we 'ad, while we 'ad anythink—except in one partic'lar." The Adam's apple jumped up and down as he gulped. He was burning crimson now to the roots of his ragged, light-brown hair, and the tips of his flat-rimmed, jutting ears, and the patch of thin bare chest that showed where his coarse grey back shirt was unbuttoned at the neck.

All those eyes, feverishly bright or sickly dull, watched him as he put his hand into the bulging breast-pocket, and slowly fished out a shining brown briar-root with a stem unchewed as yet by any smoker.

"Twig this 'ere noo pipe. It was sent me by a—by a friend, along of a packet of 'Oneydew, for a—for a kind o' birthday present." His voice wobbled strangely; there was scalding water dammed up behind his ugly honest eyes. "She—she bin an' opened the packet and filled the pipe, an' I shared out the 'Oneydew in the trenches as far as it went, but I bin an' kep' the pipe, sayin' to myself I'd smoke it when she lighted it wiv 'er own 'ands, an' not—not

before. Next day we"—the Adam's apple went up and down again—"we 'ad words, an' parted. I—I never set eyes on 'er dial since."

The voice of W. Keyse ended in an odd kind of squeak. Nobody looked at him as he bit his thin lips furiously, and blinked the unmanly tears away. Then he went on: "It's—it's near on two months I bin lookin' for 'er. She—she—sometimes I think she's made a way out of the lines after another bloke—a kind o' Dutchy spy 'oo was a pal of 'ers, or—or else she's dead. There's times I've dreamed I seen 'er dead!" His voice bounded up in that queer squeak again. The word "dead" was wrung out of him like a long-fanged double molar. His lips were drawn awry in a grimace of anguish, and the pipe he held shook in his gaunt and grimy hand, so perilously that half a dozen other hands, as gaunt and even grimier, shot out as by a single impulse to save it from falling. "Tyke it an' smoke it between you," said W. Keyse, and the Adam's apple jerked again as he gulped. "But read the writin' on the bit o' pyper first, and mind you—mind you give it back." He resigned the treasure, and turned his face away.

"Blessed Mary!" came in the accent of Kildare, breaking the silence, "let me hould ut in me han's!"

"Spell out the screeve," ordered the R.E. Reserve man imperiously.

The Town Guard who had questioned the officer about the difference of time, deciphered the blotty writing on the slip of paper pinned round the stem of the new briar-root. It ran thus:

> "i ope yu wil Engoy this Pip Deer; i Fild it A Purpus with Love and Menney Apey

Riturnse. from

"FARE AIR."

"'Is gal?" interrogated the Reserve man.

"His girl," assented the man who had read.

"And he never saw her no more, so he did not!" commented the Cardiff stoker as the pipe travelled from hand to hand to be smelt at, dandled, worshipped by every man in turn. Only the Sergeant-gunner, the grey-headed ex-Royal Field Artilleryman, maintained self-command by dint of looking very hard the other way. Then said Kildare impetuously:

"Take ut back, Corp'ril Keyse. 'Tis little wan poipe av tobacca wud count for betune six starvin' savigees."

"Wot I wants," growled the Reserve man, "is to over-'aul a bacca factory afire, and clap my mouth to 'er chimbley-shaft. So take it back, Corporal. It's no manner o' good to me!"

All the other voices joined in the chorus, and the be-papered pipe was thrust back upon its owner. W. Keyse thanked them soberly, and put the gift of his lost love away.

His pale, unbeautiful eyes had the anguish of despair in them, and the tooth of that sharp death-hunger of which Kildare had spoken was gnawing what he would have termed with simplicity "his inside." For if Emigration Jane were dead, what had Life left for him?

After his first superb assumption of cold indifference had broken down he had sought her, feverishly at first, then doggedly, then with a dizzy sickness of

terror and apprehension that made the letters of the type-written casualty-lists posted outside the Staff Headquarters in the Market Square turn apparent somersaults as he strove to read them. This was his punishment, that he should hunger as she had hungered, and still be disappointed, and learn by fellowship in keenest suffering what her pain had been.

The "Fare Air" letters were some comfort. In the trench at night, when fever and rheumatism kept him from the dog-sleep that other men were snatching, he would hear her crying over and over: "Oh, cruel, to break a poor girl's heart!" And when sleep came he would track her through strange places, calling her to come back—to come back and be forgiven. And when he awakened from such dreams there would be tears upon his face. And each day he consulted the lists of killed and wounded, and once had staggered white-lipped to the mortuary-shed to identify a Jane Harris, and found her—oh, with what unutterable relief!—to be a coloured lady who had married a Rifleman. After that he had perked up, and continued his quest for the beloved needle lost in the haystack of Gueldersdorp with renewed belief in the ultimate possibility of finding it. Then, in the middle of one awful night, the darkness of his mental state had been luridly illuminated by the conviction that she had joined Slabberts. Now strange voices whispered always in his ears, saying that she was dead, and urging him to follow by the same dark road over which her trembling feet had stumbled.

He heard those voices as he wrought and sweated with the gun-team at the levers, and the ponderous muzzle-loader rolled back upon the grooves of her

improvised mounting. He heard it as they sponged the antique monster out, and fed it with a three-pound bolus of cordite, and a ten-pound ball of ancient pattern with the date of 1770. He heard it now again as he kneeled at a loophole in the parapet, watching Saxham. Those pale, ugly eyes of Billy Keyse were extraordinarily keen. He saw a grimy hand carefully balance an old meat-tin on the top of the parapet of the enemy's western entrenchment. He saw Saxham kneeling, aim and fire, and with the sharp rap of the exploding cartridge came a howl from the owner of the hand, who had not withdrawn it with sufficient quickness.

Half a dozen rifle-muzzles came nosing through the loopholes at that yell. There was quite a little fusillade, and the sharp cracks and flashes in Saxham's vicinity told of the employment of explosive bullets. But not one hit the man. An unkempt Boer head bobbed up, looking for his corpse. The Winchester cracked, and the unkempt head fell forwards, its chin over the edge of the parapet, and stayed there staring until the comrades of its late owner pulled the dead man down by the heels.

There was a cheer from the rifle-pits in the river-bed, and another from Fort Ellerslie, where eager, excited spectators jostled at the loopholes. A minute later the Fort's ancient bow-chaser barked loudly, and pitched a solid shot. The metal spheroid hit the ploughed-up ground some ninety feet in front of the parapet where the bloody head had hung, and over which those explosive bullets had been fired, rose in a cloud of dust, and literally jumped the trench. There was a roar of distant laughter as the ball began to roll, and shaggy heads of curious Boers, inured only

to the latest inventions in lethal engineering, bobbed up to watch. More laughter accompanied the progress of the ball. But presently it encountered a mound of earth, behind which certain patriots were taking coffee, and rolled through, and the laughter ceased abruptly. There was a baggage-waggon beyond through which it also rolled, and behind the waggon a plump, contented pony was wallowing in the sand. When the ancient cannon-ball rolled through the pony, the owner spoke of witchcraft. But the patriots who had been sitting behind the mound made no comment then or thenceforward.

At this juncture, and with almost a sensation of pleasure, Saxham saw his old acquaintance Father Noah climb out of his particular trench, briskly for one well stricken in years, and toddle out, laden with rifle, biltong bag, and coffee-can, to his favourite sniping-post, where a bush rose beside a rock, which was shaded by a small group of blue-gums. Soon the smoke of the veteran's pipe rose above his lurking-place, and as Saxham, with a grunt of satisfaction, stretched himself upon his stomach on the hot, sandy earth and pulled the lever, a return bullet sheared a piece off his boot-heel, and painfully jarred his ankle-bone.

No one else was shooting at the big rooinek now. It was understood that Father Noah had a prior claim. And the old man peered hopefully up to see the result of his shot, and rubbed his eyes. For the hulking dief was standing, voor den donder! standing as he emptied his magazine, and the bullets sang about Father Noah as viciously as hornets roused to anger by the stripping of a decayed thatch. The magazine of the repeating-rifle emptied, Saxham calmly refilled it, causing the puzzled patriarch to

waste many cartridges in wild shooting at that erect, indifferent mark, and finally to abandon the level-headed caution to which he owed his venerable years, and climb a tree to obtain a better view of the tactics of the enemy.

Saxham laughed as the invisible hornets sang in the air about him. The battered solar helmet he wore was pierced through the hinder brim, and he was bleeding from a bullet-graze upon the knuckle of the second finger of his left hand. Since that Sunday afternoon beside the river, when he learned the madness of his hope and the hopelessness of his madness, he had taken risks like this daily, not in the deliberate desire of death, but as a man consulting Fate negatively.

Father Noah would decide, one way or the other: the issue of their protracted duel should determine things for Saxham. If he sent the old man in, then there was Hope, if the superannuated, short-stocked Martini, with that steady old finger on the trigger, and that sharp old eye at the backsight, ended by accounting for Saxham, then there would be an end to this burning torment for ever. Strangely, he did not believe that he could be killed by any other hand than Father Noah's. Doubtless the long overstrain was telling upon him mentally, though physically the man seemed of wrought steel.

"To-day will settle it, one way or the other. To-day ——"

As the thought passed through his mind, and he brought the sights into line with the mark, a scrap of white, fluttering some twenty inches lower down, caught his eye. He dropped the tip of the Winchester's foresight to the bottom of the

backsight's V, and knew, almost before the shot rang out, and an ownerless Martini tumbled out of the tree-crotch, that Fate had decided for Saxham.

Then he went back to the Hospital, grim-jawed and inscrutable as ever. A dirty white rag was being hoisted on a pole by one of the relatives of the deceased. Father Noah, with the long ends of his dirty grey beard raggedly bannering in the dust-wind, was still waiting for the bearers of the hastily improvised stretcher of sticks and green reims, as Saxham, having obtained a strip of black cloth with a needle and thread from the Matron, pulled off his jacket and sat down upon the end of the cot-bed in his little room, and neatly tacked a mourning-band upon the upper part of the left sleeve.

It was his nature to absorb himself in whatever work he undertook. As he stitched, the crowded Hospital buzzed about him like a hive, the moans of sick men and the rattling breaths of the dying beat in waves of sound upon his brain, for the long rows of beds stood upon either side of the corridors now, with barely a foot of room between them. In the necessarily open space before the Doctor's door a woman's hurrying footsteps paused, there came a rustling, and a sheet of printed paper folded in half was thrust underneath.

"The *Siege Gazette*, Doctor," called the Matron's pleasant womanly voice, as, simultaneously with the utterance of Saxham's brief word of thanks, she passed on. In the famine for news that possessed him, as every other human being in the town, the sight of the little badly-printed sheet was welcome, although it could hardly contain anything to satisfy his need. He set the last stitches, fastened and cut the

thread, reached down a long arm from the foot of the bed, and took up the paper.

The Latest Information had whiskers. The General Orders announced an issue of paper currency in small amounts, owing to the deplorable shortage of silver, congratulated those N.C.O.'s and men of the Baraland Irregulars who, under Lieutenant Byass, occupying the advanced Nordenfeldt position, had brought so effective a fire to bear upon the enemy's big gun that Meisje had been compelled to abandon her commanding position, and take up her quarters in a spot less advantageous, from the enemy's point of view. A reduction in the Forage ration was hinted at, and a string of Social Jottings followed, rows of asterisks exploding like squibs under every paragraphic utterance of the Gold Pen.

Not for nothing had Captain Bingo dolefully boasted that his wife exuded Journalese from her very finger-ends. Saxham recognised in the style, the very table-Moselle of Fashionable Journalism. So like the genuine article in the shape of the bottle, the topping of gilt-foil, the arrangement of wire and string, that as the stinging foam overflowed the goblet, snapping in iridescent bubbles at the cautious sipper's nose, and evaporated, leaving nothing in particular at the bottom, it was barely possible to believe the vintage other than the genuine article from Fleet Street. Stay.... The French quotations were not enclosed in inverted commas. That let Lady Hannah out.

"Society in Gueldersdorp," she wrote, "bubbles with interested expectation of the public announcement of a matrimonial engagement with which the intimate friends of the happy lovers profess *être aux anges*.

* * * * *

"Not for worlds would we draw the veil of delightful mystery completely aside from the secret of two young, charming and popular people. Yet it may be hinted that the elder son of a representative English House and heir of a sixteenth-century Marquisate, who is one of the most gallant and dashing among the many heroic defenders of our beleaguered town, proposes at no very distant date to lead to the altar one of the loveliest among the many lovely girls who grace Gueldersdorp's social functions.

* * * * *

"Both bride-elect and bridegroom-to-be attended High Mass at the Catholic Church on Sunday, when the Rev. Father Wix, in apprising parishioners of the near approach of Lent, caused an irresistible smile to ripple over the faces of his hearers. *Toujours perdrix* may sate in the long-run, but perpetually to *faire maigre* is attended with even greater discomfort.

* * * * *

"We have pleasure in announcing the approaching marriage of Lieutenant the Right Hon. Viscount Beauvayse, Grey Hussars, Junior Aide to the Colonel Commanding H.M. Forces, Gueldersdorp, to Miss Lynette Bridget-Mary Mildare, ward of the Mother-Superior, Convent of the Holy Way, North Veld Road."

XLV

Saxham has not been staring at the printed words

because they have struck him to the heart with their intelligence, but—or so it seems to him—because they convey nothing. There is an aching pain at the back of his neck, and his mind is curiously dull and sluggish. But after a little he becomes aware that somebody is knocking at his door.

"Who is it——"

The Doctor thinks he utters these words, but in reality he has only made a harsh croaking sound that might mean anything. The door opens and shows the Chaplain standing smiling on the threshold.

The Reverend Julius Fraithorn, no longer a worn and wasted pilgrim stumbling amongst the thorns and sharp stones of the Valley of the Shadow, appears in these days as a perfectly sound and healthy, if rather too narrow-shouldered, young Anglican clergyman, not unbecomingly arrayed, in virtue of his official position under martial authority, in a suit of Service khâki such as Saxham wears, with the black Maltese Cross on the collar and the band of the wide-peaked cap. Yellow puttees conceal the unduly spare proportions of his active legs, and the brown boots upon his long slender feet are dusty, as, indeed, is the rest of him, not with the reddish dust of the veld that powders Saxham to the very eyelashes, and lies in light drifts in every wrinkle of his garments, but with the yellowish dust of the town.

"I rather thought," the Chaplain says, hesitating, as Saxham, without lifting his eyes, turns his square, white face upon the visitor, "that you said 'Come in'?"

"Come in, and shut the door, and sit down," says Saxham heavily and thickly. And Julius does so, and, occupying the single cane-seated chair the bedroom

boasts, glows upon Saxham with a sincerity of affection and a simplicity of admiration pleasant to see, and asks in his thin, sweet voice how things are going.

"Things *are* going," Saxham returns, seeming to wake from a heavy brown study. "You could not put it better or more clearly. Will you smoke?" He pitches a rubber tobacco-pouch to the Chaplain, who catches it, and the treasured box of matches that comes after, and as one man sparingly fills a well-browned meerschaum, and the other a blackened briar-root, with the weed that grows more rare and precious with every hour of these days of dearth: "That's one of the things that are going quickest after perchloride of mercury, carbolic, and extract of beef. As a fact, we are using formaldehyde as an anæsthetic in minor operations; and violet powder and starch, upon the external use of which I laid an embargo weeks ago, to the great indignation of the younger nurses, are being employed instead of arrowroot. And the more the medical stores diminish, the more the patients come rolling in."

"And each new want that arises, and each new difficulty that crops up, finds in you the man to meet it and overcome it," says the Chaplain fervently. He is disposed to make a hero of this brilliant surgeon who has saved his life, and his enthusiasm is only marred by Saxham's painfully-apparent lack of belief in certain vital spiritual truths that are the daily bread of fervent Christian souls. Now that he has become aware of the black band upon the sleeve of the jacket that lies across Saxham's knees, where he sits upon the end of the cot-bed that, with a tiny chest of drawers and a hanging bookshelf laden with volumes and instrument-cases, completes the

furnishing of the narrow room, he says, with sympathy in his gentle voice and in the brown eyes that have the soft lustre of a deer's or of a beautiful woman's:

"I am sorry to see this, Saxham. You have lost a friend?"

"*Lost a friend?*"

Saxham, echoing the last three words, stares at the Chaplain in a strange, dull way, and then forgets him for a minute or more. Baths are not to be had in Gueldersdorp in these days, and though it is not Sunday, when bathing in the river becomes a possibility, the Chaplain observes that the Doctor's thick, close-cropped black hair is wet, and that broad streaks of shining moisture are upon his pale, square face, and that he breathes as though he had been running. But perhaps he has been sluicing his head in the washstand basin, thinks the Chaplain. No; the basin has not recently been used. And then it occurs to Julius, but not until he has noticed the starting veins and corded muscles on the backs of the hands that are clenched upon the jacket, that Saxham is suffering.

"I always said he felt a great deal more than he permitted himself to show," reflects the man of Religion looking at the man of Medicine. "And the absence of belief in Divine Redemption and a Future State must terribly intensify the pain of a bereavement. If I only knew how to comfort him!" And all he can do is to ask, still in that tone of sympathy, when the Funeral is to be.

"Perhaps about the midday coffee-drinking," says Saxham heavily, "they would scrape a hole and dump

him in. But they're not over fond of risks, and they would probably leave him where he is till nightfall."

Julius Fraithorn longs, more than ever, that eloquence and inspiration were his to employ in the healing of the man who has raised himself almost from the dead. But he can only falter something about the inscrutable designs of Providence, and not a sparrow falling to the ground unnoticed. And he expresses, somewhat tritely, the hope that Saxham's friend was prepared to meet his end.

"I don't exactly suppose he expected it. He had a right to count upon pulling off the match," says Saxham, with a dreary shadow of a grin, "because a better man behind a gun than Father Noah you wouldn't easily meet. And Boers are fine shots, as a rule."

"Boers.... A Boer.... I thought you told me you had lost a friend?" Mild astonishment is written on the Chaplain's face. And Saxham looks up, and the other sees that his eyeballs are heavily injected with blood, and that the vivid blue of their irises has strangely faded.

"I gave him every opportunity to be my friend," says the dull voice heavily, "by moving out from cover, even by standing up. But no good. He suspected a ruse, and it worried him. Then he climbed a tree, emptied his bandolier at me from a perch of vantage among the branches, and had started to refill it from a fresh package, when I got the chance, and brought him down spreadeagled. And so ends Father Noah."

The Chaplain comprehends fully now, turns pale, and shudders. A blue line marks itself about his mouth; he is conscious of a qualm of positive nausea

as he says:

"You—you don't mean you have been talking of a man you have shot?"

"Just so," assents Saxham, and the sentence that follows is not uttered aloud. "And I wish with all my soul that the man had shot me!"

"And this is War," says Julius Fraithorn. He pulls out his handkerchief and wipes his damp forehead and the beady blue lines about his mouth, and the crack and rattle of rifle-fire sweeping over the veld and through the town, and the ping, ping, ping! of Mauser bullets flattening on the iron gutter-pipe and the corrugated iron of the roof above them seem to answer "Certainly, War."

"Why, you look sick, man," says Saxham the surgeon, whose keen professional eye has not missed the Chaplain's pallor, though the other Saxham is still dazed and blind, and stupefied by the blow that has been dealt him by Lady Hannah's gold fountain-pen. He leans forward, and lightly touches one of the Chaplain's thin wrists, suspecting him of a touch of fever, or town-water dysentery. But Julius jerks the wrist away.

"I am perfectly well. It was—the way in which you spoke just now that rather—rather——"

"Revolted you, eh?" says Saxham, again with the dim shadow of a smile. "Revealed me as a brute and a savage. Well, and why not, if I choose to be one or the other, or both? You Churchmen believe in the power of choice, don't you? Prove to a man that there is something worth having in the bowels of the earth, he burrows like a mole and gets it. Let him

once see utility in flying, give him time and opportunity, and he will fly. So if it is to his interests to be clean-lived, high-minded, exemplary, he will be all these things to admiration. Or, if he should happen to have lost the *goût* for virtue, if he determines that Evil shall be his good, he will make it so." He smiled dourly. "Deprive him of a solid reason for living, he can die. Hold up before his dying eyes the prospect of continued existence under hopeful conditions, he takes up his bed and walks, like the moribund paralytic in the Gospel you preach. You're a living proof of the human power of working miracles.... Granted I cut away a tumour from under your breast-bone more skilfully than a certain percentage of surgeons could have done it. But what brought you safely through the operation, healed your wound by the first intention, and set you on your legs again? I'll trouble you to tell me?"

"The mercy and the grace of God," says the Chaplain, "manifested in His unworthy servant through your science and your skill."

"You employ the technical terminology of your profession," Saxham answers, with a shrug.

The blank stare and the congested redness have gone out of his eyes, and his voice is less dull and toneless. He is coming back to his outward self again, even while the inner man lies mangled and bleeding, crushed by that tremendous broadsword stroke of Fate that has been dealt him by the gold pen of Lady Hannah, and he is ready enough to argue with the Chaplain. He gets off the bed and slips on his jacket, takes a turn or two across the narrow floor-space, then leans against the distempered wall beside the window, puffing at his jetty briar-root, his muscular

arms folded on his great chest, his powerful shoulders bowed, his square, black head thrust forward, and his blue eyes coolly studying Julius as he talks.

"Let me—without rubbing your cloth the wrong way—put the case in mine. Your belief in a Power that my reason tells me is non-existent stimulated your nervous centres, roused and sustained in you the determination without which my science and my skill—and I do not value them lightly, I assure you—would have availed you nothing. You said to yourself, 'If God will it, I shall get over this,' and because *you* willed it, it was so. Were I a drunkard, an outcast, the very refuse of humanity, tainted with vice to the very centre of my being, I have but to will to be sober and live decently, and while I continue to will it, I shall be what I desire to be."

Saxham's eyes hold Julius's, and challenge them. But no shadow of a Dop Doctor who once reeled the streets of Gueldersdorp rises from those clear brown depths as the speaker ends, "Don't underestimate the power of the Human Will, Fraithorn, for it can remove mountains, and raise the living dead."

"Nor do you venture to deny the Power of the Almighty Hand, Saxham," answers the thin, sweet voice of the Churchman; "because It strewed the myriad worlds in the Dust of the The Infinite, and set the jewelled feathers in the butterfly's wing, and forged the very intellect whose power you misuse in uttering the boast that denies It. Think again. Can you assure me with truth that you have never, in the stress of some great mental or physical crisis, cried to Heaven for help when the struggle was at its worst? Think again, Saxham."

But Saxham obstinately shakes his head, still smiling. As he stands there transfigured by the dark, fierce spirit that has come upon him and possessed him, there is something about the hulking man with the square, black head and the powerful frame, that breathes of that superb and terrible Prince of the Heavenly Hierarchy who fell through a kindred sin, and the priest in Julius shudders, recognising the tremendous power of such a nature as this, whether turned towards Evil or bent to achieve Good. The while, in letters of delicate, keen flame, the denier sees written on the tables of his inward consciousness the utterance that once broke from him, as, racked and tortured in body and in soul, he wrestled with his devil on that unforgettable night.

"O God! if indeed Thou Art, and I must perforce return to live the life of a man amongst men, help me to burst the chains that fetter me. Help me—oh, help me to be free!"

And in his heart he knows that the desperate prayer has been granted. But in this new-born, curious mood of his he will not yield, but combats his own innermost conviction, being, in a strange, perverted way, even prouder of this Owen Saxham who has gone down of his own choice to the muddiest depths of moral and physical decadence, and come up of the strength of his own will from among the hideous things that hang suspended and drifting in the primeval sludge, than he ever was of the man before his fall. His is a combative nature, and the great blow he has sustained this day in the wreck and ruin of his raft of hope has left him quivering to the centre of his being with resentment that strikes back.

"Think again yourself. Ask yourself whether the Deity

who creates, preserves, blesses, punishes, slays, and raises up, is the natural outcome of man's need of such a Being, or His own desire of Himself? And which conception is the greater—that the God in whom you Churchmen and the millions of lay-folk who recognise you as Divinely-appointed teachers believe, should have commanded, 'Let the universe exist,' and have been obeyed, or that the stupendous pigmy Man should have dared to say, 'Let there be God,' and so created Him?"

He laughs jarringly as he knocks the ashes out of the blackened pipe upon the corner of the window-ledge.

"Give credit to the human imagination and the human will for inventing a personage so useful to the Christian Churches as the Devil. For as in the beginning it was necessary for Man to build up Heaven and set his God therein, so, to throw His unimaginable purity and inconceivable perfection into yet more glorious relief, it was required that Hell should be delved out and the objective personality of Satan conceived and kennelled there, and given just sufficient power to pay the marplot where the Divine plans are concerned, and just enough malevolence to find amusement in the occupation. What should we do, where should we be, without our Satanic *souffre-douleur*—our horned scapegoat, our black puppet, without whose suggestions we should never have erred, whose wooden head we bang when things go wrong with us," says Saxham bitterly. He reaches out a hand for the tobacco-pouch and his glance falls upon the day's issue of the *Siege Gazette* lying on the parquet linoleum, where it has fallen from his hand a little while ago. He stoops and picks it up, and offers it to Julius.

"There's the announcement of an engagement here ——" He smooths the crumpled sheet, holds it under the Chaplain's eye, and points to the two last paragraphs of the "Social Jottings" column. "Take it as an instance.... Did Heaven play the matchmaker here, or has Hell had a finger in the matrimonial pie? Or has the blind and crazy chance that governs this desolate world for me, tipped the balance in favour of one young rake, who may be saved and purified and renewed by such a marriage, while his elder in iniquity is doomed to be wrecked upon it, ruined by it, destroyed through it, damned socially and morally because of it ..."

The fierce words break from Saxham against his will. He resents the betrayal of his own confidence savagely, even as he utters them. But they are spoken, beyond recall. And the effect of the paragraph upon the Chaplain is remarkable. His meek, luminous brown eyes blaze with indignation. He is aflame, from the edge of his collar—a patent clerical guillotine of washable xylonite, purchased at a famous travellers' emporium in the Strand—to the thin, silky rings of dark hair that are wearing from his high, pale temples. He says, and stutters angrily in saying:

"This is a lie—a monstrous misstatement which shall be withdrawn to-morrow!"

"How do you know that?"

The Chaplain crushes the *Siege Gazette* into a ball, pitches it into a corner of the room, grabs his Field-Service cap and the cane he carries in lieu of the carbine or rifle without which the male laity of Gueldersdorp and a good many of the women do not stir abroad, and makes a stride for the door. He

meets there Saxham, whose square face and powerful figure bar his flaming exit.

"It is enough that I do know it. Kindly allow me to pass."

"What are you going to do?"

The Chaplain is plainly uncertain, as he wrestles with the clerical guillotine of washable xylonite, and stammers something about unwarrantable liberty and a lady's reputation! And Saxham recognises that Saxham is not the only sufferer from the festering smart of jealousy, and that the vivid red-and-white carnation-tinted beauty of the delicate face in its setting of red-brown hair has grievously disturbed, if it has not altogether dissipated, the pale young Anglican's views of the celibate life.

Agnostic and Churchman, denier and believer, have split on the same amatory rock. The knowledge breathes no sympathy in the Dop Doctor.

He observes the Chaplain's face, dispassionately and yet intently, as in the old Hospital days he might have studied the expression of a monkey or a guinea-pig, or other organism upon which he was experimenting with some new drug. And the Reverend Julius demands, with resentful acerbity:

"What are you staring at? Do you imagine that the colour of my cloth debars me from—from taking the part of a lady whose name has been dragged before the public? I shall call at the office where this rag is published, and insist upon a contradiction of this—this *canard*!"

"Don't you know who edits the rag?" asks Saxham raspingly. "Do you suppose that any unauthorised

announcement, or statement that has not been officially corroborated would be allowed to pass? The paragraph comes from an authoritative source, you may be sure!"

"I am in a position to disprove it, from whatever source it comes!" cried the Chaplain hotly. "He shall contradict it himself, if there is necessity. He may be a prodigal and a rake—he bears that reputation—but at least he is not a liar and a scoundrel."

"Who?" Saxham's heart is drubbing furiously. A cool, vivifying liquid like ether seems to have passed into his blood. His quiet, set, determined face and masterful, observant eyes oppose the Chaplain's heat and indignation, as if these were waves of boiling lava beating on a cliff of granite. "Who is not a liar and a scoundrel?"

"I speak of Lord Beauvayse," says the Reverend Julius Fraithorn in the high-pitched voice that shakes with rage. "He is a married man, Saxham; I have incontrovertible testimony to prove it. He gave his name to the woman who was his mistress a week before he sailed for Cape Town. He——"

There is a strange rattling noise in the throat of the man who listens. Julius looks at him, and his own resentment appears, even to himself, as impotent and ridiculous as the anger of a child. If just before it has seemed to him that he has heard the voice of mankind's arch-enemy speaking with Saxham's mouth, he discerns at this moment, reflected in Saxham's, the face of the primal murderer. And being, as well as a sincere and simple-hearted clergyman, something of a weakling, he is shocked to silence.

XLVI

An instant, and Saxham's own face looks calmly at the dazed Chaplain, and the curt, brusque voice demands:

"What is this incontrovertible testimony?"

"A letter," says Julius breathlessly, "from a person who saw the entry of the marriage at the Registrar's office where it took place."

"Is anyone else in possession of this information?"

"With the exception of the Registrar and the witnesses of the marriage, up to the middle of last September, when the letter was written, nothing had leaked out. I received the communication by the last mail from England that was delivered at the Hospital before I underwent the operation."

"That was the last mail that got through. Who was your correspondent?"

"One of the senior officiating priests of St. Margaret's, Wendish Street, the London church where I did duty as junior curate."

"Have you kept the letter?"

"It is in my desk at my hotel, with some other correspondence of Father Tatham's. You may see it if you wish."

"I will see it. In the meanwhile, let me have the pith of it. This clergyman—happening to visit a Registrar's office—— Where was the office?"

"At Cookham-on-Thames, where Father Tatham has

established a Holiday Rest Home for the benefit of our London working lads"—the Chaplain begins. He is sitting on the end of the bed, weak and worn and exhausted with the emotions that have torn him in the last half-hour. Beads of perspiration thickly stud the high temples, out of which the flushing colour has sunk; his cheeks are pallid and hollow. His eyes have lost their fire; his muscles are flaccidly relaxed; his sloping shoulders stoop; his long, limp hands hang nervelessly at his sides.

"One moment." Saxham glances at the gold chronometer that was a presentation from the students of St. Stephen's years ago. It is rather typical of the man that, even when under stress of his heroic thirst he has pawned the watch for money wherewith to buy whisky, he should have only borrowed upon it such small sums as are easily repaid. He has yet another five minutes to bestow in listening to the Chaplain's story, yet even as he returns the chronometer to its pocket, his quick ear catches the frou-frou of feminine petticoats outside the door. He opens it, frowning. A nurse is standing there with a summons in her face. She delivers her low-toned message, receives a brusque reply, and rustles down the corridor between the long lines of pallets as Saxham draws back his head and shuts the door, and, setting his great shoulders against it, and facing Julius, orders:

"Go on!"

Julius goes on:

"At Roselawn Cottage—a pretty place of the toy-residence description, standing in charming gardens not far from the Holiday Rest Home, lived a lady—an actress very popular in Musical Comedy—who was

known to be the mistress of Lord Beauvayse. I need hardly tell you the Father touched on the unpleasant features of the story as delicately as possible——"

"Without doubt. But—get on a little quicker," says Saxham grimly, jerking his head towards the door. "For I am wanted. And don't speak loud, for there are people on the other side there. With regard to this woman—actress, or whatever she may be——?"

"With all her moral laxities," goes on Julius, "Miss Lessie Lavigne——"

"Ah, I know the name," says Saxham sharply. "On with you to the end. 'With all her moral laxities——'"

"Miss Lessie Lavigne is a generous, kindly, charitable young woman," goes on Julius. "And the Holiday Home has benefited largely by her purse. She is known to the Matron; and Father Tatham—having occasion to visit the Registrar's office at Cookham on the 29th of last June, for the purpose of looking up the books, with the Registrar's consent, and satisfying himself of the existence of the entry regarding a marriage between one of our young fellows then at the Home and a girl he very foolishly married when on a hopping excursion in the autumn of the previous year—Father Tatham encountered Miss Lavigne—or Lady Beauvayse, to give her her proper title——"

"In the Registrar's office?"

"In the act of quitting the Registrar's outer office," says the burnt-out Julius in a weary voice, "in the company of Lord Beauvayse, and followed by his valet and a woman who probably were witnesses; for when the Father entered the inner office the register

was lying open on the table, the entry of the marriage still wet upon the page."

"And your religious correspondent pried first," says Saxham, with savage irony, "and afterwards tattled?"

"And afterwards, seeing in the *Times* that Lord Beauvayse was under orders for South Africa, mentioned his accidental discovery when writing to me," says Julius Fraithorn wearily.

"That will do. When can I see the letter at your hotel? The sooner the better," says Saxham, with a curious smile, "for all purposes. Can you walk there with me now? Very well"—as Julius assents—"that is arranged, then."

"What is to be done, Saxham?" Julius stumbles up. The fires that burned in him a few moments ago are quenched; his slack hand trembles irresolutely at his beautiful weak mouth, and his deer-like eyes waver.

"I advise you," says Saxham, "to leave the doing of what is to be done to me." His own blue eyes have so strange a flare in them, and his heavy form seems so alive and instinct with threatening and dangerous possibilities, that Julius falters:

"You believe Lord Beauvayse has been a party to—has wilfully compromised Miss Mildare? You—you mean to remonstrate with him? Do you—do you think that he will listen to a remonstrance?"

"He will find it best in this instance," says Saxham dourly.

"Do not—do not be tempted to use any violence, Saxham," urges the Chaplain nervously, looking at the tense muscles of the grim, square face and the

purposeful right hand that hovers near the butt of the Doctor's revolver. "For your own sake as much as for his!"

Saxham's laugh is ugly to hear.

"Do you think that Lord Beauvayse would wind up as top-dog if it came to a struggle between us?"

"It must not come to a struggle, Saxham," says the Chaplain, very pale. "We—we are under Martial Law. He is your superior officer." (Saxham, Attached Medical Staff, holds the honorary rank of Lieutenant in Her Majesty's Army.) "Remember, if Carslow—the man who killed Vickers, of the *Pittsburg Trumpeter*"—he refers to a grim tragedy of the beginning of the siege—"had not been medically certified insane, they would have taken him out and shot him."

Saxham shrugs his massive shoulders, and with the utter unmelodiousness that distinguishes the performance of a man devoid of a musical ear, whistles a fragment of a little tune. It is often on the lips of another man, and the Doctor has picked it up unconsciously, with one or two other characteristic habits and phrases, and has fallen into the habit of whistling it as he goes doggedly, unwearyingly, upon his ever-widening round of daily duties. It helps him, perhaps, though it gets upon the nerves of other people, making the younger nurses, not unmindful of his arbitrary action in the matter of the violet powder, want to shriek.

"The Military Executive would be perfectly welcome to take me out and shoot me, if first I might be permitted to look in at Staff Bomb proof South, and render Society the distinguished service of ridding it of Lord Beauvayse. Who's there?"

Saxham reopens the door, at which the nurse, now returned, has knocked. The tired but cheerful-faced young woman, in an unstarched cap and apron, and rumpled gown of Galatea cotton-twill, informs the Doctor that they have telephoned up from Staff Bomb proof South Lines, and that the password for the day is "Honour."

"You are going to him now?" asks the Chaplain anxiously and apprehensively.

"Oddly enough, I have been sent for to attend to a shell casualty," says Saxham, picking up and putting on his Service felt, and moving to take down the canvas wallet that is his inseparable companion, from the hook on which it hangs. "Or, rather, Taggart was; and as he has thirty diphtheria cases for tracheotomy at the Children's Hospital, and McFadyen's hands are full at the Refugees' Infirmary, the Major asks if I will take the duty. It's an order, I suppose, couched in a civil way."

He swings the heavy wallet over his shoulders, and picks up his worn hunting-crop.

"And so, let's be moving," he says, his hand upon the door-knob. "Your hotel is on my way. I may need that letter, or I may not. And in any case I prefer to have seen it before I meet the man."

"One moment." The Chaplain speaks with a strained look of anxiety, squeezing a damp white handkerchief into a ball between his palms. "You have taken upon yourself the duty of bringing Lord Beauvayse to book over this—very painful matter.... I

should like ... I should wish you to leave the task of enlightening Miss Mildare to me."

"To you. And why?"

Saxham waits for the answer, a heavy figure filling up the doorway, with scowling brows, and sullen eyes that carefully avoid the Chaplain's face.

"Because I—because in inflicting upon her what must necessarily be a—a painful humiliation"—the Rev. Julius clears his throat, and laboriously rolls the damp handkerchief-ball into a sausage—"I wish to convince Miss Mildare that my respect and my—esteem for her have—not diminished."

"And how do you propose to drive this conviction home?"

The Reverend Julius flushes to the ear-tips. The coldness of the questioning voice gives him a nervous shudder. He says with an effort, looking at the thick white, black-fringed lids that bide the Doctor's queer blue eyes:

"By offering Miss Mildare the honourable protection of my name. My views, as regarding the celibacy incumbent upon an anointed servant of the altar, have, since I knew her, undergone a—a change.... And it occurs to me, when she has got over the first shock of hearing that she has been deceived and played with by a person of Lord Beauvayse's lack of principle——"

"That she may be induced to look with favour on the parson's proposal?" comments Saxham with an indifference to the feelings of the person he addresses that is positively savage. The raucous tones flay Julius's sensitive ears, the terrible blue eyes

blaze upon him, scorch him. He falters:

"I—I trust my purpose is pure from vulgar self-seeking? I hope my attitude towards Miss Mildare is not unchivalrous—or ungenerous?"

"In manipulating her disadvantage to serve your own interests," says Saxham's terrible voice, "you would undoubtedly be playing a very low-down game."

Julius laughs, shortly and huffily.

"A low-down game!... Ha, ha, ha! You don't mince your words, Doctor!"

"I can phrase my opinion even more plainly, if you desire it," returns Saxham brutally. "To bespatter a rival for the gaining of an advantage by contrast is a Yahoo's trick to which no decent gentleman would stoop."

"At a pinch," retorts the Chaplain, stung to the point of being sarcastic, "your 'decent gentleman' would be likely to remember the old adage, 'All's fair in Love and——'"

"Exactly. All *is* fair," returns Saxham, squaring his dogged jaws at the other, and folding his great arms upon his deep wide chest. "And all shall be, please to understand it. It is, unfortunately, necessary that Miss Mildare should be undeceived as regards Lord Beauvayse. But the painful duty of opening her eyes will be undertaken by that"—the break before the designation is scathingly contemptuous—"by that—distinguished nobleman himself, and by no other."

"How can you compel the man to give himself away?" demands the Reverend Julius incredulously. Saxham answers, mechanically opening and closing

his small, muscular surgeon's hand, and watching the flexions and extensions of the supple fingers with an ugly kind of interest:

"I shall compel him to. How doesn't concern you at the moment. What matters is—your parole of honour that you will never by word, or deed, or sign disclose to Miss Mildare that Lord Beauvayse was not, when he engaged himself to marry her, in a position to fulfil his matrimonial proposals. Short of betraying your rival, you are at liberty to further your own views as may seem good to you. The plan of campaign that I, in your place, should choose might not find favour in your eyes...."

His look bears upon the younger man with intolerable weight, his heavily-shouldered figure seems to swell and fill the room. Julius is clearly conscious of hating his saviour, and the consciousness is acid on his palate as he asks, with a wry smile:

"What would your plan be if you were in my place?"

"To praise where a rival was worthy of praise; to be silent where it would be easy to depreciate; to win her from him, not because of my own greater worth, but in spite of the worst she could know of me. That would, in my opinion, be a conquest worthy of a man."

The pupils of the speaker's flaming blue eyes have dwindled to mere pin-points, a rush of blood has darkened the square pale face, to sink away again and leave it opaquely colourless, as Saxham says with cool distinctness:

"And now, before we leave this room, I must trouble

you for that promise—oath, if you feel it would be more in your line of business. I don't possess a copy of the Scriptures, but I think that is a Crucifix you wear upon your watch-chain?"

It is. And when the Reverend Julius has kissed the sacred symbol with shaking lips, and taken the oath as Saxham dictates, his heart tattooing furiously under the baggy khâki jacket, and an angry pulse beating in his thin cheek, Saxham adds, with the flickering shadow of a smile, as he opens the door, and signs to the Chaplain to pass out before him:

"You observe, I have turned the weapons of your profession against you. Exactly as—replying to your question of a moment back with regard to compelling—exactly as I intend to do in the case of Lord Beauvayse!"

He motions to the other to pass out before him, and locks the door upon his stuffy little sanctum whose shelves are piled with a heterogeneous confusion of tubes and bottles, books and instruments, specimens of foodstuffs under the process of analysis for values, and carefully-sealed watch-glasses containing choice cultures of deadly microbes in bouillon, before he leads his way down the long corridor, where narrow pallets, upon which sick men and boys are stretched, range along the walls upon either hand, and the air is heavy with the taint of suppurating wounds, and the hot, sickly breath of fever and malaria.

He walks quickly, his keen blue eyes glancing right and left with the effect of carelessness, yet missing nothing. He stops, and loosens the bandage, and relieves the swollen limb. He delays to kneel a moment beside one low pillow, and turn gently to the light a face that is ghastly, with its bristly beard

and glassy, staring eyes, and its pallor that is of the hue of old wax, and lay it gently back again as he beckons to the nurse to bring the screens, and hide the Dead from the sight of the living.

He is in his element; salient and masterful and strong. But the haggard eyes that turn upon him do not shine with gratitude. He has not reached these hearts. They accuse him, quite unjustly, of a liking for cutting and carving. They suspect him, quite correctly, of being in no hurry for the ending of the siege. How should he be, when, these strenuous days once over, he sees nothing before him but the murky blackness of the night out of which he came, from which he has emerged for one brief draught of renewed joy in living before the dark shall close over him again, and wrap him round for ever?

He has suffered horribly of late. But at the worst his work has never failed to bring relief and distraction. Pure loyalty to a man in whom he believes, has been the main-spring of his unflagging strength. He is not liked or popular in any way, though Surgeon-Major Taggart upholds him manfully, and McFadyen is loyal to the old bond. His harshness repels regard, his coldness blights confidence, and so, though he is admired for his dazzling skill in surgery, for his dogged perseverance and unremitting power of application, for his fine horsemanship and iron nerve; he is not regarded with affection.

He is not in the least aware of it, to do him justice, when his rough ironies and his brusque repartees give offence. In the heyday of his London success he has not truckled to Rank, or Influence, or Affluence. The owner of a gouty or a varicose leg has never had the more civil tongue from Saxham that the uneasy

limb or its fellow was privileged upon State occasions to wear the Garter. He trod upon corns then, as he treads upon them now, without being aware of it, as he goes upon his way.

Julius goes with him, rent by apprehensions, stealing nervous side-glances at the impassive, opaque-skinned face as Saxham swings along with his powerful, rather lurching gait over the ploughed and littered waste that divides the Hospital from the town beyond it. He speaks once or twice, but Saxham seems not to hear.

The Doctor is listening to a dialogue that is as yet unspoken. He is crushing a resistance that has not yet been made. In imagination his small, strong, muscular hands are gripped about the throat of the man who has lied to her and deceived her; and he is listening with joy to the gurgling, choking efforts to phrase a prayer for mercy, or utter a final defiance; and he sees with grim pleasure how the fine skin blackens under his deadly hold, and how the lazy, beautiful, grey-green eyes, no longer sleepy or defiant, but staring and horribly bloodshot, are already rolling upwards in the death-agony. The primitive savage that is in every man lusts at a juncture such as this, to kill with the bare hands rather than to slay with any weapon known to civilisation.

"Let him look to it how he deals with her! Let him look to it!"

How long it seems since Saxham muttered those words, turning sullenly away to recross the stepping-stones, leaping from boulder to boulder as the river wimpled and laughed in mockery of his clumsy tender of protection and her rejection of it, and

Beauvayse's tall figure stood, erect and triumphant, on the flower-starred bank, waiting to recommence his wooing until the intruder should be gone, divining, as Saxham had instinctively known, the hidden passion that rent and tortured him, glowing with the consciousness of secret mastery....

If this meek, thin-blooded young clergyman who walks beside him might have won her, it seems to Saxham that he could have borne it. But that Beauvayse of all others should venture to approach her, presume to rear an image of himself in the shrine of her pure breast; win her from her high aims and lofty ideals with a bold look and a few whispered words, and, having thrown his honourable name into the lap of a light woman as indifferently as a jewelled trinket, should dare to offer Lynette Mildare dishonour, is monstrous, hideous, unbearable....

How comes it that she of all women should be so easily allured, so lightly drawn aside? Was there no baser conquest within reach that this white, virginal, slender saint should become *his* prey? Shall she be made even as those others of whom she spoke, when the veil of a girlish innocence was drawn aside, and strange and terrible knowledge looked out of those clear eyes, and she said, in answer to his question:

"They are the most unhappy of all the souls that suffer upon earth. For they are the slaves, and the victims, and the martyrs of the unrelenting, merciless, dreadful pleasures of men...."

Of men like Beauvayse.

Not only swart and shaggy, or pale and bloated beast-men, or white-haired, toothless, blear-eyed

satyrs grown venerable in vice. But beautiful, youthful profligates, limbed like the gods and fauns of the old Greek sculptors; soft of skin, golden of hair, with sleepy eyes like green jewels, soft persuasive voices with which to pour poisoned words into innocent and guileless ears, and the bold, brave blood of old-time heroes running in their veins, prompting them to the doing of dashing, reckless, gallant deeds, no less than sins of lust and luxury.

Let him look to it, this splendid young soldier with the ancient name, hope of his House, pride of his Regiment. Let him look to it how he has dealt with her, who had no thought or dream but to save others from the fate he destines for her, until his cursed, beautiful face smiled down into her own. For every lying oath he has sworn to her, for every false promise made to the wrecking of her maiden peace, for every kiss those innocent lips have been despoiled of, for every touch of his that has soiled her, for every breath of his that has scorched the white petals of the Convent-reared lily, he shall pay the price.

Silently Saxham registers this oath upon that beloved red-brown head, since he denies its Maker His honour, and the whirling blackness that is within him is rent and cloven, for one blinding instant, by the levin-fires of Hell. He knows thenceforward what he will do, as he walks with the pale Chaplain between the shell-torn houses, and along the littered streets, where men and women and children, thin and haggard and listless with hunger, and the deadly inertia of long confinement, pass and repass as indifferently as though no guns were battering and growling from the low grey hills south and east, and the incessant rattle of rifle-fire were the innocent

expenditure of blank cartridge incidental to a sham fight.

They reach the Chaplain's hotel, and go to his room. Saxham waits silently while Julius searches for and finds Father Tatham's letter, takes it and reads it attentively, puts it carefully away in a worn notecase, restores the notecase to the inner pocket of his jacket, and, without a nod or word of farewell, is gone.

XLVII

To the remarkably complete system of underground wires installed by the Garrison Telephone Corps, Lady Hannah Wrynche, on duty at the Convalescent Hospital that was once the Officers' Club, was, upon the Thursday that saw the publication of the string of paragraphs previously quoted from the *Siege Gazette*, indebted for what she afterwards described with ruefulness as a "heckled morning."

Once a week the "Social Jottings," bubbling from the effervescent Gold Pen, descended like rain upon the parched soil of drouthy Gueldersdorp. To make gossip where there is none is as difficult as making bricks without clay, or trimming a hat when you are a member of the Wild Birds' Protection Society, and plumage is Fashion's latest cry. Under the circumstances a genuine item of general and public interest was a pearl of price. And yet something had told the little lady that the ruthless Blue Pencil of Supreme Authority would deprive her of the supreme

joy of casting it before the readers of the *Siege Gazette*. She seemed to hear him saying, in the pleasant voice she knew so well:

"No personalities shall be published in a paper I control."

He had said that on Sunday, when she had pleaded for a freer hand. Well, he could hardly call the announcement of an engagement a personality, and, supposing he did, how easy to convince him that it was nothing of the kind!

She dashed off her description of the Convent kettledrum, and added the paragraphs we know of, each one accentuated by an explosion of asterisks, and gave the blotty sheets to Young Evans, who combined in his sole person the offices of sub-editor, engineer, chief-compositor, feeder, and devil.

Young Evans, who, next to the single-cylinder printing-press driven by the little oil-engine that had sustained a shell-casualty at the beginning of the siege, adored Lady Hannah, vanished behind the corrugated partition that separated the office from the printing-room, and presently came back in inky shirt-sleeves with a smear of lubricating-oil upon his forehead, and laid the wet slips upon the Editorial table. Then he went back, and fell to tinkering at his machine. Lady Hannah corrected her proof. When she had done she looked at her wrist-watch. In ten minutes Supreme Authority would descend the ladder, wield the Blue Pencil, and depart. Would he have mercy and not sacrifice? The suspense was torturing.

Then a simple plan occurred to her by which Supreme Authority might be—she dared not use the

word "circumvented." "Got round" was even worse; "evaded" sounded nicest. To resist the promptings of her own feminine ingenuity required a greater storage of cold moral force than Lady Hannah desired to possess. She took the editorial scissors, and daintily cut off the three paragraphs from the bottom of the slip.

The thing was done, and the snipped-off paragraphs concealed, as a pair of brown boots, with steel jack-spurs attached, came neatly down the ladder. The Chief gave her his cheery "Good-morning," and congratulated her on looking well. Her cheeks burned and her heart rat-tatted against the hidden paper, as he ran his keen eye down slip after slip, and initialled them for the press. She almost shrieked as he took up the "Social Jottings." The underground office whirled about her as the blue pencil steadily travelled down. Then—he was gone—and the initialled proof lay before her. She had nothing to do but neatly and delicately paste on the bit she had snipped off. This done, she gathered up her various small belongings, swept them into her bag, and went, leaving the passed proof of the "Social Jottings" column waiting for Young Evans with the rest.

In the middle of the night she realised what she had done. But even in a beleaguered town under the sway of Martial Law you cannot hang a lady, or order her out and shoot her for Mutiny and Treason combined. There would be a reprimand; what Bingo pleasantly termed "an official wigging," unless the Blue Pencil could, by any feminine art, be persuaded that it had passed those pars.

But, of course, she would never stoop to such a deception. The ruse she had employed was culpable.

The other thing would be infamous. And—he would be sure to see that the end of the proof-slip had been pasted on.

She slept jerkily, rose headachy, and set out for the Convalescent Hospital in that stage of penitence that immediately precedes hysterical breakdown. She experienced a crisis of the nerves upon meeting a man, who, regardless of quite a brisk bombardment that happened to be going on just then, was walking along reading the *Siege Gazette*. Shirt-sleeved Young Evans had worked until daylight getting the Thursday's issue out. And there was a tremendous run upon copies. Every other person Lady Hannah encountered upon the street seemed to have got one, and to find it unusually interesting. The women especially. None of them were dull, or languid, or dim-eyed this morning. The siege crawl was no longer in evidence. They walked upon springs. Upon the stoep of the Hospital, where the long rows of convalescents were airing, every patient appeared plunged in perusal. Those who had not the paper were waiting, with watering mouths, until those who had would part. A reviving breath seemed to have passed over them, and spots of colour showed in their yellow, haggard faces. They talked and laughed....

Lady Hannah passed in, conscious of an agreeable tingling all down her spine. The hall-porter, a brawny, one-armed ex-Irregular, who had lost what he was wont to term his "flapper" at the outset of hostilities, was too deeply absorbed in spelling out a paragraph of the "Social Jottings" column to salute her. Inside you heard little beyond the crackling of the flimsy sheet, mingled with the comments, exclamations, anticipations, expectations that went

off on all sides, met each other, and rebounded, exploding in coruscations of sparks. Something had happened, something was going to happen, after months and months of eventless monotony. It warmed the thin blood in their veins like comet champagne, and quickened their faded appetites like some salt breath from the far-distant sea.

The flavour of success upon the palate may, like Imperial Tokay, be sensed but once in a lifetime, but you can never forget that once. Out of her gold fountain-pen Lady Hannah had spurted a little ink upon the famished Gueldersdorpians, and their dry bones moved and lived. She knew a fine must be paid for this dizzying draught of popularity, even as she tied on a bibbed apron, and superintended the serving and distribution of the patients' one-o'clock dinner.

Horse-soup, with a few potato-sprouts, and one or two slivered carrots to the gallon, formed the menu to-day. There was no more white bread, and a villainous bannock of crushed oats had to be soaked in your porringer if you had no strength to chew it. Sweetened bran-jelly followed, and upon this the now apologetic but smiling porter, with the intelligence that her ladyship was wanted at the wall-jigger in the Matron's room.

The ring-up came from Hotchkiss Outpost North, where Captain Bingo was this day on duty, *via* the Staff Headquarter office in Market Square, and the voice that filtered to the ear of Lady Hannah was unmistakably that of her spouse, and tinged with a gruffness as unusual as ominous.

"Hullo. Is that you?"

"Qu'il ne vous en déplaise!"

Bingo growled in a perfectly audible aside:

"And devil a doubt. What other woman would jabber French through a telephone?"

"A Frenchwoman would, possibly."

"Don't catch what you're saying. Look here, what made you shove such a whacking bouncer into the *Siege Gazette*?"

"Please put that into English." She underwent a quaking at the heart.

"I say, that announcement about Toby and the Mildare filly is all my eye."

"It isn't all your eye. It's first-hand, fully-authorised fact."

"Rot!"

"Paix et peu! Say rot, if it pleases you!"

"You'll have to withdraw and apologise."

"I can't make out what you're saying."

"It will end in your eating humble-pie. Can you hear that?"

"I can hear that you are in a bearish temper."

"I've reason to be. If a man had written what you have I should punch his head."

"Say that again!"

"I say, if a stranger of the kickable sex had told such a pack of infernal——"

Click!

Lady Hannah hung up the receiver, blew a contemptuous kiss into the gape of the celluloid mouthpiece, and turned to go. There was another ring-up as she reached the door.

"Hallo. Are you the Convalescent Hospital?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Staff Bombproof South. I want to speak to Lady Hannah Wrynche."

"I'm here, Lord Beauvayse."

"I say, I'm going to rag you frightfully. Why on earth have you given us away in that beastly paper?"

"Whom do you mean by 'us'?"

"Well, me and Miss Mildare."

"Didn't you tell me on Sunday that you were engaged?" she demanded indignantly.

"I did." The answer came back haltingly.

"And that you didn't care who knew it?"

"Fact."

"And that you two were going to be married as soon as you could pull off the event?"

"Yes." The voice was palpably embarrassed. "But——"

"Well?"

"But—things you don't mind people knowing look beastly in cold print."

"If I were in your shoes I should think they looked

beautiful."

Nothing but a faint buzz came back. Lady Hannah went on:

"If I were in your shoes, and such a pearl and prize and paragon as Lynette Mildare had consented to marry me, I should want the whole world to envy me my colossal good luck. I should go about in sandwich-boards advertising it. I should buy a megaphone, and proclaim it through that. I should ——"

There was no response beyond the buzzing of the wire. Beauvayse had evidently hung up the receiver.

"Is there any creature upon earth more cowardly than a man engaged?" Lady Hannah demanded of space. There was a futile struggle inside the telephone-box. Somebody else was trying to ring up. She put the receiver back upon the crutches, and—

"*Ting—ting—ting!*" said the bell in a high, thin voice.

"Who is it?" she asked.

The answer came back with official clearness:

"Officer of the day, Staff Headquarters. If you're the Convalescent Hospital, the Colonel would like to speak to Lady Hannah Wrynche."

Her knees became as jelly, and her heart seemed to turn a somersault. She answered in a would-be jaunty voice that wobbled horribly:

"Here—here—is Lady Hannah."

"Hold on a minute, please!"

She held on. She had not shuddered at the end of the

wire for more than a minute when the well-known, infinitely-dreaded voice said in her ear, so clearly that she jumped:

"Lady Hannah there? How d'you do?"

She gulped, and quavered:

"It—it depends on what you're going to say."

"I see." There was the vibration of a stifled laugh, and her heart jumped to meet it. "So you anticipated a hauling over the coals?"

Revived, she shrugged her little shoulders.

"Have I deserved one?"

The voice said, with unmistakable displeasure in it:

"Thoroughly. Why were not the last three paragraphs of the weekly 'Social Jottings' column submitted to me yesterday with the rest?"

She heard herself titter imbecilely. Then a voice, which she could hardly believe her own, said, with a pitiable effort to be gay and natural:

"Weren't they? Perhaps you overlooked them?"

"You know I did not overlook them."

This was the cold, incisive, cutting, rasping voice which Bingo was wont to describe as razors and files. Her ears burned like fire, and her bright, birdlike eyes were round and scared. She gasped:

"Oh ... do you really——"

"I want the truth, please, without quibbling." The voice was harsh and cold, and inexorably

compelling. "Why were those paragraphs not shown to me?"

She winked away her tears.

"Because I was sure you'd blue-pencil them out of existence. And a genuine bit of news is such a roc's egg in these times of scarcity."

"Genuine!"

There was incredulity in the tone.

"Upon my honour as the wife of a British Dragoon."

He said crisply:

"Precipitate publication, even of authentic information, is likely to be resented by the persons concerned."

She remembered, with a sinking at the heart, that one person concerned had already objected.

"Both of them authorised the insertion."

"And the official consent to it was obtained by a trick."

She whispered, her heart in the heels of her Louis Quinze shoes:

"Please—please don't call it that!"

"How can I call it anything else? Besides, has it occurred to you that, should any copies of to-day's issue get through these lines, the Foltlebarres will be thrown into a state of volcanic eruption?"

"If the Foltlebarres aren't absolute beetles they'll jump for joy. How could their boy possibly do

better?"

"I don't see how myself."

"Ah, if you're going to back up Toby, the day is as good as won."

"You're very kind to say so."

The red was dying out of Lady Hannah's ear-tips. That "You're very kind" had a gratified sound. The most rigorous and implacable of men can be buttered, she thought, if the emollient be dexterously applied. And a bright spark of naughty triumph snapped in each of her birdlike black eyes.

"Thanks." He was speaking again. "Apologies for keeping you. You're up to your eyes in Hospital work, I don't doubt."

"There is enough to keep one going."

"Without the additional tax of literary labour." She was conscious of a premonitory, apprehensive chill that travelled from the roots of her hair down her spine, and apparently made its exit at the heels of her Louis Quinze shoes. "So the 'Social Jottings' column will not appear in the *Siege Gazette* after to-day. Good-morning."

"Is that my punishment for insubordination?"

Not a sound in reply. "He must have hung up the receiver and gone away. Oh, horrid, horrid male superiority!" thought Lady Hannah. "To have been put under arrest, even to have been ordered out and shot, would be preferable to being figuratively spanked and put in the corner." She winked away some more tears, and sniffed a little dejectedly. "And only the other day he seemed quite pleased with me,"

she added pensively. Then she shrugged her shoulders, and rang up the Head Hospital, North Veld Road.

"Who you-e?"

It was the sing-song voice of the Barala hall-boy.

"I'm Lady Hannah Wrynche. Is the Reverend Mother on duty in the wards to-day?"

"I go see. You hang-e on."

Lady Hannah hung on until her small remaining stock of patience deserted her. As she stamped her small feet, longing to accelerate the languid movements of the hall-boy with a humanely-wielded hatpin, a whisper in the velvet voice she knew stole across the distance.

"Hannah. Is it you?"

"It's me, Biddy dear."

There was a soft laugh that ended in a sigh. "It is so long since anybody called me that."

"I wouldn't dare to with you looking at me."

"Am I so formidable of aspect? But go on."

"It's not so easy. But I've had an awful morning. Everybody I like best down on me like bricks and m ——" The speaker gulped a sob.

"You are crying, dear!"

"Not a drop. But if you join in the heckling I shall dribble away and dissolve in salt water. It's all about those wretched paragraphs of mine in the *Siege Gazette*. But perhaps you haven't seen it?"

"I have seen it."

"You were quite willing that the *fiançailles* should be made public.... Indeed, you gave me to understand you desired it."

"I was quite willing. I did wish it."

"Yes.... Thank you, dear; that was what I wanted to hear from you. I understand now what the one clapping pair of hands must mean to the actor who is booed by all the rest of the audience. Good-bye, dear."

"Stay.... Who are the persons who disapprove of the announcement?"

"My Bingo, for one. Not that anything the dear old stupid says matters in the slightest. And—and Toby."

"'Toby'?"

"I mean Lord Beauvayse."

"Tell him I quite approve. He should know that in this matter it was for me to decide."

"Certainly, dear."

"Whose is the other objecting voice?"

"The Chief thinks I ... we ... it ... I rather fancy that he used the word 'precipitate' in expressing his opinion."

"Refer him to me if he expresses it again."

"Of course, dear, since you ..."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye, dear. If Biddy Bawne hadn't been a nun,"

reflected Lady Hannah, as she went out of the Matron's office and back to her patients, who had long ago dined, "I think she would have made rather a despotic Empress. '*Refer him to me*,' indeed. What is it, Sergeant? Don't say I'm rung up again."

But the one-armed porter was positive on the subject, and her little ladyship went back. This last communication proved a puzzling one.

"You there?"

"I am Lady Hannah Wrynche. Where are you?"

There was a brief hesitation. A thickish man's voice said:

"I don't know as that matters."

"Who are you?"

There was another hesitation. Then the stranger parried with a question:

"You write them weekly screeds in the *Siege Gazette*?"

"I am responsible for some of the social paragraphs. Kindly say who is speaking?"

"Nobody that matters much. Can you tell me where Miss Mildare lives?"

"Not without knowing who you are."

"You may call me an old friend of hers," aid the thickish, lisping voice, with a sluggish chuckle in it that the little woman at the other end of the wire had heard ... where?...

"If you are an old friend of the young lady you mention, how is it you don't know her address?" she

demanded.

"Keep her address all you want to. Only next time you come alongside her give her a message for me. Ask her if she remembers the Free State Hotel on the veld, three days' trek from Dreipoort, and Bough, who was her friend?"

Lady Hannah repeated:

"'And Bough, who was her friend.' You are Bough ——?"

"*Click!*" Somebody had hung up the receiver.

Lady Hannah spent another bad night, not wholly due to the indigestible nature of a dinner of mule colloped, and locusts fried in batter by Nixey's chef. Staggering in the course of disturbed and changeful dreams, under the impact of sufficient bricks and mortar to rebuild toppledown Gueldersdorp, being hauled over mountains of coals, and getting into whole Gulf Streams of hot water, she was slumberously conscious that these nightmares were less harassing than one nasty, perplexing little vision that kept cropping up among the others. It had no beginning and no end. In it the Matron's room at the Convalescent Hospital and Kink's Family Hotel at Tweipans were somehow mixed up, and the ingenuous Mr. Van Busch, that Afrikander gentleman of British sympathies, whose chivalrous and patriotic sentiments had prompted and urged him to the imperilling of his own skin and the risking of his own liberty in the interests of an English lady masquerading for political reasons as the refugee-

widow of a German drummer, was oddly confused in identity with an uncomfortably mysterious individual who possessed neither features nor name.

"Ask her if she remembers the Free State Hotel on the veld, three days' trek from Dreipoort, and Bough, who was her friend?" the voice would say..

"You are Bough?" she would find herself asking.

There would be a little guttural, horrible laugh, and nothing would answer but the buzzing of the wire.

And then she was wide awake and sitting up in bed, with a thumping heart. She was no longer in any doubt as to the identity of the owner of the voice. Van Busch was in Gueldersdorp ... and however he came, and whatever disguise of person or of purpose sheltered him, his presence boded no good. The merely logical masculine mind doffs hat respectfully before the superiority of feminine intuition.

XLVIII

Saxham, shouldering out of Julius's hotel upon his way to Staff Bombproof South, is made aware that the hundred-foot-high dust-storm that has raged and swirled throughout the morning is in process of being beaten down into a porridge of red mud by a downpour of February rain.

Straight as Matabele spears it comes down, sending pedestrians who have grown indifferent to shell-fire to huddle under cover, adding to the wretchedness of life in trench or bombproof as nothing else can. And the Doctor, biting hard upon the worn stem of the old briar-root, as he goes swinging along through the hissing deluge with his chin upon his breast and his fierce eyes sullenly fixed upon the goal ahead, recalls, even more vividly than upon Sunday, the angry buffalo of Lady Hannah's apt analogy.

He is drenched to the skin, it goes without saying, in a minute or two. So is the Railway Volunteer, who challenges him at the bridge that carries the single-gauge railway southward over the Olopo, in spite of his ragged waterproof and an additional piece of tarpaulin. So is a mounted officer of the Staff, in whom Saxham mechanically recognises Captain Bingo Wrynche, as he goes by at a furious gallop, spurring, and jagging savagely at the mouth of the handsome if attenuated brown charger, who sends stones and mud and water flying from his furious iron-shod hoofs. So is the Barala on guard by the wattled palisade of the native village—a muddy-

legged and goose-fleshy warrior, in a plumed, brimless bowler and leopard-skin kaross, whose teeth can be heard chattering as he stands to attention and brings his gaspipe rifle to the slope. The Chinamen working in the patches of market-garden, where the scant supply of vegetables that command such famine-prices are raised, are certainly sheltered from the wet by their colossal umbrella-hats, but the splashed-up red gruel has imbrued them to the eyes. Yet they continue to labour cheerfully, hoeing scattered shell-fragments out of their potato-drills and removing incrusted masses of bullets that incommode the young kidney-beans, and arranging this ironmongery and metal-ware in tidy piles, possibly with a view to future commerce. And so, with another challenge from a picket, posted between the Barala village and the south trenches, where many of the loyal natives are doing duty, Saxham finds himself on the perilous tongue of land that lies behind Maxim Kopje South, and where the Staff Bombproof is situated.

As the long, low mound comes into view, a dazzling white flash leaps from a fold of the misty grey hills beyond, and one of Meisje's great shells goes screaming and winnowing westwards. Then a sentry of the Irregulars, a battered, shaggy, berry-brown trooper, standing knee-deep in a hole, burrowed in the lee of a segment of stone-dyke that is his shelter, challenges for the last time.

"'Alt! I know you well enough, Doctor." It is a man whose wounded arm was dressed, one blazing day last January, outside the Convent bombproof. "But you'll 'ave to give the countersign. Pass Honour and all's well. But"—the sentry's nostrils twitch as the savour of Saxham's pipe reaches them, and his

whisper of appeal is as piercing as a yell—"if you left a pipeful be'ind you, it wouldn't do no 'arm. Don't pull your pouch out, sir; the lookout officer 'as 'is eye on you. Open it by the feel, an' drop a pinch by the stone near your toe. I'll get it when they relieve me."

Saxham complies, leaving the sentry to gloat distantly over the little brown lump of loose tangled fibres rapidly reducing to sponginess under the downpour from the skies. The long mound of raw red earth, crusted with greenish-yellow streaks of lyddite from the bursting-charges, rises now immediately before him. At its eastern end is a flagstaff displaying the Union Jack. Under the roof of the little penthouse from which the flagstaff rises are sheltered the vari-coloured acetylene lamps that are used for signalling at night.

Midway of the raw mound rises the rear elevation of an officer in dripping waterproofs, who is looking steadily through a telescope out between the long driving lances of the rain, beyond Maxim Kopje South to those mysterious hills, swathed in grey-black folds of storm-cloud, that look so desolate, and whose folds are yet as full of swarming, active, malignant life as the blanket of an unwashed Kaffir. An N.C.O. is posted a little below the officer, whose narrow shoulders and dark hair, showing above the edge of the turned-up collar and below the brim of the Field-Service cap, prove him to be not Beauvayse. And the usual blizzard of rifle-fire, varied by brisk bursts of cannonading, goes on, and the Red Scythe of the Destroyer sweeps over these two figures and about them in the customary way. But even women and children have grown indifferent to these things, and the men have long ceased to be aware of them.

A bullet sings past Saxham's ear, as the acrid exhalations of a stable rise gratefully to his nostrils, recently saluted by the fierce and clamorous smells of the native village. The ground slopes under his feet. He goes down the inclined way that ends in the horses' quarters, and the orderly, who is sitting on an empty ammunition-box outside the tarpaulin that screens off the interior of the officer's shelter, stiffens to the salute, receives a brief message, and disappears within.

Before Saxham rise the bony brown and bay and chestnut hindquarters of half a dozen lean horses, that are drowsing or fidgeting before their emptied mangers. Against the division of a loose-box that holds a fine brown charger, still saddled and steaming, and heavily splashed with mud, there leans a stretcher, which, by the ominous red stains and splashes upon it, has been recently in use.

Upon Saxham's left hand is the shelter for the rank and file. Here several gaunt, hollow-eyed, and hairy troopers are sitting on rough benches at a trestle-table, playing dominoes and draughts, or poring over tattered books by the light of the flickering oil-lamps, with tin reflectors, that hang against the earth walls. None of them are smoking, though several are sucking vigorously at empty pipes; and the rapacious light that glares in every eye as Saxham mechanically knocks out the ashes from his smoked-out briar-root against the side-post of the entrance is sufficient witness to the pangs that they endure.

Perhaps it is characteristic of the Doctor that, with a hell of revengeful fury seething in his heart, and a legion of devils unloosed and shrieking, prompting him to murder, he should have paused to relieve the

tobacco-famine of the sentry, and be moved to a further sacrifice of his sole luxury by the sight of those empty pipes. The old rubber pouch, pitched by a cricketer's hand, flies in among the domino-players, and rebounds from a pondering head, as the orderly comes back, and lifts one corner of the tarpaulin for the Doctor to pass in. A pack of ravening wolves tussling over an unusually small baby might distantly reproduce the scene Saxham leaves behind him. The trestle-table and benches are upset, and men and benches, draughts and dominoes, welter in horrible confusion over the earthen floor, when the scandalised orderly-corporal rushes in to quell the riot, and thenceforward joins the rioters.

They fight like wolves, but the man who rises up from among the rest, clutching the prize, and grinning a three-cornered grin because his upper lip is split, divides the tobacco fairly to the last thread. They even share out the indiarubber pouch, and chew the pieces as long as the flavour lasts. When the thick, fragrant smoke curls up from the lighted pipes, it steals round the edges of the tarpaulin that has dropped behind Saxham, passing in to the wreaking of vengeance upon the thief whose profane and covetous hand has plucked the white lily of the Convent garden.

Now, with that deadly hate surging in his veins, with the lust to kill tingling in every nerve and muscle, he will soon stand in the presence of his enemy, and hers. As he thinks of this, suddenly a bell rings. The sound comes from the north, so it cannot be the bell of the Catholic Church, or that of the Protestant Church, or the bell of the Wesleyan meeting-house, or of the Dutch Kerk.

"*Clang-clang! clang-clang! Clang——*"

The last clang is broken off suddenly, as though the rope has been jerked from the ringer's hands, but Saxham is not diverted by it from his occupation. With that curious fatuity to which the most logical of us are prone, he has been conning over the brief, scorching sentences with which he means to strip the other man's deception bare to the light, and make known his own self-appointed mission to avenge her.

"They telephoned for me, and I have come, but not in the interests of your sick or wounded man. Because it was imperative that I should say this to you: Your engagement to Miss Mildare and your approaching marriage to her were announced in to-day's *Siege Gazette*. You have received many congratulations. Now take mine—liar, and coward, and cheat!"

And with each epithet, delivered with all the force of Saxham's muscular arm, shall fall a stinging blow of the heavy old hunting-crop. There will be a shout, an angry oath from Beauvayse, staggering back under the unexpected, savage chastisement, red bars marring the insolent, high-bred beauty of the face that has bewitched her. Saxham will continue:

"You approached this innocent, inexperienced girl as a lover. You represented yourself to her and to her mother-guardian as a single man. All this when you had already a wife at home in England—a gaudy stage butterfly sleek with carrion-juices, whose wings are jewelled by the vices of men; and who is worthy of you, as you are of her. I speak as I can prove. Here is the written testimony of a reliable witness to your marriage with Miss Lavigne. And now you will go to her and show yourself to her in your true colours. You will undeceive her, or——"

There is a foggy uncertainty about what is to follow after that "or." But the livid flames of the burning hell that is in Saxham throw upon the greyness a leaping reflection that is red like blood. A fight to the death, either with weapons, or, best of all, with the bare hands, is what Saxham secretly lusts for, and savours in anticipation as he goes.

Let the humanitarian say what he pleases. Man is a manslayer by instinct and by will.

And within the little area of this beleaguered town do not men kill, and are not men killed, every day? The conditions are mediæval, fast relapsing into the primeval. The modern sanctity and inviolability attending and surrounding human life are at a discount. Even for children, the grim King of Terrors had become a bugaboo to laugh at; red wounds and ghastly sights are things of everyday experience; there is a slump in mortality.

In those old, far-distant Chilworth Street days, two men who engaged in a battle to the death about a woman desired might have seemed merely savages to Saxham. Here things are different. The elemental bed-rock of human nature has been laid bare, and the grim, naked scars upon it, testifying to the combat of Ice and Fire for the round world's supremacy, will never be quite hidden under Civilisation's green mantle of vegetation, or her toadstool-growths of bricks and mortar, any more.

And the men are well matched. Saxham knows himself the more muscular, but Beauvayse has the advantage of him in years, and is lithe, and strong, and supple as the Greek wrestler who served the sculptor Polycleitos as a model for the Athlete with the Diadem.

It will be a fight worth having. No quarter. And Saxham's breath comes heavily, and his blue eyes have in them a steely glitter, and, as the tarpaulin falls behind him, he shifts to a better grip on the strong old hunting-crop.

Overhead the rain drums deafeningly on the tarpaulins. The long bombproof is heterogeneously furnished with full and empty ammunition-boxes marked A.O.S., a leathern sofa-divan, tattered by spurs and marked by muddy boots, several cane or canvas deck-chairs, and others of the Windsor pattern common to the barrack-room. Arms and accoutrements are in rude racks against the corrugated-iron-panelled walls; a trestle-table covered with oilcloth runs down the middle. It is lighted by a couple of acetylene lamps hanging by their chains from iron bars that cross the trench above, and there is another lamp, green-shaded, upon a bare deal table that stands, strewn with papers, against the farther wall.

A man in shirt-sleeves sits there writing. Another man is busy at a telephone that is fixed against the wall beyond the writing-table. There is something fateful and ominous about the heavy silence in which they do their work. It is broken only by a strange sound that comes almost continuously from—where Saxham does not trouble to ask. It is the groaning, undoubtedly, of the wounded man to whose aid he has been summoned, with the added injunction, "Bring morphia," showing that little further can be done for him, whoever he may be, than to smooth his passage into the Beyond by the aid of the Pain Slayer.

Let him wait, however sore his need, until Saxham

has dealt with his enemy. He is resentfully impatient in the knowledge that neither of the men present is Beauvayse.

Then, as he stands sullen and lowering, the man who has been writing gets up and comes to him. Saxham recognises the keen-featured face with the rusty-brown moustache, and the grip of the lean, hard hand that hauled a Dop Doctor out of the Slough of Despair is familiar. The pleasant voice he likes says something about somebody being very wet. It is Saxham, from whose soaked garments the water is running in streams, and whose boots squelch as he crosses the carpet that has been spread above the floor-tarpaulin. The friendly hand pours out and offers him a sparing measure of that rare stimulant, whisky.

"As preventive medicine. We can't have our Medical Staff men on the sick-list."

Some such commonplace words accompany the proffered hospitality.

"I shall not suffer, thanks. You have a shell-casualty, you have 'phoned us, but before I see your man it is imperative that I should speak to Lord Beauvayse. Where is he?"

"He is here."

"My business with him is urgent, sir."

The man at the telephone makes a sound indicative that a message is coming through. The Chief is beside him instantly, with the receiver at his ear. He looks round for an instant at Saxham as he waits for the intelligence, and the muscles of his face twitch as if under the influence of some strong, repressed

emotion, and the Doctor's practised glance notes the unsteadiness of the uplifted hand. Then he is saying to the officer in charge at Maxim Kopje South:

"The ammunition comes up to-night. Tell Gaylord that we are short-handed here, and shall want him to help on night duty.... Practically as soon as he can join us. No, no better. All for the present ... thanks! Saxham, please come this way."

There is a sleeping-place at the end of the long, narrow, lamp-lit perspective, curtained off from the rude bareness of the outer place. Light shows between the curtains, and they are of plush, in hue a rich, deep red. As that strong colour sinks into his brain, through his intent and glittering eyes, Saxham the man has a sudden furious impulse to tear the deep folds back, with a clash of brazen rings on iron rods, and call to the betrayer who lurks behind them to come out and be dealt with. But that hollow, feeble moaning sounds continuously from the other side, and Saxham the surgeon stays his hand and follows the Colonel in. There are two camp-beds in the small sleeping-place, and a washstand and a folding-chair. A lamp hangs above, and its light falls full upon the face of the man whom he is seeking.

Ah! where are they? His furious anger and his deadly hate, where are they now? Like snow upon the desert they vanish away. How can one rage against this shattered thing, stretched on the pallet of the low cot-bed from which the blankets have been stripped away? First Aid bandages have been not ineffectually applied. Fragments of packing-case have been employed as splints for the broken arm and shattered hand, but, in spite of all that has been done, the beautiful young life is sinking, waning, flowing out

with that ruddy tide that will not be stayed.

The greenish pallor and the sweat of mortal agony are upon the face of Beauvayse, thrown back upon the pillow, and looking upwards to where the deluging rain makes thunder on the tarpaulined roof. The atmosphere is heavy with the sour-sickly smell of blood, and lamp-fumes; he draws each breath laboriously, and exhales it with a whistling sound. Through his clenched teeth, revealed by the lips that are dragged back in the semi-grin of desperate agony, that dumb, ceaseless moaning makes its way despite the gallant effort to restrain it. The one uninjured arm hangs downwards, its restless fingers picking at the bloodstained matting that covers the loose boards of the floor. A sheet has been lightly laid over him. It is dabbled with the prevailing hue, and sinks in an ominous hollow below the breast. And beyond the bottom of it splashed leggings and muddy boots with spurs on them stick out with helpless stiffness.

A flask of brandy—a precious restorative treasured for use in such desperate need as this—stands with a tumbler and a jug of water on the camp washstand that is between the two cot-beds. Upon the second bed sits a big and stoutish man, whose large face, not pink just now, is hidden in his thick, quivering hands. It is Captain Bingo Wrynche, heavy Dragoon, and honest, single-hearted gentleman, to whom belongs the blown and muddy charger drooping in the loose-box outside. The telephone has summoned him in haste from Hotchkiss Outpost North, to see the last of a friend.

XLIX

"It was just before the rainstorm that it happened. He was on the lookout. They have been moving the big gun and the 16-pounder Krupps again, and some of the laagers seem to be shifting, so we have kept an extra eye open of late, by night as well as by day. He was very keen always...."

Already he is spoken of by those who have known and loved him as one who was and has been.

"He had relieved me at 10 a.m. He might have been up over an hour when it happened. The orderly-sergeant had got his mouth at the speaking-tube, in the act of sending down a message; he did not see him hit. It was a shell from their Maxim-Nordenfelt. And when we got to him, the first glance told us there was little hope."

"There is none at all," says Saxham curtly, as is his wont. "A splinter has shattered the lower portion of the spine. The agony can be deadened with an opiate, and the ruptured arteries ligatured. Beyond that there is nothing else to do, though he may live till morning."

"He managed to ask for Wrynche before he swooned, so we 'phoned him at Hotchkiss Outpost North. He got here ten minutes ago, badly cut up, but there has been no recognition of him. Do what you can, Saxham, in the case. Every moment may bring Wrynche's recall. There is another person I should have expected the poor boy to ask for.... That young girl, Saxham, whose heart has to be broken with the news, sooner or later. Perhaps about nightfall, when it will be safe for her to venture. I ought to send an

escort for Miss Mildare?"

The slow, dusky colour rises in Saxham's set, pale face, and as slowly sinks out again. He has been standing in low-toned colloquy with the Chief outside the heavy plush curtains. He turns silently upon his heel and vanishes behind them.

"*Ting—ting—ting!*"

The telephone-bell heralds an urgent recall from Hotchkiss Outpost North. And a beckoning hand summons Captain Bingo from the bedside of his dying friend ere ever the word of parting has been spoken.

"It is for you, Wrynche, as I expected."

"I am ready, sir. Orderly, get my damned brute out!"

The sorrow and love that swell the big man's heart to bursting find rather absurd expression in his savage objurgation of the innocent brown charger. But Captain Bingo, when he stoops over the camp-bed where lies Beauvayse, kisses him solemnly and clumsily upon the forehead, and then goes heavily striding out of the death-chamber with his bulldog jowl well down upon his chest; and a moment later when he is seen bucketing the lean brown charger through the thrashing hailstorm that is jagged across by the white-green fires of bursting shell, is rather a tragic figure, or so it seems to me.

Meanwhile, what of the man who lies upon the bed? Since Bingo's face came between and receded into, those thick grey mists that gather about the dying, he

has lost consciousness of present things. Fever is rising in those wellnigh empty veins of his, his skin is drawing and creeping; it seems as though innumerable ants were running over him. The hand that is not powerless tries to brush them away. Sometimes he thinks he is in Hospital, and that the man in the next bed is groaning, and then he is aware that the groans are his own. He is conscious that a needle-prick in the sound wrist has been followed by sensible relief. The unspeakable grinding agonies subside; he is able to murmur, "Thanks, Nurse," as he gulps some liquid from the glass a strange hand holds to his lips....

The groans are sighs now, and the clogged brain, spurred by morphia, shakes off its lethargy. The fever goes on rising, and he begins, silently, for his powers fail of speech, to wander over all the past. Could Saxham, sitting motionless and vigilant on the folding-chair, his keen eyes quick to note each change, his deft hand prompt to do all that can be done—could Saxham hear, he would behold, anatomised before his mental vision, the soul of this his fellow-man.

"Coming straight for me—five round black spots punched in the grey. If they go by, luck's on my side, and I marry her. If not ... hit—and done for!"

Exactly thus has Saxham made of the unconscious Father Noah, of the Boer sharp shooters behind their breastwork, the arbiters of Fate.

"Send for Bingo!" flashes across the dying brain "Something to say to Bingo. Don't bring *her*. Who'd want a woman who loved him to remember him like this? What was it the Mahometan *syce* the *musth* elephant killed at Bhurtpore said about his wife? '*Let*

her cool my grave with tears.' Until she finds out ... until someone tells her. Ah—'h!" There is a groan, and a convulsive shudder, and the beautiful dim eyes roll up in agony, and the blue, swollen lips are wrung as the feeble voice whispers: "Nurse, this hurts like—hell! Some more—that stuff!"

Saxham gives another subcutaneous injection of morphia. The curtains part, and the Colonel, in waterproof and a dreadnought cap, comes noiselessly in. "No change," Saxham answers to the mute inquiry. "I anticipate none before midnight. Of course, the weakness is progressive."

"Of course." The Chief touches the cold, flaccid wrist. There are hollows in his lean cheeks, and deep crow's-feet at the corners of the kindly hazel eyes, and the brown moustache is ominously straight and curveless. "Tell him, if he recovers consciousness, that I thought it best to send for her. Chagrave has gone with a couple of the men. It's a desperate night for a woman to be out in, but they took an Ambulance sling-chair with them. They'll wrap her in tarpaulins, and carry her in that."

He nods and goes up on the lookout with a night-glass, and the wearied officer he relieves comes down. As he has said, it is a desperate night of driving sleet and swirling blackness, illuminated only with the malignant coruscations of lyddite bursting-charges. But the tempest without is nothing to the tempest that rages in the soul of the quiet man in sodden khâki who watches by the dying.

She has been sent for.... She is coming.... To kneel by the low cot and weep over him who lies there; kiss the tortured lips and the beautiful dim eyes, and hold the unwounded head upon her breast.... How shall

Saxham bear it without crying out to tell her? He clenches his hands, and sets his strong jaw, and the sweat breaks out upon his broad, pale forehead. The man upon the bed, mentally clear, though incapable of coherent speech, is now listening to comments that shall ere long be made by living men upon one who very soon shall be numbered with the dead.

"Well, well, don't be hard on the poor beggar!" he hears them saying. "Give the devil his due: not a bad chap—take him all round. Got carried away and lost his head. She's as lovely as they make 'em, and he ... always a fool where a pretty woman was concerned —poor old Toby!"

He pleads unconsciously, with his most merciless judge, in his utter incapacity to plead at all....

And so the time goes by. There has been coming and going in the place outside. The guard has relieved the double sentries, the official lamp burns redly under the little penthouse. A reconnoitring-patrol ride out, the horses' hoofs sounding hollow on the earth-covered boards of the sloping way. The business of War goes on in its accustomed grooves, and the business of Life will soon be over for Beauvayse. Yet she has not come. And Saxham looks at his watch.

Nine o'clock. He has not eaten since early morning. He is wet to the skin and stiff with long sitting. But when the savoury odours of hot horse-soup and hot bean-coffee, accompanied by the clinking of crockery and tin pannikins, announce a meal in readiness, and would-be hosts come to the curtains and anxiously beg him to take food, he merely shakes his square black head and falls again to watching the unconscious face of Beauvayse. The conscious brain

behind its blankly-staring eyes is thinking:

"Those paragraphs.... In black and white the thing looked damnable. And think of the gossip and tongue-wagging. Whatever they say about me ... she'll be the one to suffer. They're never so hard on ... the man!"

He has uttered these last words audibly; they pierce to the heart's core of the mute, impassive watcher. Strong antipathy is as clairvoyant as strong sympathy, and with a leap of understanding, and a fresh surge of fierce resentment, Saxham acknowledges the deadly truth contained in those few halting words. She will be the one to suffer. Beside the martyrdom inevitably to be endured by the white saint, the agony of the sinner's death-bed pales and dwindles. There is a savage struggle once again between Saxham the man and Saxham the surgeon beside the bed of death.

His sudden irrepressible movement has knocked the tumbler from the little iron washstand at his elbow. It falls and shivers into fragments at his feet. And then—the upturned face slants a little, and the eyes that have been blankly staring at the roof-tarpaulins come down to the level of his own. He and her fallen enemy regard each other silently for a moment. Then Beauvayse says weakly, in the phantom of the old gay, boyish voice that wooed and won her:

"Thought it was Wrynche. Where is——"

The question ends in a groan.

Saxham the man shrinks from him with unutterable loathing. But Saxham the surgeon stoops over him, saying, in distinct, even tones:

"Captain Wrynche was here. He has been recalled to Hotchkiss Outpost North. Drink this." This is a little measure of brandy-and-water, in which some tabloids of morphia have been dissolved. And Beauvayse obeys, panting:

"All right. But ... more a job for the Chaplain than the Doctor, isn't it?"

"Do you wish the Chaplain sent for?"

There is a glimmer of the old lazy, defiant humour in the beautiful dim eyes.

"What could he do?"

Saxham answers—how strangely for him, the Denier:

"He would probably pray beside you, and talk to you of God."

There is a pause. The faint, almost breathless whisper asks:

"It's night, isn't it?"

"It is dark and stormy night."

Beauvayse says, in the whispering voice interrupted by long, gasping sighs that are beginning to have a jarring rattle in them:

"Before to-morrow.... I shall know more of God ... than the whole Bench of Bishops."

There is silence. And she does not come. The man on the bed makes a painful effort, gathering his nearly-spent forces for something he wants to say:

"Doctor!"

"Let me wipe your forehead. Yes?"

"I ... insulted you frightfully the other day."

"You need not recall that. I have forgotten it."

"I ... beg your pardon! Will you ... shake hands?... My left, if you don't mind. The other one's ... no good."

He tries to lift the heavy arm that lies beside him. There is only a faint movement of the finger-tips, and he gives up the effort with a fluttering sob. And the square white face with the burning eyes under the lowering brows opposes itself to his. Words are crowding to Saxham's lips:

"*I would gladly shake the hand of the man who insulted me and who has apologised. And I honour the brave officer who meets Death upon the field. But with the would-be betrayer of an innocent girl, the dancing-woman's husband who proposed himself as mate for Lynette Mildare, I have nothing but contempt and abhorrence. He is to me a leper. Worse, for the leper I would touch to cure!*"

He does not utter the words, nor does his rugged, unconquerable sincerity admit of his taking the hand. He fights with his hatred in silence. And she has not come. What is *he* saying in that weak voice with the rattling breaths between?

"Listen, Saxham.... There's ... something I want you ... say to Miss Mildare."

The grey mists that gather about him shut out a clear view of Saxham's terrible face. The feeble whisper struggles on, broken by those rattling gasps.

"Tell her forget me. Say when I ... asked her ... to marry me...."

Silence. He is falling, falling into an abyss of vast uncertainties. The blue lips dabbled with foam can frame no more coherent words. Only the brain behind the dying eyes is alive to understand when Saxham approaches his own livid face and blazing eyes to the face upon the pillow, and says:

"Do not try to speak. Close your eyes when you mean 'Yes.' I know what you wish me to tell Miss Mildare. It is that when you asked her to marry you, you were already the husband of another woman. Am I correct?"

The affirmative signal comes.

"You were married to Miss Lavigne at the Registrar's office, Cookham-on-Thames, last June, before you sailed. The witnesses were your valet and a female servant at Roselawn Cottage. And knowing that you were not free, you deceived and cheated her. That is what I am to tell Miss Mildare? Signal if I am right."

The dying eyes are brimming with tears. When the lids shut, signifying "Yes," slow, heavy drops are forced between them.

"Very well. Now hear. I will not tell her!"

The eyes open wide with surprise.

"I will never tell her," says Saxham again. "I will not blacken any man's reputation to further my own interests." The vital strength and the white-hot passion of him, contrasted with the spent and utter laxity of the dissolving thing of clay upon the bed, seem superhuman. "Do you hear me?" he demands again. "Listen once more. Knowing the truth of you, I came here to force you to undeceive her. Had you refused, I would certainly have killed you. But I

would never have betrayed you!"

That "never" of Saxham's carries conviction. The pale ghost of a laugh is in the dying eyes. The wraith of Beauvayse's old voice comes back again to say:

"Doctor, you're a ... damned good sort!" And then there is a long, long silence, broken only by those painful rattling breaths, never by her coming.

The end comes, and she is not there. A pale blink in the wild sky eastward hints to the night lookouts of hot drink, food, and welcome rest. The Chief stands beside the comfortless camp-bed, where the hope of a high old House is flickering out. The Doctor holds the wet and icy wrist, where the pulse has ceased to be perceptible. The sheet above the labouring breast rises and falls with those panting, rattling gasps; the beautiful eyes are rolled up and inwards. The light is very nearly out, when, with a last effort, the flame leaps up. He thinks that what is the barely perceptible whisper of a tongue already clay is a loud and ringing cheer. He thinks that he is shouting, his strong young voice topping a hundred other voices. It seems to him who, for the bribe of all the beauty he has coveted, and all the love that is yet unwon, could not speak one audible word or move a finger, that he waves his hat again and again. Oh! glorious moment when the white moonbeams blink on the grey dust-wall rolling down from the North, and the horsemen of the Advance ride out of it, and clustering enemies that have rallied again to the attack waver, and disperse, and scatter....

"Hurrah! They're running—running for their lives! Give it 'em with shrapnel! Oh, pepper 'em like hell! The Relief! The Relief! Hurrah!"

It is all over with the opening of the day-eye in the east. When they leave him, beautiful, and stern, and calm in that deep slumber from which only the Angel with the Trumpet may awaken him, and pass out between the curtains, the dark, short officer who was on the lookout when the Doctor came, stands very pale and muddy, and steaming with damp, waiting to report. And two troopers of the Irregulars, wet and muddy and steaming too, are waiting also, just inside the tarpaulins of the outer doorway. And she is not there.

A few rapid words, an exclamation from the Chief, shaken for once out of his steely composure, and quivering from head to foot with mingled rage and grief:

"My God, how unutterably horrible!"

Saxham shoulders his way into the ring of white faces that have gathered about the dark little muddy officer.

"What has happened to Miss Mildare——?"

The little officer answers, panting:

"The Sisters could not make her understand. She——"

The Chief speaks for him:

"She had been previously stunned by the shock of—a terrible calamity."

"What calamity?"

"The Mother-Superior has been killed. Two of the Sisters and Miss Mildare found her in the Convent

chapel. They got there before evening. She must have been dead some hours. She had been shot through the lungs."

"By a stray bullet?"

"By a bullet from a revolver, fired close enough to scorch the clothes. Foul murder, and by God who saw it done——"

The lean clenched hand, thrown upwards in a savage gesture, the blazing eyes, the livid, furrowed face, the writhen mouth, the furious, jarring voice, leave little doubt of the vengeance that will be wreaked when he shall track down the murderer. He wheels abruptly, and goes to the telephone. The swift, imperative orders volt from fort to fort; the circuit of vigilance is made complete, the human bloodhounds unleashed upon the trail, in a few instants, thanks to the buzzing wire that brings the mouth of a man to the ear of another across a void of miles.

But Bough, primed with knowledge as to which are dummy rifle-pits and which are real, aided by acquaintance with the ground, and covered by that wuthering night of storm, has already pierced the lines. Subsequently that excellent Afrikander, Mr. Van Busch, rejoins Brounckers' bright boy at Tweipans, with information that decides the date of Schenk Eybel's Feint from the East.

L

She had gone about her Master's business all

Monday, calm and composed, and inexorably gentle. She did not meet Richard's daughter before nightfall. "She will not suffer now," she thought, even as she sent the message that was to allay Lynette's anxiety, and give notice of her whereabouts in case of need. Her mission led her to a half-wrecked shanty at the south end of the town, where some Lithuanian emigrants herded together in indescribable filth and misery. A woman who had been recently confined lay there raving in puerperal fever. Until nightfall, when she was removed to the Isolation Hospital on the veld, near the Women's Laager, the Mother-Superior remained with the patient.

A burly, bushy-bearded man, with a peculiarly dark skin and strange steely eyes, passing the broken window, caught sight of the noble profile and the stately shoulders stooping above the miserable bed. Going home at dark, the Mother heard a stealthy footstep following behind her.

Since the Town Guard had been withdrawn to man the trenches, many people, revisiting their deserted dwellings, had found them plundered of movable possessions, and, losing the fear of Eternity in wrath at the wholesale evaporation of their worldly goods, had thenceforth remained to protect them. Instances there had been of robbery from the person by thieves not all tracked down by Martial Justice and made examples of.

The hovering human night-bird and the prowling human jackal, whose sole end is money and money's worth, have no terrors for Holy Poverty. But there are other creatures of prey more terrible than these. And the padding footsteps that followed, hurrying when she hurried and slackening when she went

more slowly, and stopping dead when she paused and looked round, conveyed to her a haunting sense of something sinister, and at the same time greedy and guileful, that bided its time to spring.

She moved in long, swift, undulating rushes, her black robes sweeping noiselessly as a great moth's wings over the well-known ground, her course kept unfalteringly; but her heart shook her, and she gasped as the Convent bomb proof neared in sight. She had wrought much and suffered more of late, and she knew herself less strong than she had been. When the blue light that hung from a post by the ladder-hole blinked "Home" through the mirk of a night of thin rain and mist-shrouded stars, she knew infinite relief. Her great eyes were as wild and strained as a hunted deer's, and her bosom heaved with her panting breaths. She paused a moment to regain her composure before she went down.

The nuns who were not on night-duty were gathered together about the trestle-table sewing, while the lay-Sisters prepared the scanty evening meal. Lynette was there, sitting pale and quiet on her corner-stool. Richard's daughter had been watching and waiting for her Mother. Ah! to see the relief and gladness leap into the dear face, and shine in the beautiful wistful eyes that had shed such tears, dear God!—such tears of anguish upon Sunday—and then had dried at the utterance of her decree—

"You are never to tell him!"

—And changed into radiant stars of joy, by whose light the darkness of her own wickedness and misery seemed almost bearable.

"It is the Mother. Mother——"

Lynette sprang up, and would have hurried to her, but the Mother lifted a warning hand, and calling Sister Tobias to her, passed aside into a curtained-off and precautionary cave that had been hollowed out behind the ladder. This was the custom when the ladies of the Holy Way returned from doubtful or infectious cases. Lynette sighed, and went back to her stool to wait. The busy needles had not ceased stitching.

That humble saint, Sister Tobias, hurried to her diligent ministry of purification. When she came in with hot water and carbolic spray, she brought a letter with her. It was directed to the Mother in a coarse round-hand.

"Somebody dropped this down the ladder-hole as I came by with my kettle," said Sister Tobias. "It's the first letter-box I ever knew that was as wide as the door. Maybe 'twill bring in a new fashion, for all we know." She made her homely joke with a sore heart for the sorrow she read in the Mother's beloved face, and trotted away to fetch clean towels, saying—a favourite saying with Sister Tobias—that her head would never save her heels.

The Mother opened the letter. It was anonymous, and utterly vile. Had the pen been dipped in liquid ordure, the thing written could not have been more defiling to the touch than its meaning was to this pure woman's chaste eyes. Had a puff-adder writhed out of the envelope, and struck its fangs into her beautiful hand, it would have poisoned her less certainly. And every beat of the obscene words upon her brain, strangely enough, awakened an echo of those long padding footsteps that had followed in the dark. And the writer knew of all that had happened

at the tavern on the veld, when a human brute had triumphed in his bestiality, and a girl-child had been helpless, and the great white stars had looked down unmoved and changeless upon Innocence destroyed.

The Mother read the letter from the loathly beginning to the infamous end. She had been sorely wrought upon of late. She tried to pray, but she knew the Ear Above must be averted from one who had lied and was in deadly sin.... When Sister Tobias came back she found her lying in a swoon.

The little old crooked, nimble Sister, with the long, pale sheep-face, dropped on her knees beside that prone column of stately womanhood, removed the Mother's hooded mantle, loosened the *guimpe* and habit, and worked strenuously to revive her, dropping tears.

"My beautiful, my poor lamb!" she crooned. "What's come to her? What wicked shadow's black on all of us? What's brooding near us—Mary be our guardian! —that's struck at *her* to-night!"

The letter lay upon the floor, where it had dropped from the unconscious hand. It lay there for Sister Tobias, and might lie. If the Mother willed to tell its contents, she would tell. If not, the little old nun, her faithful daughter, would never ask or seek to know.

She opened her great eyes at last, and smiled up at the tender, wrinkled ugliness of the long, sheep-like face in the close white linen wimple.

"Say nothing to anybody. I was overdone," she said, and rose. Sister Tobias picked up the letter, and gave it to her. There was a Boer mutton-fat candle flaring draughtily in an iron sconce upon the wall. The

Mother moved across the little room, and burned the letter to the last blank corner, and trod the fallen ashes into impalpable powder. Then she helped Sister Tobias to remove every trace left, and obviate every danger that might result from her late toil, and rejoined her quiet family of daughters as though nothing had happened.

They recalled afterwards how cheerful and how placid she had seemed that night. Her smile had a heart-breaking sweetness, and her voice made wonderful melody even in their accustomed ears.

They supped on the little that they had, and chatted, said the night-prayers, and went, aching, all of them, with unsatisfied hunger, to bed. You may conjecture the orderly, modest method of retiring, each Sister vanishing in turn behind a curtained screen to disrobe, lave, and vest herself for sleep, emerging in due time in the loose, full conventual night-garment of thick white twilled linen, high-throated, monkish-sleeved, and girdled with a thin cotton cord, her face, plain or pretty, young or elderly, framed in the close little white drawn cap of many tucks.

Then, the ladder having been removed, and the tarpaulin pulled over its hole, the lights were extinguished, and only the subdued crimson glow of the tiny lamp that burned before the silver Crucifix that had stood above the Tabernacle on the altar of the Convent chapel burned ruby in the thick, hot dark, where, upon the little iron beds, each divided by a narrow, white-cotton-covered board into two constricted berths, the row of quiet figures lay outstretched, her Breviary upon every Sister's pillow, and her beads about her wrist.

The Mother lay very still, seeing the hideous

sentences of the anonymous letter written in hellish characters of mocking flame on the background of the dark. She prayed as the wrecked may when the ship beneath their feet is going down. Beside her Lynette, not daring to disturb the silence, suddenly grown rigid and awful, lay aching with the loneliness of living on the other side of the wide gulf of division that had suddenly yawned between.

She had spent the day at the Hospital with Sister Hilda-Antony and Sister Cleophée. She had not seen Beauvayse. But a note had come from him, that had warmed the heart she hid it near. His dearest, he called her—his own beautiful beloved. He could not snatch a minute from duty even to kiss his darling's sweetest eyes, but on Sunday they would be together all day. And would she not meet him at the Convent on Thursday, at twilight, when the shelling stopped, and it would be safe for his beloved to venture there? She must not come alone. Dear old Sister Tobias would bring her, and play Mrs. Grundy's part. And, with a thousand kisses, he was hers in life and death.

Lynette's first love-letter, and it seemed to her so beautiful. It laid a hand upon her heart that thrilled, and was warm and strong. The hand said "Mine!"

His. She would be his one day—soon; and there would be no more mysteries between the man and the woman welded by God's ordinance into husband and wife. She shivered a little at the thought of that intimate, peculiar, utter oneness. And then, with a sickening, horrible sinking of the heart, she realised that, however well such a secret as that she guarded might be hidden before the priest and the clergyman made they twain One, it must be known of both afterwards, or else be for ever threatening to start

through the burying earth, crying, "I am here. How came you to forget?"

She had been cold in the sultry heat of that long noon, and deaf when voices spoke to her. She was thinking.... How if she might be mistaken in Beauvayse, even now? He was beautiful and brave and alluring to her woman's sense in what she knew of him and what was yet to know. He called her and drew her. Nothing noble awakened in her at the smile on the gay, bold lips and in the grey-green, jewel-bright eyes. When he had held her to his heart, she had not felt her soul merge with another, its fellow, and yet stronger and greater, in that embrace. He and she were not bodiless spirits floating in pure ether, but an earth-made girl and boy, very much athirst for the common cup of human rapture, hungry for the banquet of mortal bliss.

It was sweet, but how if he were another, and not the one? How if her hasty gift of herself robbed both in the long end? How if his headlong passion and tempestuous love should be torn from him like rags in the first instant of that discovery that must almost inevitably be made? She heard his boyish voice crying, "Hateful!... You have deceived me!" and was stabbed with quick anguish, knowing him in the right.

Men did not enter into marriage pure. By some unwritten code of that strange lawgiver, the World, they were absolved of the necessity of spotlessness. They might slake their thirst at muddy sources unrebuked. And the more each wallowed, the more he demanded of the woman he wedded that she should be immaculate in thought and deed—if in knowledge, that was all the better.

What a cloud of doubts assailed her, swarming like bees, settling in every blossomed branch of her mind, and blotting out the sweetness with angry buzzing, furry bodies, armed with sharp stings for punishment or revenge. She had seen a little peach-tree weighed down and bowed to the red earth at its roots with the weight of such a swarm. She felt at this juncture very like the tree. A little more, only a slight increase of the burden, and the slender trunk would have snapped. When the native bee-master came and shook the double swarm into a couple of hives, the little tree stayed crooked. It did not regain its beautiful, healthful uprightness for a long time.

The Mother had commanded her never to tell Beauvayse. She realised that in this one sorrowful instance she was wiser than her teacher. If unutterable misery was not to result from their union, he must be told the truth before ...

Once he knew it, would he love her any longer? Would he desire to make her his wife? She knitted her brows and her fingers in anguish, and set her little teeth. Possibly not. Probably not.

And supposing all went well and they were married. She had not realised clearly, even when she talked of travelling abroad into the unknown, conjectured world, what it would mean to go out from this, the first home she had ever known, and leave the Mother. She caught her breath, and her heart stopped at the thought of waking up one morning in a new, strange country, and knowing that dear face thousands of miles away.

The loneliness drove her to daring. She reached out a timid hand, and laid it upon the breast of the still, rigid, immovable figure beside her. Ah, what a

leaping, striving, throbbing prisoner was caged there! A faint sob of surprise broke from her. Ah! what was it? what could it mean?

The faint sound she uttered plucked at the strings of that tortured heart. The Mother turned, rose upon her elbow, leaned over the low dividing barrier, took the slight body in her arms, and gathered it closely to her, shielding it from the fangs of that coiled, formless Terror that threatened in the dark. She felt how thin and light it was, and how frail the arms were that clung about her, and how wasted was the face that pressed against the coarse, conventual linen, covering the broad, deep bosom whose chaste and hidden beauties Famine had not spared.

She would be a real mother once—just once. God would not grudge her that. She bared her breast to the cheek with a sudden half-savage, wholly maternal gesture, and drew it close and pillowed it and rocked it. Had Heaven wrought a miracle and unsealed those white fountains of her spotless womanhood, she would have found it sweet to give of herself to Richard's starving child. But she had nothing but her great, indignant pity and her boundless agony of love. Long hours after the face lay hushed in sleep above her heart, and while the long, soft breaths of slumber went and came, she lay staring out into the sinister blackness over the beloved, menaced head.

Rain leaked through the tarpaulin over the ladder-hole, falling in heavy, sullen gouts and splashes on the beaten earth below as blood drips from a desperate wound. That image rose, and the blackness

seemed all red—red with those lines of fiery writing on it, smoking and crawling, flickering and blazing, climbing, and licking with thin, greenish tongues of hell-begotten flame.

Then the midnight hour struck, and it was time to rise for Matins. Long after the Sisters had gone back to bed the Mother knelt on, a motionless figure wrestling in silent prayer before the silver Crucifix upon the wall. Dawn found her still kneeling. No ray of heavenly light had found her soul, that weltered in darkness, crying to One Who seemed not to hear.

LI

She did not venture to take Lynette with her to the Hospital next day, but secretly charged Sister Tobias and Sister Hilda-Antony to carry her whithersoever they went, and not once to let her out of sight. This done, she knew herself impotently helpless to do more. This strong and salient woman, lapped in unseen, impalpable serpent-coils that tightened every hour, was waxing weak. By her own deed she had barred out help and put counsel far from her. She had known the punishment would not be long in coming, when, for the sake of Richard's daughter, she had lied to Richard's friend.

Now she knew, poor, noble, suffering soul, that it would have been wiser to have saved her spotless garment from the smirch by telling him the truth. Then she could have fought this invisible tarantula Thing, with the conjectural hairy claws, the baleful,

glittering eyes, and the padding feet that dogged her in the dark, with a strong man's arm to aid her. God was in Heaven, and in Him were her faith and trust, but the comfort of a human counsellor would have been unspeakable.

In a purely spiritual difficulty she would have gone to Father Wix. The kindly, fussy, feeble little old priest could hardly help her in this extremity. She had never told *him* what had happened at the tavern on the veld. Deep in her pitying woman's heart the child's cruel secret had been buried, once learned. Sister Tobias was the only one who shared it.

Meanwhile she was followed that night and the next night; and on the morning of the Thursday, when she rose from her sleepless bed, another letter weighted with a stone had been dropped down the ladder-hole. She was to give the anonymous writer a meeting and receive a message, unless she wished them that chose to be nameless to lay in wait for the girl. Most likely that would be the better way. She could choose.

She burned the second letter before she went to the Hospital. She found there the single sheet of the *Siege Gazette* fluttering in every hand. Even her dignified reserve could not ward off the well-meant congratulations, the eager questions, the interested comments on the news contained in the three last paragraphs of the column that was signed "Gold Pen." Then came the telephone message from Lady Hannah. We know what words of hers the wire carried back. All the more firm, all the more courageous, all the more determined that her knees shook, and her heart was as water within her. For the Thing that coiled in the dark would surely strike

now.

Perhaps it was some premonition of approaching death that made her, always gracious, always infinitely kind, untiring in helpful deeds, move about among the sick that day, with such a sorrowful-sweet tenderness for them in her noble face and in her gentle touch, and in that wood-dove's voice of hers, that they spoke of it long afterwards with bated breath. A perfume as of rare incense was wafted from the folds of her veil, they said, and a pale aureole of light shone about her white-banded forehead, and her eyes—— Ah! who that met their look could ever forget those eyes?

It was before twilight when she left the Hospital and went to the Convent, a tall, upright, mantled and hooded figure, stepping through the heavy rain that had fallen since noon, under a quaint monster of a cotton umbrella with ribs of ancient whale,—Tragedy carrying Farce.

It was not the custom to linger in the neighbourhood of the Convent, even among those who were most indifferent to shot and shell. No one was visible in its vicinity, except one burly, bushy-bearded, dark-skinned man in tan-cords and a moleskin jacket. He lounged against a bent and twisted lamp-post, near the broken entrance-gates, cutting up a lump of something that might have been cake-tobacco upon his broad, thick palm with a penknife.

She passed him as she went in. His slouched hat made shadow for his eyes. But so curiously shallow and flat and rusty pale were they against the purplish-brown of the full-blooded, bearded face, that their sharp, sly, sudden look as she went by was as though the adder-fangs had slashed at her. She

knew it was the man who had written those two letters. And something else she knew, but did not dare to admit her knowledge even to herself as yet.

She mustered all her forces to meet what was coming as she went up the broken stairs. The wind and the long, driving lances of the rain came at her through the gaps in the walls. The sky was a driving hurry of muddy vapours. The grey hills were blotted out by mist and fog. Long flashes of white fire leaped from them, and the heavy boom of cannon followed. Then all would be still again. She passed down the whitewashed, matted, sodden corridor, and drew out the heavy key of the chapel door from a deep pocket under her black habit, and went in.

Rain beat in here through jagged holes in the soft brickwork and poured through the broken roof, whose rubbish littered the floor. Whiter squares on the whitewashed walls, sodden now with damp, and peeling, showed where the pictures of the Stations of the Cross had hung; with them all draperies had been stripped away and hidden. The crimson-velvet-covered ropes that had done duty instead of altar-rails had been removed, their brass supports unscrewed from the floor. The naked altar-stone was covered with fragments of cheap stained-glass from the little east window of which the Sisters had been so proud. The Tabernacle gaped empty; sandy, reddish-grey dust filled the tiny piscina, and lay thick upon the altar-stone and the shallow wooden altar-steps, and wherever else the rain had not reached it to turn it into yellow mud.

Why had she come here? Because she felt as though the Presence that had housed under the veil of the Consecrated Element were still guarding Its

desecrated home. And near the door of the tiny sacristy dangled the rope communicating with the bell that hung, as yet uninjured, in the little wooden cupola upon the roof. The bell could be rung, should need arise. She did not formulate in thought what need. But the recollection of those poisonous adder-eyes stirred even in that proud, dauntless woman's bosom a cold and creeping fear. And when she heard the padding, stealthy footsteps whose sound seemed burned in upon her brain, traversing the soaked matting of the corridor, she caught her breath, and an icy dew of anguish moistened her shuddering flesh.

Then slowly, cautiously, the door opened. He came in, shutting it noiselessly after him. It was the man she had seen loafing by the lamp-post. And, standing tall and forbidding on the bare altar's carpetless steps, she threw out her white hand in a quick, imperious gesture, forbidding his nearer approach.

For an instant the dignity and authority of the tall, black-robed figure gave pause even to Bough. Then he touched his wide-brimmed felt hat to her with a civility that was the very essence of insolence, and took it off and shook the wet from it, and dropped it back upon his head again. He leaned against the wall by the door where there was a little holy-water font, and stuck his gross thumbs in his belt, and waited for her to begin. Always he followed that plan when the woman was angry. Nothing remained for any bloke to teach Bough about the sex. You let her row a bit, and when she had done herself out, you put in what you had got to say. That was Bough's way with them always.

"You have written letters to me and followed me."

His grinning red mouth and tobacco-stained teeth showed in the beard. He looked at her and waited.

"Why have you done this? And, now that you have brought yourself into my sight, quitting the safe shelter of darkness and anonymity, what is to hinder me from handing you over to those who administer and enforce Martial Law in this town, and will deal with you as you deserve?"

His light eyes glittered. His teeth showed again in the brown bush. He spat upon the floor of the sacred place, and answered:

"That's all blow. How do I know what you mean about writing letters and following? Who has seen me doing it? Not one of the mob. I'm just a man that has come in off the road out of the rain. Maybe I have no business in this crib? That's for you to say.... Maybe I have a message for somebody you know. So you don't choose to give it, then that's for her to hear."

He swung about in pretended haste, and laid his hand upon the door.

"Stop," she said, with white lips. "You will not molest the person to whom you refer. You will give your message—if it be one—to me, and to me alone."

"High and mighty," the ugly, wordless smile that faced round on her again seemed to say. "But in a little I'll bring you down off that...." He spat again upon the Chapel floor, and scratched his head under his hat, and began, like a simple, good-natured fellow, a rough miner with a heart of gold:

"No offence is meant, lady, and why should it be taken?"

She seemed to grow in height as she folded her arms in their flowing black sleeves, and looked down upon him silently. The boiling whirlpool in her breast mounted as it spun, stifling her. But she was outwardly calm. He went smoothly on, with an occasional display of red mouth and grinning teeth in the big beard, and always that baleful glitter in his strange light eyes:

"I'm a man that, in the goodness of his heart, is always doing jobs for other people, and never getting thanked for it. I started to push my way up here, two hundred miles from Diamond Town, three weeks back, with a letter from a woman to her husband. She couldn't pay me nothing, poor old girl. Said she'd pray for me to her dying day. There was a pal of mine put up the grubstake. His name"—his evil eyes were glued upon her face—"was Bough. You've heard that name before!"

It was an assertion, not a question. The fierce rush of crimson to her brow, and the flame that leaped into her eyes, had already spoken to her knowledge. She was deadly quiet, gathering all her superb forces for a sudden lioness-spring. He went on:

"He's a widower now, Bough, and well-to-do. Getting on for rich. Got religion too, highly respected. Says Bough to me, 'There's a young woman at the Convent at Gueldersdorp that's not the sort for holy, praying ladies to have under their roof, for all the glib slack-jaw she may have given them.'"

Her great eyes burned on him.

"Say what you have to say, and be brief. Go on."

He shifted from one foot to the other, and licked his

fleshy lips.

"I've got to tell the story my own way, lady. Don't you quarrel with it. Says Bough: 'They picked her up on the veld seven years ago, a runaway in rags. As pretty a girl she was,' says he, 'as you'd see in a month's trek, and from what I hear they've made a lady of her.'"

Still silent and watchful, and her eyes upon him, searching him. He went on:

"'However the years have changed her,' says Bough, 'you'll spot her by her little feet and hands, and her slender shape, and her big eyes, like yellow diamonds, and her hair, the colour of dried tobacco-leaf in the sun....'"

She quivered in every limb, and longed to shut her eyes and bar out the intolerable sight of him, leering and lying there. Had she not interrupted, she must have cried out. She said:

"You tell me this man Bough is at Diamond Town?"

"I said he was there when I left. The young woman he talked of was brought up at his place in Orange Free State, a nice respectable boarding-house and hotel for travelling families on the veld between Driepoort and Kroonfontein. Bough was good to the girl, and so was his wife, that's dead since. Uncommon! Not that they had much of the dibs to spend in those days. But, being an honest Christian man, Bough treated the girl like his own. And right down bad she served him."

He licked his thick lips again, and the flattish, light-hued adder-eyes glittered.

"There was a bloke that used to hang around the place—kind of coloured loafer, with Dutch blood, overgiven to Squareface and whisky. He got going gay with the girl——"

She stood like a statue of ebony and ivory. Only by the deep breaths that heaved her broad bosom could you tell she lived—by that, and by the unswerving watchfulness of those burning eyes.

"And Bough, when he caught them together, got mad, being a respectable man, and let her taste the sjambok. Then she ran away."

He coughed, and shifted again from one foot to the other. He would have preferred a woman who had loaded him with invectives, and told him that he lied like hell.

"The man that had left her to Bough's guardianship was a sort of broken-down English officer by the name of Mildare——"

Her bosom heaved more stormily, but her intense and scorching regard of him never wavered.

"—Mildare. He left a hundred pounds with Bough, to be kept for her till she was twenty. There was a waggon and team Bough was to have had to sell, and use the money for the girl's keep, but a thief of a Dutch driver waltzed with them—took 'em up Johannesburg way, and melted 'em into dollars. Bough got nothing for all his kindness—not a tikkie. But he's ready to hand over the hundred, her being so nigh come to age. There's a locket with a picture in it, and brilliants round, that may be worth seventy pounds more. All Bough wants is to do the square thing. This is the message he sends her now. The

money and the jewels will be handed over, as in duty bound; and, since she's turned respectable and got education, I was to say there's an honest man—widower now, and well off—that's ready to hang up his hat for her, and wipe all old scores off the slate in the regular proper way...."

She said in tones that were of ice:

"Bough is the honest man?..."

"Just Bough.... 'Maybe, in my decent anger at her goings on,' he says, 'I went a bit too far. Well! I'm ready to make amends by making her my wife.'"

The lioness crouched and leapt.

"You are Bough! You are the evil man, the servant of Satan, who wrought abomination upon a helpless child!"

The onslaught came so suddenly that he was staggered. Then he swore.

"Not me, by G——!"

She pointed her long arm at him, and some strange force seemed to be wielded by that unweaponed woman-hand that struck him and pierced him through flesh, and bone and marrow....

"You are the man!" She stretched her arms to the wild, hurrying clouds that looked in upon her through the yawning rifts in the roof, and called upon her Maker for vengeance. "How long wilt Thou delay, O Lord, righteous in judgment? Fulfil Thy promise! Bind Thou Thy millstone about the neck of this wretch, hated and accursed of Thee, and let it drag him down to the uttermost depths of the Lake of Fire, where such as he shall wallow and howl

throughout Eternity!—--"

She was infinitely more terrible than the lioness who has licked her murdered cubs. No Pythoness at the dizziest height of the sacred frenzy, no Demeter wrought to delirium by maternal bereavement, was ever imagined by poet or painter as half so grand, and terrible, and awe-inspiring, as this furious cursing nun.

"—Delay not Thou, O Lord!" she prayed....

Rain fell in a curtain of gleaming crystal rods between them. Seen through it, she appeared supernaturally tall, her garments streaming like black flames, her face a white-hot furnace, her eyes intolerable, merciless, grey lightnings, her voice a fiery sword that cleft the guilty to the soul.

The voice of Conscience was dumb in him. He knew no remorse, and made a jest of God. But his callous heart had been filled from the veins of generations of Irish Catholic peasants, and, in spite of himself, the blood in his veins ran cold with superstitious fear.

Yet, when no palpable answer came from that Heaven to which she cried, he rallied, remembering that, after all, she was a woman, and alone with him in the place. She had sunk back against the altar that was behind her. Her eyes were closed, her face a white mask of anguish; she looked as though about to swoon. Bough hailed the symptoms as favourable. Fainting was the prelude to caving in, with the women he knew. But when he stirred, her eyes were wide and preternaturally bright, and held him. He snarled:

"You'll not take the girl my message, then?"

She reared up her tall form, and laughed awfully.

"Did you dream I would defile her ears with it? Now that I know you, you will be wise to leave this place; for it is a spot where your sins may find you out!"

He jeered:

"That flash bounce doesn't go down with me. The trouble'll be at your end of the house, unless you listen to reason and stop giving off hot air. What's to hinder me making a clean breast to that swell toff she's wheedled into asking her to marry him? What's to hinder me from standing up before the whole mob, saying as I've repented what I done years back, and I've come to make an honest girl of her at last?"

The whirling waters of bitterness in her breast were rising, drowning her.... He realised her momentary weakness, and moved a step or two nearer, keeping well between the woman and the door.

"What's to hinder me, I say?"

Her rapier of keen womanly intuition flashed out at him again, and drew the blood.

"Your fear will hinder you. You are here in an assumed character, and under a false name." The long arm shot out, the white hand pointed at him again. "You never came here from Diamond Town. That letter was a forgery. You have papers on you now that would prove you to be a spy, if you were taken. Ah, I can see it written in your coward's face!"

The devil was at the woman's ear, prompting her. Or was it——? Bough's dark, full-blooded face bleached to muddy-pale as her terrible voice rang through the desolate place, and echoed among the broken rafters.

"You boast yourself ready to admit your infamy. You shall be compelled! Everything shall be made known! I will go to Lord Beauvayse now, and tell him all—all! And if he loves her, he will marry her. And you who have secrets upon your soul even more perilous, if less vile and hideous"—again the terrible hand pointed, and that sense of a supernatural force that it wielded knocked his knees together and dried up his mouth—"I see the millstone round your neck!..."

The clarion voice mounted on a great note of triumph. With her inspired face, and with her floating veil, she looked like a Prophetess of old. "The Lord is not mocked! He will avenge His little one as He has promised! Move aside, you lost, and branded, and miserable wretch! Do you dare to dream you can hinder Me from doing what I have said?"

He was at the bottom of the altar-steps as the tall, imperious figure came sweeping down. The curtain of rain no longer fell between them, but behind him. He must silence that railing voice that cried in the house-top—put out the light of those intolerable eyes....

He drew out his revolver with a blasphemous oath. At the gleam of steel in the thickening twilight she dropped her upraised arms, and made a swift rush to the rope of the bell, and set it clanging. Two double strokes rang out; the third was broken in the middle.... For as she swung round, panting and tugging at the rope, he shot her in the back above the line of the white wimple from which the veil streamed aside, and ran to the door as she cried out and swayed forward, still clinging to the vibrating rope, and turned there and fired a second shot, that

struck her in the body.

Then he was gone, and the walls were crowding in on her to crush her, and then receding to immeasurable distances, and the blood and air from her pierced lungs bubbled through the bullet-holes in the serge stuff and the scorched linen.

She stumbled a few steps blindly, then fell and lay choking, with that strange gurgling and whispering in her ears, the rushing blood mingling with the water of the puddles that the rain had made upon the littered floor. She faltered out the name of her Master and Spouse, and commended her pure soul to Him in utter humility. Death would have been a welcome loosing of her bonds but for the Beloved left behind, at the mercy of the merciless.

The stab of that remembrance lent her strength to struggle up upon her knees. Ah, cruel! cruel!... But she must submit. Was it not the Holy Will? She signed the Cross upon her bosom, with fingers already growing stiff, and made a piteous little act of charity, forgiving the sin of the man against herself, but not his crime against dead Richard's child. And she stretched out long black-sleeved arms gropingly in the thick, numbing darkness that hemmed her in, and moaned to the Mother of the motherless to have pity!... pity!...

She swayed forwards then, like a stately falling column, and lay with outspread arms upon the altar-step.

"Jesu.... Mary.... *The child!*..."

The sacred names were stifled in her blood. The last two words were nearly her last sigh. Thenceforward

there was no sound at all in the Convent chapel, save the dull splash of rain, falling through the holes in the broken roof upon the sodden floor, where the dead woman lay, face downwards.

LII

No one had heeded the revolver-shot. The detonation of a cartridge or so when a bombardment is going on, what does it count for? And yet, when the burly figure of the runner from Diamond Town slipped out of the Convent doorway and stole across the shrapnel-littered garden, and crossed the veld towards the native town, it had been barely twilight —a twilight of heavy, drenching rain, to be sure. Still, in it he had encountered those who might have suspected afterwards....

Perhaps it would have been better had he stopped in Gueldersdorp and mugged it out. But that sharp, prompt, swift, unsparing thing called Martial Law is not a power to play with with impunity, and of the man who wielded it in Gueldersdorp, Bough had conceived a wholesome dread. Best that he had fled, although his going tagged him with suspicion. That cursed stupid game of his with the telephone at the Headquarters of the Baraland Rides might cost him more than the bit of twist with which he had bribed the orderly, left for a moment in sole charge, and demoralised by the sight of tobacco.

Opium played you tricks like that, when, for the gratification of a sinister whim, a grotesque fancy,

born and bred of the stuff, you would risk everything. In excess it played hell with the nerves. That was why those eyes of hers.... Damn them! Why couldn't a man put them out of mind and out of sight?

It was not to be done. The obsession held him. A black shadow on the floor would be the long body, lying face downwards on the altar-steps, with outspread, crucified arms. He heard her stifled crying upon the Name, and the gurgling outrush of mingled air and blood that followed each deep sob for breath....

And then he would be running through the lashing, bucketing wet, circumventing the sentry-posts, wriggling over the veld on his belly like a snake. He would be pushing through the dripping covert of the north bank of the river—for that, he had decided, was the safest way out or in—leaving fragments of his garments on the thorny cacti that grabbed at him with their green hands. And then he would find himself lying doggo between two great stones, waiting for it to be quite dark before he essayed to pass the rifle-pits that angled across either shore. Two hours he had lain so, and it had hailed, and sheet lightning had smitten greenish-blue glares from the hissing, clattering whiteness, and he had remembered with a shudder those eyes....

Then it had been dark enough to risk passing between the angles of the rifle-pits, where lay men who kept their eyes skinned and their weapons handy by day and night. And again Bough had wriggled like a snake, but through shallow water instead of grass and red mud. He had swam the deep pools, and once got entangled in barbed-wire, and

went under, gurgling and drowning, three times before he wrenched himself loose. It had seemed as though a dead woman's hands had seized him, and were dragging him down. But he tore free and passed safely. There was not a single shot—the Devil was so obliging! And then, lest Brounckers' pickets should mistake a friend in the darkness, he waited for light in a little thorny kloof beyond their advanced outposts; and the dawn came, with an awful gush of crimson dyeing all the eastern sky, so that the pools about his feet—even the drops of wet upon the stones and bushes—caught the ruddy reflection, and all the world seemed dripping with new-shed blood.

Then up had rushed the sun, and smitten a glorious rainbow out of fog and vapour, and one end of it seemed to be in Gueldersdorp, resting in a golden mist upon the Convent's shattered roof, while the other vanished in mid-heaven. It had seemed to the murderer like a ladder by which the dead woman's soul went climbing, up and up, to tell his crime to God....

He had killed her, that woman in black, to stop her from blowing on him. Who would have dreamed a meek, sober nun could be transformed like that? A lioness whose cub has been shot, straightway becomes a beast-devil. She, standing on the naked steps of the bare altar, with upraised, black-sleeved arms and black funereal robes, demanding Heaven's vengeance for that deed of old, calling down the judgment of God upon its doer, had been infinitely more terrible than the lioness. Lightning had flashed from her great eyes, and subtle electric forces had darted from her outspread finger-tips. While she looked at him and spoke she enmeshed him, helpless, in a net of terror. It was only when she had turned

her back that Bough had had the nerve to shoot. And he was no novice in bloodshed—not he. There were things safely hidden and put away and buried, that might some day put a rope round some man's neck. But the man would never be Bough. There had always been a scapegoat to suffer until now.

He ate more opium now than ever, because he could not forget that woman's awful eyes. He would see them looking at him in the dark, when he could not sleep. Her voice haunted him, terrible in its clarion-note of wrath, its organ-roll of denunciation. The hand that had pointed to the millstone about his neck had conjured it there. He felt it dragging him down.

Maar—that was the gold! You can carry a goodly amount of the precious metal upon your single person, if you are clever enough to stow it and muscular enough to walk lightly under the weight. And a great deal of the yellow stuff, gathered and stored by the mining companies, leaked about this time out of the hiding-places skilfully contrived for it into the pockets of Van Busch and his pals. It is weighty, as well as precious, stuff, and when you inter it, there must be bearers as well as a gravedigger, and when you carry away a great deal of it at a time, confederates must aid you.

Oom Paul, when, like some elderly black humble-bee, with crooked thighs deep laden with the metallic yellow pollen, he buzzed heavily off for Lorenço Marques, deplored the deceitfulness of riches less bitterly than their non-portableness.

Van Busch, by a series of clever expedients, overcame that difficulty. The cartridges that weighed down his bandolier were of cast gold, cleverly

painted; the gun he carried was a hollow sham packed with raw gold; also, his garments were lined and padded with the same material. At Cape Town he would disburden himself, and one of the women who were his confederates would take the stuff to England, and sell it in London, and bank the money in the name of Van Busch. He so managed that there was always a woman coming and a woman going. Women had been his tools, and his slaves, and his victims, ever since he had been born. When the old were worn out and useless, he shook them off, and fresh instruments rose up to take their places.

He never trusted men in money matters. He knew too much of the power of that yellow pollen that breeds madness in the male. But there is one thing that most women desire more than the possession of much money, and that is absolute possession of one man.

Bough understood women of a certain class. He had moulded them to his will, and bent them to his whim, all his life long. He was a man of manifold experience as regards the sex.

Lately he had added to his stock. He had stood face to face with a woman, unarmed and in a lonely place, and had tasted Fear. He had seen—from afar off—a woman whose slight, vivid beauty had roused in him a desire that was torture.

It was as though the Minotaur were in love with Ariadne; it was Caliban thirsting for the beauty of Miranda. Prospero had not come in time; the satyr had surfeited upon the unripe grapes, and now was ahungered for the purple cluster, tied up out of reach of those gross, greedy, wicked hands.

The locket with a picture in it and brilliants round, "that might be worth seventy," the dainty, pearly miniature on ivory by Daudin, of the dead woman who lay buried under the Little Kopje, and which Bough had taken from the body of the English traveller, together with the signet-ring and everything else of value that Richard Mildare had owned, possessed a strange fascination for the thief. It was extraordinarily like.... He hung it by its slender gold chain about his thick neck, and gloated over and grudged the beauty that it recalled.

It is horrible to speak of love in connection with the man Bough, but if ever he had known it, it was now. His victim of old time had become his tyrant. Replete with vile pleasures, he longed for her the more.

He even became sentimental at times, telling himself that all he had sought was to repair the wrong, and make an honest woman of the Kid. She should have been lapped in luxury, worn jewels equalling any Duchess's. He was a man of money now. A little delay, to become yet more rich, and arrange for the safe burying of Bough—then Van Busch, of Johannesburg, capitalist and financier, would descend upon London in a shower of gold, furnish a house in Hyde Park or Mayfair in topping style; own four-in-hands, and motor-cars, and opera-boxes, and see all Society fluttering to his feet to pick up scattered crumbs of the golden pudding.

It really seemed as though the dream would be realised. The gross, squarely-built man with the bushy whiskers and the light strange eyes, found success attend his every enterprise from that hour in which he had spilt life upon the pavement of the Convent chapel. The tarantula-pounce never missed

a prey. Every knavish venture brought in money or money's worth, every base plot was carried through triumphantly. Bough, *alias* Van Busch, was not ordinarily a superstitious man, but his run of luck made him almost afraid at times.

He scented the Relief before the besiegers, undertook to scout for Young Eybel in the direction of Diamond Town, and ingeniously warned Colonel Cullings of a Boer plan for cutting off the Flying Column on the scorching western plains, which resulted in the capture of two waggon-loads of burghers, their rations, ammunition, and Mausers—a most satisfying haul. He placed before the leader of the British Force intercepted telegrams which threw invaluable light on Dutch moves. No more single-minded, ingenuous, and patriotic British South African ever drew breath than Mr. Van Busch, of Johannesburg. And verily he reaped his reward, in an officially countersigned railway pass, which would enable the patriot to render some further services to British arms, and a great many more to Van Busch, of Johannesburg.

He had his knavish headquarters still at the Border homestead known as Haargrond Plaats. Something drew him back to the place, and kept on drawing him. From thence he could observe and conduct his operations, and gather news of the besieged in Gueldersdorp. He was there at the time when the Division—Irregular Horse and Baraland Rifles, with a half battalion of Town Guards, converted into mounted infantry by the simple process of putting beasts underneath men who could ride them—marched out of Gueldersdorp *en route* for Frostenberg.

The slatternly Dutchwoman and the coloured man

who had charge of the Plaats were too surely his creatures to betray Bough Van Busch. "Let the dogs smell around the place," he thought, when by the sounds that reached him in his hiding-place he knew the Advance had halted. "They'll tire of the game before they smell out me!"

His hiding-place was a safe retreat and storehouse for stuff that it was necessary to conceal. No one knew of it save Bough Van Busch and the draggle-tailed woman. It was in the great stone-built chimney of the disused, half-ruined farmhouse kitchen, a solid cube of masonry reared by the stout hands of the old voortrekkers of 1836, its walls, three feet in thickness, embracing the wide hearth about which the family life of the homestead had concentrated itself in the past.

There may have been a mill on the farm in the old days. Or possibly, meaning to build one, those robust pioneers of the Second Exodus had dragged the two huge stones into the wilderness, and then abandoned their plan. The lower millstone paved the hearth, the upper, the diameter of its shaft-hole increased by chipping to the size of a musk-melon, had been set by some freak of the farmer-architect's heavy fancy as a coping on the top of the big stone shaft. From thence, as Lady Hannah Wrynche had said in one of her descriptive letters, dated from "My Headquarters at the Seat of War," it dominated the landscape as a Brobdingnagian stone mushroom might have done.

The wide black throat of the chimney half-way up was choked by a platform of beams and masonry, reaching not quite across, so that even a bulky man who had climbed up—divers rusty iron stanchions driven in between the stones, and certain chinks

affording secure foothold—might wriggle between the platform and the chimney-wall, and so lie hid securely. Through the hole in the round stone above came air and light. Crevices cunningly enlarged afforded opportunities for viewing the surrounding country, as for seeing without being seen, and hearing also all that took place in the low-walled courtyard that was used as a cattle-kraal. You had also a bird's-eye view of the lower end of the farm kitchen, where the wall had cracked, and bulged, and spit out some of its stones.

To this eyrie Bough Van Busch retreated when the wall of dust to the south-west gave up the dim shapes of the Advance, and the beat of many iron-shod hoofs, and the roll of many iron-shod wheels made distant thunder, coming nearer, always nearer....

Maar! How the trot of the squadron-columns, the roll of the oncoming batteries, shook the crazy building. The Advance rode into the yard, dismounted, and began to ask questions of the coloured man and the slipshod woman. Neither knew anything. The woman cursed the Englishmen freely, at which they laughed, and lighted fresh cigarettes. The man was dumb as stone.

The Division snaked out of the dust presently, a huge brown centipede that had been chopped in bits, and moved with intervals between its travelling sections. There was no halt; it rolled on, a vision of innumerable moving legs and tanned, wearied faces, over the greening veld to the north-east. The dust grew hotter and thicker, and more stifling, as it rolled.

It drifted in through every chink and cranny in the

great chimney, with the smell of hot human flesh and sweating horsehide, and Bough Van Busch longed to, but dared not sneeze. Bits of mortar fell about him, and dislodged tarantulas galloped over his boots. He shook the loathsome, hairy, bright-eyed insects off, shuddering at them with a horror somewhat misplaced, considering the affinity between his own methods and theirs.

Roll, roll, roll! The English voices of the chatting men crouched upon their beasts' withers or sprawling on the limbers, the trampling and snorting of the horses, the sharp signal-whistles of the leaders, the curt utterances of command, mingled with the stream of thought that raced through the busy brain of Bough Van Busch. It had struck him when the Colonel and his Staff rode up and halted by the gateway of the littered courtyard, that here would be a chance for a nervy man, with a set purpose, to venture back, cleverly disguised, to Gueldersdorp. He knew he would be risking his neck, but the sting of desire galled him to hardihood. She was there. Red mist gathered in his brain, red sparks snapped before his eyes, the thick red blood surged fiercely through his veins—drummed deafeningly in his gross ears at the thought of seeing her again....

And the tail of the Division was going by. A Field Telegraph Company, a searchlight company, the Ambulances, and a train of transport-waggons, with the mounted infantry, brought up the rear. The Advance had galloped forwards in haste, the group at the gate lingered. A voice rang out clearly, giving some order. It said:

"And if abandoned, carry out instructions, previously warning the inmates of the farm to retire out of——"

The lean, eagle-eyed, keen-faced Colonel bent lower in the saddle to reach the ear of the dismounted officer of Royal Engineers, who stood with one dogskin gloved hand resting on the sweating withers of the brown Waler. He answered, saluted, and drew away. Then the Staff rode on, into the ginger yellow dust-cloud, leaving the officer of Engineers standing in the beaten tracks of many iron-shod hoofs and many iron-shod wheels.

He was not left alone. A little cluster of mounted Cape Police had detached itself from the rear of the Division. They were deeply-burned, hard-bitten men, emaciated to a curious uniformity, mounted on horses as gaunt as their riders. A sergeant was in command of the party, and a drab-painted wooden cart drawn by a high-rumped, goose-necked chestnut mare, pitifully lame on the near fore, had an Engineer for driver. His mate sat on the rear locker, and a mounted comrade rode by the mare's lame side. The rider's stirrup-leather was lashed about the cart-shaft, and thus the mare was helped along.

Obeying some order unheard of the man who was hiding in the old stone chimney, the party of Cape Police divided into two. One half patrolled the outward precincts of the homestead. The rest, dismounting in the courtyard, thoroughly searched the place. The Engineer officer took no part in the search. He stood by the stone-coloured cart, busy at the locker, the sapper who had sat upon it being his aid. Very soon he returned to the yard, and stood in the middle of the litter motionless as a little figure of pale, dusty bronze, holding a cigar-box carefully in both his dogskin-gloved hands. In spite of his patched khâki and ragged puttees there was something dandified about him. His red moustache,

waxed to a fine point, jutted like the whiskers of a watchful cat, the whites of his eyes gleamed like silver as he turned them this way and that, following the movements of the men who went in and out of the farm-buildings as directed by their sergeant. The sergeant was an expert in his business, and yet, after a hasty glance up the black yawning gullet of the chimney where Bough Van Busch lay perdu, he had gone out of the dismantled kitchen whistling a tune. Two of his men remained lounging near the threshold. Like the sergeant they had stooped, hands on spread knees, necks twisted awry in the effort to pierce the thick mirk beneath the ragged arch of masonry that spanned the wide hearth where the ashes of long-dead fires lay in powdery grey drifts, and, like the sergeant, they had seen nothing. When you covered the man-hole between the platform-edge and the chimney-wall with the sooty board and the old sack, it was impossible for anyone below to see anything. The inside of the old chimney was as black as hell.

The inquisition ended. The khâki-clad figures came hurrying out of the house, pursued by the Dutchwoman's shrill recriminations. The non-commissioned officer made a report to the officer of Engineers. The men who had been deputed to search mounted at an order, and fell in with the patrol, and sat upon their saddles outside the courtyard wall exchanging furtive winks as the mevrouw devoted their souls and bodies to everlasting perdition.

A quiet utterance from the little red-haired officer checked the torrent of the woman's anger. She screeched in dismay, raising thick hands to heaven. The coloured man's stolid silence was suddenly swept away in a spate of oaths and protestations. Suddenly,

looking in the officer's unmoved face, they realised the uselessness of words, turned and ran between the gateless posts, out upon, away over, the dusty, hoof-tracked, wheel-scored veld. And their ungainly hurry and awkward gestures of terror somehow reminded the peering Bough Van Busch of an engraving he had seen by chance in a Dopper Bible, in which Lot and his two daughters, fearfully foreshortened by the artist, scuttled in as grotesque an insect hurry from the doomed vicinity of Sodom, Queen City of the Plain.

The officer of Engineers hardly glanced after the retreating couple. He stepped across the threshold of the disused farm-kitchen, holding the little wooden box carefully in both his dogskin-gloved hands. He crossed to the hearth, stubbing his toe against a jutting floor-brick, and as he did so he caught his breath. Then he stepped down under the yawning gape of the chimney, and seemed to grope and fumble at the back of the hearth. He raised himself then, stepped back, and called out sharply in the Taal:

"Wie is daar?"

The man's voice dropped back dead out of the choked-up chimney-throat. A little sooty dust fell. There was no other answer. The voice was lifted again, speaking this time in English:

"Is anyone hiding here?"

No one replied, and the little officer seemed to give up. He lingered a moment longer, struck a match as though to light a cigarette, then went quickly out of the kitchen. An orderly waited with his horse outside the gateway. Bough Van Busch, listening with

strained ears, heard the clink of spur against stirrup, the creak of the saddle receiving a rider's weight. There was a short sharp whistle, followed by the sound of cantering hoofs, and the rattle of hurrying wheels dying out over the veld to the north-east. The unwelcome intruders had gone. Bough Van Busch, after a cautious interval, deemed it safe to descend.

He was red-smeared with veld dust and white-smeared with mortar, and black with old soot. His bulky body oscillated as he let himself down from beam to stanchion, finding sure foothold in the crevices, and hand-grip in the stout iron hooks from which plump mutton-hams and beef sausages had hung ripening in the pungent smoke of burning wood and dried dung. There was a smell in his nostrils like charring wool and saltpetre. He hung over the wide hearth now. A short drop of not more than a foot or two would bring him safely to the ground.

Van Busch did not drop. He dangled by the hands and sweated. He blasphemed in an agony of terror, though it seemed to him that he prayed.

For the dandy little Engineer officer had left the cigar-box lying empty among the powdery ashes in the wide, old-world hearthplace. An innocent-looking parcel it had contained, wrapped in a bit of old canvas, and, further secured with copper wire and string, was wedged in a chink between the blackened stones at the back of the hearth. From it a fuse hung down; a short length nearly consumed by the crepitating fiery spark at its loose end. It burned with a little purring sound, as though it liked the business it was engaged upon. Bough Van Busch knew that in another moment the detonation would take place....

He heard nothing of it when it came.... Nor did he know it when the walls of Cyclopean masonry bulged and opened about him like the petals of a flowering lily. He was beyond all that. His gross body, headless, rent and torn as though the devils it had housed had wreaked their fury on their dwelling, lay sandwiched between the wreckage of the great chimney and the millstone that had paved its hearth, now a yawning cavity, some six feet deep. Leaning on its side in a trench its own weight had dug in the stony earth of the dirty courtyard was the huge stone that had topped the shaft. Something ugly was wedged in the central hole that had been made bigger to let out the smoke. And the murderer's soul, light as a dried leaf fluttering through the illimitable spaces of Eternity, went wandering on its way to the Balances of God.

* * * * *

The party of Cape Police who had searched Haargrond Plaats, with the drab-painted cart, the three Engineers, and the dandified little officer, had only ridden to a safe distance. They halted, and, concealed from observation by a fold of the grassy veld, waited for the explosion of the dynamite cartridge. When it came, the Engineer officer shut his binoculars, and gave the signal to return.

LIII

There were two funerals in the Cemetery at Gueldersdorp, upon a night that no one will forget

who stood in the packed throng of shadowy mourners about each of those open graves. The wind blew soft from the west, and the vault of heaven might have been hollowed out of the darkling depths of an amethyst of inconceivable splendour and planetary size. Myriads of stars, dazzlingly white, swung under this, the Mother's fitting canopy, shared with another, not like her holy, not noble or unselfish or devoted, but like her in that he was brave and much beloved.

Beloved undoubtedly. You could not look at the crowding faces about the narrow open trench where the Reverend Julius Fraithorn read the Burial Service by lantern-light without being sure of that. Men's eyes were wet, and women sobbed unrestrainedly. He had been so beautiful and so merry and cheerful always, said the wet-eyed women; the men praised him for having been such a swordsman, horseman, shot. Everyone spoke of him as the life and soul of the garrison, the idol of his brother-officers, and worshipped by the men under his command. Everyone had something to tell of dead Beauvayse that was pleasant to hear.

But the great bulk of the crowd was massed behind the black-robed, white-coiffed figures of the Sisters, kneeling rigid and immovable about the second open grave, where the Mother-Superior lay in her snow-white coffin, fully habited and mantled, her Rosary in the marble hand on which the plain gold ring of her Divine espousals shone, the parchment formula of the vows she took when admitted to her Order nineteen years before, lying under those meekly-folded hands upon her breast. So she had lain, feet to the altar, in the Convent chapel that her daughters in Religion had draped and decked for her, keeping

their loving vigils about her from twilight to dawn, from dawn to twilight, until this hour when they must yield all that was mortal of her to Earth's guardianship and the unsleeping watchfulness of God.

Suffocatingly dense the throng about this grave, and strangely quiet. The women's faces white and haggard and tearless, the men's drawn and deeply lined. Not even muffled groans or sighs of pity broke the profound silence as the solemn rite drew to its singularly simple and impressive close. As the fragrant incense rose from the censer and the holy water sprinkled the snow-white pall that bore the Red Cross, one dreadful word lurked sinister in every thought:

Murdered!...

Their friend, helper, nurse, consoler, the woman whose hands had staunched the bleeding wounds of many present, whose arm had lifted and pillowed the dying heads of others dear to them; who had stood through long nights of fever and delirium beside their Hospital pallets, ministering as a very Angel from Heaven to tortured bodies and suffering souls—murdered!

The tender Mother, the wise virgin, who watched continually with her lamp prepared, that at the first summons of the Heavenly Bridegroom she might enter with Him into the marriage chamber, could it be that His signal had come to her by the bloodstained hand of an assassin? It was so. And—ah! the horror of it!

The aged priest sobbed as, followed by the server, he moved round the grave within the enclosing wall of

kneeling Sisters. But no answering sob came from the vast assemblage. They were as dumb—stricken to stone. They could not yet contemplate the felicity of the pure soul of the martyred saint, carried by God's Angels into the Land of the ever-living, admitted to the unspeakable reward of the Beatific Vision. They could only realise that somebody had killed her.

But when the solemn strophes of the Litany for the Dead broke in upon a profound silence, the responses of the multitude surged upwards like giant billows shattering their forces in hollow thunder upon Arctic heights. And when, in due pursuance of the symbolic rite of Rome, the vested priest and her whole Sisterhood suddenly withdrew from the grave, and left her earthly body, how wonderful in its marble, hushed, close-folded, mysterious beauty none who had looked upon it ever could forget, waiting for the second coming of her Master and her Lord, a great sob mounted, and broke from every breast, and every face was drenched with sudden tears. Perhaps God let her see how much they loved her in that parting hour. And then the bugle sounded "Last Post" over both the open graves, softly for fear of Brounckers' German gunners, and the great crowd melted away, and all was done and over.

I have said that all the people wept. There was a girl in white, for she would not let the Sisters put black garments on her, kneeling between Sister Tobias and Sister Hilda-Antony. This girl did not weep at all. Chief mourner at both these funerals, she was not conscious of the fact. She knew that Beauvayse was on duty at Maxim Outpost South, and could not get away, and that the Reverend Mother was vexed with her, and was hiding at the Convent, pretending that she had gone somewhere, and would never come

back.

She was especially clear of mind when she thought all this. At other times she was not Lynette, and knew no one, and had never known anybody of the name. She was the ragged Kid, crouching on the Little Kopje in the gathering twilight or on the long mound that its eastward shadow covered. Or she was lying under the tattered horse-blanket on the foul straw pallet in the outhouse, waiting for the Lady to come with the great, kind, covering dark.

Or she was sitting in the bar-parlour on an upturned cube-sugar box beside the green rep sofa where Bough lolled on wet days or stormy nights, her great eyes wild with apprehension, her every nerve tense and strained with terror of the master in his condescending moods, when he would make pretence of teaching her to scrawl coarse pothooks and hangers on the greasy slate that usually hung below the glass-and-bottle shelf. Or—and at these times the Sisters found her difficult to manage—she was crouching upon one side of a locked door, and a long thin wire was feeling its way into the keyhole on the other side, and the man who manipulated it laughed as the agile pliers nipped the end of the key and turned it in the wards of the lock....

And then she would be running through the night, anywhere, nowhere, and Bough would be riding after. She could hear the short wheezing gallop of the tired pony when she laid her ear to the ground. And then the sjambok, wielded by a strong and brutal hand, would bite into the quivering flesh of the child, and she would shriek for mercy, and presently fall upon the ground and lie there like one dead—acting that old tragedy over and over again.

God was very kind to you, Reverend Mother, if He hid that sight from one to whom she was so dear. But if His Blessed in Heaven have cognisance of what takes place in this dull, distant speck of Earth, I think some salt tears must needs have fallen from the starry eyes of one of Christ's saintly maiden-spouses, glorious under the dual crown of Virginity and Martyrdom, and yet a mother as truly as His Own.

That swift unerring judgment of Saxham's had pointed, months ago, to some such mental and physical collapse, as the result of shock, crowning long-continued nervous overstrain. He had said to the Mother that such a result would be easier to avert than to deal with.

There was not an ounce of energy the man possessed that he did not employ in dealing with it now.

Let Sister Tobias tell us, as she told Saxham then, the story of the Finding. She was always a plain woman of few words.

"The last charge the Mother laid on us—Sister Hilda-Antony and me—was to keep our eyes upon the child. The very day *it* was done she told us, and I saw that something had made her anxious by the look that was in her eyes." She dried her own with a coarse blue cotton handkerchief before she took up her tale. "She went alone to the Head Hospital that day. None of us were to be surprised, she said, if she came home extra late. Sister Hilda-Antony and me were on duty at the Railway Institute. We took Lynette with us.—There!... Didn't she look up, just for the one second, as if she remembered her name?"

She had not done so at all. She was sitting on her stool in her old corner of the Convent bombproof,

but she did not heed the shattering crashes of the bombardment any more. She had only moved to push out of her eyes the dulled and faded hair that the Sisters could not keep pinned up, and bent over her little slate again. Before that, and a pencil had been given her she had been restless and uneasy. Now she would be occupied for long hours, making rude attempts at drawing houses and figures such as a child represents, with round "O's" of different sizes for heads and bodies, and pitchforks for legs and arms....

Sister Tobias went on: "The *Siege Gazette* had come out that day, with the news of"—she dropped her voice to a whisper—"of her being likely to be married before long to him that's gone. May Our Lord give him rest!" Sister Tobias's well-accustomed fingers pattered over the bib of her blue-checked apron, making the Sign. "And Sister Hilda-Antony and me had the world's work with all the people who stopped us in the street and came round us at the Institute to say how glad they were. Talk of a stone plopped in a duckpond! You'd have thought by the crazy way folks carried on that two pretty young people had never went and got engaged before." Sister Tobias was never coldly grammatical in speech. "But the child was happy, poor dear, in hearing even strangers praise him; and when the firing stopped and we were on our way home, she begged us to turn out of it and call in at the Convent, where he'd begged her to meet him, if only for a minute, not having seen her since the Sunday when ——"

"Yes—yes!"

Saxham, who writhed inwardly, remembering that

Sunday, nodded, bending his heavy brows. His ears were given to Sister Tobias, his eyes to the slight figure that somehow, in the skirt some impatient movement had wrenched from the gathers and the shirt-bodice that was buttoned awry, had the air of a ragged, neglected child. And she held up her scrawled slate to ward off his look, and peeped at him round the side of it.

Big strong men like that could be cruel when they were angry. The Kid knew that so well.

"We went to the Convent with the child," Sister Tobias continued: "We hadn't the heart to deny her, though we thought the Mother might be vexed that we hadn't come straight home. A queer thing happened as we crossed the road and went up along the fence towards the gates with the child between us.... A big, heavy man, dressed as the miners dress, with a great black beard and his hat pulled down over his eyes, came along in such a hurry that he knocked Sister Hilda-Antony off the kerb into the road, and brushed close up against *her*——"

"Against Miss Mildare? Did it occur to you that the man had come out of the Convent enclosure?" Saxham asked quickly.

Sister Tobias shook her head.

"No; but I did think he meant stopping and speaking to the child, and then changed his mind and hurried on. 'Did he hurt you, dearie?' I asked her, seeing her shaking and quite flustered-like. And she answers, 'I don't know....' And 'Was it anyone you knew?' I puts

to her again, and 'I can't tell,' says she, like as if she was answering in her sleep. Do you thinks she understands we're talking about her, poor lamb?"

They both looked at her, and she, having been taught by painful experience that to be the object of simultaneous observation on the part of the man and woman meant punishment involving stripes, began to tremble, and hung her head. From under her tangled hair she peeped from side to side, wondering what it was she had left undone? Ah!—the broom, standing in the corner. She had forgotten to sweep out the house-place and the bar. When the dreaded eyes turned from her, she got up and went softly to the corner where Sister Tobias's besom stood, and took it and began to sweep, casting terrified glances through her hair at her two Fates.

Something gripped Saxham by the heart and wrung it. The scalding tears were bitter in his throat. Do what he would to keep them free, his eyes were dimmed and blinded, and Sister Tobias wiped her own openly with the blue cotton handkerchief.

"We thought the young gentleman would be waiting near the Convent," said Sister Tobias, "or in one of the ground-floor rooms, but he wasn't there. Me and Sister Hilda-Antony looked at one another. 'Early days for a young girl's sweetheart to be late at the meeting-place!' says Sister Hilda-Antony's eyes to me, and mine said back, 'The Lord grant no harm's come to him!' We waited five minutes by the school clock, that's never been let run down, and then another five, and still he didn't come. He had got his death-wound, though we didn't know it, hours before."

"The Angel of Death had spread his wings over the Convent. Both me and Sister Hilda-Antony felt there was a strange and awful stillness and solemnness about the place. At last me and her told the child that go we must. We'd wait no longer. But *she*, knowing we'd never leave without her, ran upstairs. We heard her light feet going over the wet matting and down the long passage to the chapel door. Then ——"

Sister Tobias sobbed for another moment in the blue handkerchief. The child, who had been diligently sweeping, looked at the woman and at the big man who had made her cry, with great dilated eyes of fear. She put the broom back noiselessly in its corner, and stole back to her stool. Who knew what might happen next?

"Then," said Sister Tobias, "we heard the dreadfullest scream. 'Mother!' just once, and after it dead silence. Then—I don't know how we got there, it was so like a cruel dream—but we were in the chapel, trying to raise them up. That dear Saint—may the Peace of God and the Bliss of His Vision be upon her for ever! —lay dead on the altar-steps where the wicked, murdering hand had shot her down.... And the child lay across her, just where she had dropped in trying to lift her. And the strength of me and the Sister, and the strength of them that came after, wasn't equal to unloose those slender little hands you're watching."

The slender little hands were busy with the slate and pencil as Saxham looked at them.

"Those that came and helped us had been sent on from the Convent bombproof, where they'd been to look for *her*"—Sister Tobias glanced sorrowfully at the owner of those little busy hands—"with an

Ambulance chair and a story of more trouble. But Our Lady had had pity on the child. She was past understanding why they'd come to fetch her.... The brain can soak up trouble till it won't hold a drop more. But she was quiet and happy kneeling by that blessed Saint, waiting till the Lady should wake up, she said.... And, 'deed and 'deed, but it looked like the blessedest sleep——"

Sister Tobias broke down and cried outright. The child eyed her half suspiciously, half wonderingly. Her great terrified eyes had not seen the man strike, but he must have hurt the woman. Therefore, she looked sharply at the man between the tangled masses of the hair that could not be kept pinned up, and saw two great slow tears ooze over his thick underlids, and glitter as they hung there, and then fall. Others followed them, tumbling down the square white face, and the stern mouth was wrenched with a strange spasm, and the grim chin trembled curiously....

Somebody had hurt the man.... It is not possible to follow up the workings of the disordered intelligence, and spell out the blurred letters of the confused mind. It is enough that her terror of him abated. She slipped from her stool to the floor, under the pretence of picking up her slate-pencil, threw back the hair that prevented her seeing clearly, and peered up in that working face of Saxham's with curiosity, crouching near. She did not recoil violently when the strange, sorrowful face bent towards her; she only shrank back as Saxham asked:

"You remember me? You know my name?"

She nodded, eyeing him warily. If his hand had moved, she would have sprung backwards. But it did

not stir.

"Tell me who I am, then?"

"Man."

Her lips shaped the word. Her voice was barely audible. His heart beat thickly as he went on:

"Quite right, but something else besides a man. A man with a name. Tell me the name, or shall I tell it you?"

She nodded, and her eyes were great and timorous, but there was no terror of him in them now.

"My name is Saxham—Owen Saxham. Say the name after me."

For a wonder she obeyed. Sister Tobias caught a breath of surprise, but her subdued exclamation was silenced in mid-utterance by Saxham's look.

"Dr. Owen Saxham—Doctor because I try to cure sick people. You have seen me trying at the hospitals. You have helped me many times——"

She puckered her delicate, bewildered brows, and held her head on one side. To be made to think, and recall, and remember, hurt.

"—Many times, and the sick people were grateful. They often ask me now, How is Miss Mildare?"

Her attention had wandered to the bronzed buttons on the Doctor's khâki coat. She was trying to count them, it seemed, by the movement of her lips. Saxham went on with inexorable patience:

"Never mind the buttons. Look at me. Think of the patients at the Hospital who are asking when Lynette

Mildare is coming back again. Tell me what I am to say to them, Lynette?"

His voice shook over the beloved name. In spite of his grim effort to fight down the overmastering emotion, his eyes brimmed over, and a drop splashed, hot and heavy, upon the wandering hand that crept out to finger the buttons that would not let themselves be counted right. She looked up at the eyes that wept for her, and their mingled love and anguish touched even her dulled mind to pity. She held her slender hand up against the light, and looked at the splash of wet upon it.

"You—cry?"

There was a glimmer of something in the eyes that redeemed their vagueness. A rushlight seen shining through a night of mist upon a desolate mountain-side might have meant as little or as much to eyes that saw it. Saxham saw it, and it meant much to him. His great chest lifted on a wave of hope as he answered her:

"I cry for somebody who cannot cry for herself. Shall I tell you her name? It is Lynette Mildare. When tears come to her, then it will be for those who love her to cry again for joy, for she will be given back to them...."

"Lord grant it!" breathed Sister Tobias behind them. But Saxham had forgotten her. The fountains of his deep were broken up and words came rushing from him.

"I think that day will come, Lynette. I believe that day will come," he said, holding the beautiful vague gaze with his. "If every drop in these veins of mine,

poured out, could bring it more quickly, it should be hastened so; if every faculty of my body, every cell in my brain, bent to the achievement of one end, expended to the last unit of energy, in the restoration of what is infinitely dearer to me than life—than a hundred lives, if I had them to devote!—could insure its dawning, and bring the light of Reason and Memory and Hope into these beloved eyes again ____"

A sob tore its way through the Doctor's great frame. He rose up abruptly and hurried away.

LIV

A deadly lassitude, both physical and mental, had settled down upon the men and women of the garrison. They knew that Brounckers had gone south, leaving General Huysmans in command of the investing forces. They knew that the rainy season brought them fever, for they shivered and burned with it, and they knew that the scanty rations of coarse and unpalatable food were getting smaller every day.

But they were conscious of these things in a dull way, and as though they affected people who were a long distance off. One day, when for the thousandth time word came that the advance-guard of the Relief was in sight, when the commotion visible in the enemy's laagers suggested a poked-up ant-hill, and seemed to confirm the report, there was a brief flicker of excitement. Mounted men rode out in

force, guns were limbered up and galloped out north and west, to divert General Huysmans' attention, and give Grumer, conjectured to be waiting for it, the opportunity for an eagle-like swoop down upon the harassed tortoise sprawling on her sand-hills. But the rainy dark came down upon the clatter of artillery, and the shining dawn crept up and brought the cruel news that the allies had really been beaten back; and if there was any doubt of that, it was dissipated at the day's end when one of the Red Cross waggons came rumbling back out of the sloppy twilight, bringing Three Messengers to confirm the tale.

They were eloquent enough, even in their speechlessness, those three dead troopers, whose boots and coats were missing, and whose pockets had been turned inside out. Not a man of them was known to any member of the beleaguered garrison. Yet every man and woman there was the poorer by three friends and one more hope.

We know what was happening while Gueldersdorp ate her patient heart out. It has been written in the History of Successful Strategy how Lord Williams of Afghanistan, landing at Cape Town in January, found Muller on his way from Port Christmas, Whittaker at Bergstorm, Parris at Kooisberg, Ruthven on the Brodder, and everybody and everything at a deadlock. And being too old and wise to disdain the wisdom of others, the keen old brain under the frosty thatch recalled to mind the story of Stonewall Jackson, collected what forces he could muster, slipped in between two of the columns held immovable, and having established his lines of communication to the south, launched himself on Groenfontein, and created the necessary diversion. A mighty wave rolled back to protect the menaced Free

State capital, the paralysed columns moved again, Diamond Town was relieved by Sir George Parris, and Commandant Selig Brounckers was captured at Pijlberg.

Doubtless he was a bully and a tyrant, that roaring-voiced, truculent man. But those angry, red-veined grey eyes of his could look Death squarely in the face, and the brain behind them could conceive and plan stratagems and tactics that were masterly, and devise works that were marvels of Defensive Art. And the heavy hand that patted Mevrouw Brounckers' head, as that devoted woman sat disconsolate in the river-bed, surrounded by her children, and pots, and bundles, and the roaring voice that softened to speak words of consolation, even as the trap so ingeniously set to catch a Tartar closed in—North, South, East, West—belonged to a man who knew not only how to fight and win and how to fight and lose, but how to love and pity.

There came the faint dawn of a day in May when the plan of that bright young man Schenk Eybel was tried, and tried successfully.... The line between two forts that lay far apart on the south and south-west was pierced, while the incessant roll of rifles made a mile-long fringe of jagged yellowish flame along the enemy's eastern trenches. Even before the feint sputtered out the rush had been made, the stratagem had developed, and at the bidding of twenty incendiary torches, the daub-and-wattle huts of the Barala town leaped skyward in one roaring conflagration.

We know the glorious, unlooked-for ending of that day of fire and blood. It is marked with a white stone in the History of the Siege of Gueldersdorp, and the

chapter is headed "The Turning of the Tables." It gives a spirited description of the prudent retreat of General Huysmans, the unconditional surrender of Commandant Eybel, and winds up with a pen-and-ink sketch of Brounckers' bright boy breaking the chaff-bread of captivity in the quarters of that slim duyvel, the Engelsch Commandant.

But while the Boer was yet top-dog in the scuffle, and held the Barala stad, and the fort that had lately done duty as headquarters for the Irregulars, holding captive their commanding officer, several of his juniors, and some fifteen troopers, with a handful of Town Guards; and all the fighting men who could be spared from the trenches were being posted between the menacing danger and the town, and a couple of field-guns were being hurried into position, and it had not yet occurred to Commandant Schenk Eybel that the cautious Huysmans might leave him in the lurch, things looked very bad indeed for the doughty defenders of little Gueldersdorp—certainly up to afternoon-tea time, when a couple of Scotch girls crossed the two hundred yards of veld that lay between the Fort and the town, carrying cans of steaming tea for the parching Britons penned up there.

You are to see those calm, unconscious heroines start, fixing their hairpinned braids with quick, deft touches, pinning up their skirts as for the crossing of a wimpling burn rather than for the fording of Death's black river. They measured the distance with cool, keen eyes, took up a can in each hand, exchanged a word, and started. The remaining can they left behind, saying they would come back for it. And they meant to, and would have, but for a pale young woman in curling-pins, crowned by the

deplorable wreck of a large and flowery hat, and wearing a pink cotton gown of deplorable limpness, through the washed-out material of which her sharpened collar-bones and thin shoulders threatened to pierce. For 'ow are you to take to call a proper pride in yourself when you 'aven't got no 'art for anythink any more?

You are to understand that Emigration Jane 'ad bin 'in 'Orspital along of what the doctors called the Triphoid Fever, months an' months; and 'ad bin orful bad, an' sent back again after being discharged, on accounts of an Elapse, and kep' a dreadful time at the Women's Combalescent, through her blood being nothink but water—and now you may guess the reason of that fruitless search on the part of W. Keyse.

She tried to run at first, but the can was full and heavy, and her knees shook under her at the screaming of the bullets over that cross-swept field. Her pore 'art beat somethink crooil, and there was a horrible kind of swishing in her years, but to give up, and chuck away the can, and scuttle back to cover, with Them Two stepping along in front as cool—and more than halfway over, was what Emigration Jane could not demean herself to do. And at last they passed her coming back, and the Fort loomed up before her, as suddenly as though it had sprouted up mushroom-fashion under her dazzled eyes. And grimy men were leaning over the sandbag-parapet applauding her, and blackened hands attached to hairy arms reached down and grabbed the can, and it was taken up into the air and vanished, she never knew how. And then she was staring up into the lean, brickdust-coloured face of a Corporal of the Town Guard, whose head was swathed in a bloody

bandage, and in all the world there was only Her and Him.

"You fust-class little Nailer. You A1 bit o' frock——" W. Keyse began. Then his pale eyes bolted and his jaw fell, and his overwhelming joy and relief took on the aspect of horrified consternation.

"Watto!" he was beginning weakly, but she tore her gaze from his, and with a rending sob, covered her face with her hands, and ran blindly. He remained petrified and staring. And then a bullet struck him full in the face, and he screamed like a shot rock-rabbit, and threw up his arms and fell back, smothering in his own blood, behind the breastwork. And she never knew the cruel trick that Fate had played her, as she ran....

She learned it later, when Young Eybel and his party were marched prisoners into town, and cheer upon cheer went up from British throats, and bells were ringing joyfully, and "God Save the Queen!" bellowed in every imaginable key, was heard from every possible quarter.

It was while the Barala were wailing over their suffocated women and piccaninns, and the acrid fumes of burning yet hung heavy in the powder-tainted air, and the R.A.M.C. men and their volunteer helpers were bringing in the wounded and the dead, that Emigration Jane saw a face upon a stretcher that was being carried through the rejoicing crowd, and screamed at the sight, and fell tooth and nail upon the human barrier that interposed between herself and it, and got through—how, she never could 'a' told you.

Rather a dreadful face it was, with wide-open,

staring eyes protruding through a stiffening mask of gore. The teeth grinned, revealed by the livid, drawn-back lips, and how she knew him again in such a orful styte she couldn't tell you—not if you offered her pounds and pounds to say——

She was only Emigration Jane, but when the bearers halted with the stretcher, it was in obedience to the gesture and the look of a young woman who had risen above herself into the keen and piercing atmosphere of High Tragedy.

"Put that down, you two blokes. Wot for?" Her thin throat swelled visibly before the scream came: "'Cos 'e belongs to me! 'Ain't that enough? Then—I belongs to 'im! Dead or livin'—oh, my darlin'! my darlin'!"

The bearers interchanged a look as they laid their burden down. It was not heavy, for Corporal W. Keyse, even when not living under conditions of semi-starvation, was a short man and a spare. *Had been*, one was tempted to say, in regard to his condition: "For," said one of the R.A.M.C. men to a sympathetic bystander, "the chap has had a tremendous wipe over the head with a revolver-butt or a gun-stock, and he has been shot in the face besides. There's the hole plain where the bullet went in under his near nostril, and came out at the left-hand corner of his off eye. And unless a kind o' miracle happens, I should say, myself, that it would be a saving of time to carry him straight to the Cemetery."

"Don't let the poor girl hear you!" said the sympathetic bystander. But Emigration Jane was past hearing or seeing anything but the damaged head upon the canvas pad, as she beat her breast and cried out to it wildly, dropping on her knees beside it:

"O my own, own, try an' know me! Come back for long enough to s'y one word! O Gawd, if You let 'im, I'll pray to You all my days. O pore, pore darlin' 'ead that wicked men 'ave 'urt so crooil——"

It was a lover's bosom that she drew it to, panting under the limp and shabby cotton print gown. And the voice that called W. Keyse to come back from the very threshold of the Otherwhere was the voice of true, true love.

It worked the kind o' miracle, for one of the Corporal's stiffened eyelids quivered and came down halfway, and the martial spirit of its owner flickered up long enough for W. Keyse to sputter out:

"Cripps, it's 'Er! Am I dead an' got to 'Eaven—on somebody else's pass?"

"Born to be hung, I should say," commented the R.A.M.C. man aside to his mate. "Chuck some water over the young woman, one of you," he added, as the stretcher was lifted. "And tell her, when she comes to, that we've taken her sweetheart to Hospital instead of to the other place."

"Rum critters, women," commented another bystander, not untender in his manner of sprinkling the dubious liquid known in Gueldersdorp as water out of a cracked tin dipper over the face of the young woman who sat upon the ground in the centre of a circular palisade of interested human legs. "Look at this one, for instance. Lively as a vink as long as she believes her chap a corpse, and does a solid flop as soon as she finds out he has a kick in him. Help her up, you on the other side. Do you think you could walk now, miss, if you tried to?"

She made a faltering attempt, but her knees shook under her. Her clasped hands shook, too, as she held them out, beseeching those about her to be pitiful, and tell her where "they" had taken him. Then, when she was told, and because she was too weak and dazed to walk, she ran all the way to the Hospital, and volunteered to nurse him.

Saxham stitched up the split scalp of W. Keyse, and grimly congratulated him upon the thickness of the skull beneath it. The bullet had, as has already been indicated, gone in under the left nostril, and emerged below the inner corner of the right eye, gaining the recipient of the wound notoriety as well as a strong temporary snuffle and a slight permanent cast....

"You shall git well, deer," Emigration Jane would tell her patient twenty times a day. "You carn't 'elp it, becos I means to myke you."

"A' right," her hero would snuffle. One day he added, with a weakly swoop of one lean arm in the direction of her waist: "Mend me an' marry me. That's wot I call a Fair Division o' Labour. Twig?"

She crimsoned, gasping:

"You don't never mean it?"

"Stryte I mean it," declared W. Keyse. "Wot d'you tyke me for?"

His bed was in a corner, and a screen baffled prying eyes. She hung over him, trembling, ardent, doubting, joyful, faltering:

"S'y it agyne, darlin'! Upon yer solemn natural——"

He said it with the lean arm round her.

"An' it's me—me wot you wants—an' not that Other One?——"

He swore it.

"You and not that Other One. So help me Jiminy Cripps!"

"An' you've forgiven me—abart them letters?" Her face was coming close....

"Every time I blooming well kissed 'em, arter I bin an' picked 'em up," he declared.

"You did—that?" she quavered, marvelling at the greatness of his nature.

"Look in me jacket pocket if you think I'm spinnin' you fairy ones." His close arm slackened a little. "Now there's somethin' I got to up an' tell, if you never tips me the 'Ow Do no more."

"Wot is it, deer?" Her heart beat painfully. Was this something the reason why he had not yet kissed her?

"It's got to do with the Dutchy wot landed me this slip over the cokernut"—he indicated some plaster strappings that decorated the seat of intelligence —"with a revolver-butt, when they rushed the Fort. After 'e'd plugged at me wiv' 'is last cartridge an' missed." The Adam's apple in his thin throat worked up above the collar of the grey flannel Hospital jacket. "I—I outed 'im!" said W. Keyse.

"O' course you did, deer." Her heart thrilled with pride in her hero. "An' serve 'im glad—the narsty, blood-thirsty, murderin'——"

He interrupted:

"'Old 'ard! Wait till you knows 'oo it was." He gulped, and the Adam's apple jerked in the old way. "That 'ulkin' big Dopper you was walkin' out along of, when I——"

"Walt! It was—Walt?"

She shuddered and grew pale.

"That's the bloke I means. I 'ad to 'ave 'im," explained W. Keyse, "or 'e'd 'ave 'ad me. So I sent 'im in. With my one, two, an' the Haymaker's Lift. Right in the middle of 'is dirty weskit. F'ff!" He blew a sigh. "Now it's out, an' I suppose you 'ates me?"

She panted.

"It's 'orrible, deer, but—but—you 'ad to. An'—an'—if I 'ave to s'y it, I'd a bloomin' sight rather it was 'Im than You!"

"I'll 'ave my kiss now," said the lordly W. Keyse. And took it from her willing lips.

LV

There was no perceptible change in Lynette, either at the time of young Eybel's frustrated coup, or for long after. She was to live as much as possible in the open air, Saxham had insisted, and so you would find the girl, with a Sister in charge of her, sitting in the Cemetery, where the crop of little white crosses thickened every day. The little blue and white irises had bloomed upon those two graves where her

adopted mother and her brave young lover lay, before the dawning of that day the nuns prayed and Saxham hoped for.

It was his bitter-sweet joy to be with her constantly, striving with all his splendid powers of brain and body to brace the shattered nerves, and restore the exhausted strength, and lead the darkened mind back gently and by degrees towards the light.

She did not shrink from him now, but would answer his questions submissively, and give him her hand mechanically at meeting and parting. Saxham had not the magnetic influence over shy and backward children that another man possessed. She would smile and brighten when she saw the Colonel coming, upright and alert as ever, though bearing heavy traces now in the haggard lines and deep hollows of his face, to the greying hairs above his temples and to the close-clipped brown moustache, as in the Quixote-like gauntness of the figure that had never carried much flesh, of the long struggle of close on seven months' duration.

The pleasant little whistle would die upon his lips when he saw her sitting by the Mother's grave, plaiting grasses while the Sister sewed, or making clumsy babyish attempts at drawing on her little slate. From this she disliked to be parted, so her gentle nurses fastened it to one end of a long ribbon, and its pencil to the other, and tied the ribbon about her waist.

One day, as the Colonel stooped to speak to her, his keen glance noted that the wavering outline of a house stood upon the little slate. The living descendant of the primitive savage who had outlined the forms of men and beasts upon the flank of the

great boulder when this old world was young, would have scorned the drawing, and with good reason. It was so feeble and wavering an attempt to convey, in outline, the idea of a white man's dwelling.

The roof sagged wonderfully, and the chimneys were at frenzied angles with the sides of the irregular cube, with its four windows of impossibly varying size, and the oblong patch that meant a door between them. Above the door was another oblong, set transversely, and rather suggesting a tavern-sign.

There were some clumsily indicated buildings, possibly sheds and stables of daub and wattle, eking out the ramshackle house. Behind it and to the left of it were scrawls that might have been meant for trees. An enclosure of spiky lines might have indicated an orchard-hedge. And there were things in the middle distance, also to the left, that you might accept as beehives or as native kraals. The man who looked at them knew they were native kraals. He drew in his breath sharply, and the fold between his eyebrows deepened, as he scanned the clumsy drawing on the slate. Without those rude lines in the foreground to the right of the house, enclosing a little kopje of boulders and a low, irregular grave-mound, the drawing would have meant nothing at all, even to the eye of a practised scout, except a tavern on the lonely veld. The grave at the foot of the little kopje located the spot.

"A veld hotel in the Orange Free State—a wretched shanty of the usual corrugated-iron and mud-wall type, in the grass country between Driepoort and Kroonfontein."

He heard the wraith of his own voice speaking to the dead woman who lay under the blossoming irises at his feet. He saw her with the mental vision quite clearly. Her great purple-grey eyes were bent on his from their superior level, and they were inscrutable in their strange, secret defiance, and indomitable in the determination of their regard.

Why had she been so bent upon hiding the trail? Why had she distrusted him?

He bent upon one knee in the grass beside the slender, shrinking figure, woman's and yet child's, and held out the little slate to her, and said, with the smile that even backward children could not resist:

"Did you draw this?"

She nodded, with great wistful eyes, looking shyly up at him from under their sweeping black lashes. He went on, pointing with a slender grass-blade to each object as he named it:

"It is a house, and these are sheds and stables, and this is an orchard, and here the Kaffirs live. But who lives in the house?"

She whispered, with a look of secret fear:

"The man lives there. And the woman."

"Tell me the man's name."

She breathed, after a hesitation that was full of troubled apprehension:

"Bough."

A red flush mounted in his thin cheek, and he drew his breath in sharply. He asked:

"Does anyone else live in the house?"

She reflected with a knitted brow. He helped her.

"I do not mean the travellers—the men and women who come driving up in Cape-carts and transport-waggons, and drive away again, but someone who lives with Bough and the woman. She has been at the tavern a long, long time, though she is so young and so little. Try to remember her name."

The knitted brow relaxed, and the beautiful dim eyes had almost a smile in them.

"It is 'the Kid.'"

"Try and think. Has she no other name?"

She shook her head. He gave up that trail as lost, and moved the grass-blade to another part of the drawing on the slate.

"Tell me what this is?"

She answered at once:

"It is the Little Kopje. The English traveller made it when he put the dead woman in the ground."

His heart beat heavily, and the hand that pointed with the grass-blade shook a little.

"Where is the man who buried the dead woman and built the Little Kopje?"

She pointed to the rude oblong that was meant for a grave.

"There." The slender finger climbed the heap of boulders. "And there is where the Kid sits when she is a bad girl and runs away." She peeped up in his

face almost slyly. "Then they call her: 'You Kid, come here! Dirty little slut, take the broom and sweep out the bar! Idle little devil, fetch water for the kitchen!'" Her smile was peaked and elfish. She laid a cunning finger beside her pursed-up lips. "But though they scold and call bad names, they never come and fetch her down off the Little Kopje. Beat her when she comes in, and serve her right, the impudent little scum! But never come near the Little Kopje, because of the spook the Barala boy saw there one night when the moon was big and shining."

He said, with infinite pity in his tone, and a compassionate mist rising in those keen bright eyes of his:

"They are cruel to the Kid, both Bough and the woman?"

She began to shake. The guardian Sister, who sat sewing a little way behind her, looked up anxiously at her charge. He pacified her with a glance, and, taking one of the slender trembling hands in a firm, kind clasp, repeated his question:

"Always cruel, cruel! But Bough——"

A spasm contracted her face. At the base of the slender throat something throbbed and throbbed. She whispered brokenly:

"When the woman went away——"

Her slender fingers closed desperately upon his. Her heart shook her, and Fear was in her eyes. Her voice vibrated and shuddered at her white lips as a caught moth vibrates and shudders in a spider-web. She began again:

"When the woman went away, Bough——"

Her eyes quailed and flickered; her pale and quivering face was convulsed by a sudden spasm of awful fear. The muscles of her whole body stiffened in the immovable rigor of terror. Only her head jerked from side to side, like that of some timid creature of the wilds held captive in crushing folds or crunching fangs. And he comprehended all; and understood all, in one lightning leap of intuition, as he saw.

"Hush!" He stopped her with his authoritative eyes and the firm, reassuring pressure of his hand. "Forget that—speak of it no more. Try and tell me who lies here, under these grasses and flowers that you water every day?"

He moved the hand he held to touch the grave, and the spasm that contracted her features relaxed, and the terror died out of her eyes, as though some soothing, healing virtue were conveyed to her by the mere contact with that sacred earth. He went on:

"She was very noble, very pure, and very beautiful. Everyone loved her, and her life was spent in doing good. You were dear to her—inexpressibly dear to her. She used to call you her beloved daughter. Tell me who she was?"

Her face quivered, and in the depths of her dim, vague eyes a beam of the golden light of old was rekindled.

"She was the Lady. When will she come again?"

He raised his hand and pointed to the sky.

"When that is rolled away, and the Sign of the Cross

shines from the east to the west, and from the north to the south, and the King of Glory comes with His Angels and His Saints, we shall see her again, Lynette ——"

His voice broke. He laid the cool, delicate, nerveless hand back upon her knee, and rose, for the Sister was folding up her sewing. He looked long after the girlish figure as it was led away.

He understood everything now. He knew why the mother-plover had trailed her wing in the dust, striving to lead the footsteps of the stranger aside from the hidden nest. He stooped and gathered a blade or two of grass, and a few crumbs of red, sandy earth, from the grave at his feet, and kissed them, and folded them reverently in an envelope, and hid the little packet in his breast before he went.

That evening there were pillars and banks of dust on the north-west horizon, and the flashes of lyddite and the booming of artillery told patient Gueldersdorp that the hour of deliverance was near. A few hours later the Relief had lamp-signalled brief details of the battle with Huysmans, ending with "Good-night" and the promise to fight a way in next morning. Later still, eight troopers in khâki, jaunty ostrich-tips in their smasher hats, rode into the little battered village town that huddled on the low, sandy mound, and all the waiting world was gladdened with the news. And London called on a quiet elderly lady, to tell her what the man, her boy, had done.

The name of that little hamlet town has, cruelly enough, passed into a byword—a synonym for everything that is rowdy, vulgar, apish in the English character, with the dregs stirred up. But yet it will ring down the silver grooves of Time as long as Time

shall be.

Do I wander from the thread of my story—I who have dressed my puppets in the brave deeds of those who strove and endured and suffered, to what a glorious end?

Great writers lay down plans, formulate elaborate synopses. Not so I, who, out of all the wreaths that Fame holds yet in her lap to give away, shall never call one laurel mine....

A wandering wind came sighing past my ears one night upon the Links at Herion, burdened with this story it had to tell. Before then it had only blown in fitful gusts. Then again it blew steadily. I had caught some whispers from it years before. On the deck of the great, populous, electric-lighted ocean-hotel that was hurrying me across the Atlantic, racing the porpoise-schools to get to New York City; and later at Washington, when the red sunset-fires burned low behind the Capitol, it spoke to me in the wonderful, beloved voice I shall never hear on earth any more. Yet once more the wind came faintly sighing, in the giant blue shadow of Table Mountain; it blew at Johannesburg, six thousand feet above sea-level, in a raging cyclone of red gritty dust. Again it came, stirring the celadon-green carpet of veld that is spread at the feet of the Magaliesberg Ranges, that were turquoise-blue as the scillas growing in the South Welsh garden that lies before the window where I write, this variable spring day. But it blew with a most insistent note on the dumpy mound where they have rebuilt the ridiculous, glorious village that gave birth to deeds worthy of the Age Heroic, about whose sand-bagged defences nightly patrolled a Sentinel who never slept.

Gueldersdorp tumbled out of bed at three-thirty, to see the troops march in by the cold white morning moonlight that painted long indigo-blue shadows of marching horsemen and rolling guns, drawn by many horses, and huge-teamed baggage-waggons, eastward over the bleached dust.

I dare not attempt to describe the indescribable. Zulu and Barala, Celestial and Hindu, welcomed the Relief each after his own manner, and were glad and rejoiced. But of these haggard men and emaciated women of British race I can but say that in them human joy attained the climax of a sacred frenzy—that human gratitude and enthusiasm, loyalty and patriotism, reached the pitch at which the mercury in the thermometer of human emotion ceases to record altitudes.

At its height, when the last fort had fallen to England and the flag of the United Republics had fluttered down from the tree whence it had waved so long, and the Union Jack went up to frantic cheering, and the retreating cloud of dust on the horizon told of the exit of the enemy from the Theatre of War, Saxham played his one trump card in the game that meant life and death to him, and life, and everything that made life worth living, to one other.

* * * * *

You are to see the hulking Doctor with the square-cut face, his grim under-jaw more squarely set than ever, his blue eyes smouldering anxiety under their glooming brows, trying to coax a pale, bewildered girl to take a walk with him. She would at length, provided Sister Tobias walked on the other side and held her hand. So this party of three plunged into the boiling whirlpool of joyous Gueldersdorp.

People were singing "God Save the Queen," and "The Red, White, and Blue," "Auld Lang Syne" and "Rule, Britannia," all at once and all together, and playing the tunes of them on mouth-organs and concertinas. They were shaking hands with one another and everybody else, and shedding tears of joy, and borrowing the pocket-handkerchiefs of sympathetic strangers to dry them, or leaving them undried. They were crowding the Government kitchens, drinking the healths of the officers and men of Great Britain's Union Brigade in hot soup and hot coffee. They were clustered like bees upon the most climbable house-tops, watching those retiring dust-clouds in the distance, and the nearer movements of their friends and allies; they were hearing the experiences of dust-stained and travel-worn Imperialists, and telling their own; and one and all, they were thanking God Who had led them, through bodily fear, and mental anguish, and bitter privations, to hail the dawn of this most blessed day.

The electrical atmosphere, the surge of the multitude, the roar of thousands of voices, the gaze of thousands of eyes, had its effect upon the girl. She trembled and flushed and paled. Her breath came quick and short. She threw back her head and gasped for air. But she did not wish to be taken back to the Convent bombproof. She shook her head when Sister Tobias suggested that they should return.

And then some of the women whom she had helped to nurse in hospital saw her, and recognised her, and came about her with pitiful words and compassionate looks—not only for her own sake, but for that dead woman's whose adopted daughter they knew her to have been.

"You poor, blessed, innocent lamb!" They crowded about her, kissing her hands and her dress, and Sister Tobias's shabby black habit. "Lord help you!" they mourned over her. "Christ pity you, and bring you to yourself again!"

"Why are you so sorry?" Lynette asked them, knitting her delicate brows, and peering curiously in their tearful smiling faces. "No!" she corrected herself; "I mean why are you so glad?"

"Glad is ut, honey!" screamed a huge Irishwoman, throwing a brawny red arm about the shrinking figure and hugging it. "Begob, wid the Holy Souls dancin' jigs in Purgatory, an' the Blessed Saints clappin' their han's in Heaven, we have rayson to be glad! Whirroosh! Ould Erin for ever—an' God save the Cornel!"

She yelled with all the power of her Celtic lungs, plucked off her downtrodden shoes, slapped their soles together smartly, and, with a gesture of royal prodigality, tossed them right and left into the air, performed a caper of surprising agility on elephantine, blue-yarn-stocking-covered feet, and was carried away by a roaring surge of the joyous crowd, vociferating.

Saxham felt the slender hand of his charge tighten upon his arm, and his heart leaped as he noted the working of the sensitive face and the heaving of the small, nymph-like bosom under the thin material of her dress. He hoped, he believed that a change was taking place in her. He said to himself that the delicate mechanism of her brain, clogged and paralysed by a great mental shock, was revitalising, storing energy, gaining power; that the lesion was healing; that she would recover—must recover.

Then his quick eye saw fatigue in her. They took her back out of the dust and the clamour and the crowd, back to the quiet of the Cemetery.

It happened there. For as she stood again beside the long, low mound beneath which the heart that had cherished her lay mouldering, they saw that the tears were running down her face, and that her whole body was shaken with sobbing. And then, as a wild tornado of cheering, mingled with drifts of martial music, swept northwards from Market Square, she fell upon her knees beside the grave, and cried as if to living ears:

"Mother;—oh! Mother, the Relief! They're here! Oh, my own darling—to be glad without you!..."

She lay there prone, and wept as though all the tears pent up in her since that numbing double stroke of the Death Angel's sword were flowing from her now. And Sister Tobias, glancing doubtfully up at Saxham's face, saw it transfigured and irradiated with a great and speechless joy. For he knew that the light had come back to the beautiful eyes he loved, and that the Future might yield its harvest of joy yet, even yet, for the Dop Doctor, he believed in his own blindness.

LVI

They were standing together in the same place two months later when he told her all, and asked her to be his wife in his own brusque characteristic way.

"You have been so good, so kind," she said, in rather formal phrase, but with her sweet eyes shining through tears and her sensitive lips trembling. "You have shown yourself to be so noble in your unselfish care for others, in your unsparing efforts for the good and benefit of everyone——"

"Put that by," said Saxham rather roughly, "and please to look at me, Miss Mildare."

He had never called her Lynette since her recovery, or touched the pretty hand he coveted unless in formal greeting.

"Put all that by. You see me to-day as you have seen me for months past, conscientious and cleanly, sober and sane, in body as in mind, discharging my duty at the Hospital and elsewhere as well as any other man possessing the special qualifications it demands. Pray understand that I am not a philanthropist, and have never posed as one. For the sake, first of a man who believed in me, and secondly of a woman whom I love—and you are she—I have done what I have."

He squared his great shoulders and stood up before her, and, though his face had never had any charm for her, its power went home to her and its passion thrilled.

"I play no part. The man I seem to be I am. But up to seven months ago, before the siege began, I was known in this town, and with reason, as the Dop Doctor."

He saw recollection waken in her eyes, and nerved himself to the sharp ordeal of changing it to repulsion and disgust.

"You have heard that name applied to me. It

conveyed nothing loathsome to your innocent mind. You once repeated it to me, and were about to ask its meaning. I had it in my mind then to enlighten you, and for the mean and cowardly baseness that shrank from the exposure I have to pay now in the"—a muscle in his pale face twitched—"the exquisite pain it is to me to tell you to-day."

"Then do not tell me." She said it almost in a whisper. "Dr. Saxham, I beg you most earnestly to spare yourself." She dropped her eyes under the fierce earnestness of his, and knitted her cold little hands in one another. "Please leave the rest unsaid," she begged, without looking at him.

"It cannot be," said Saxham. "Miss Mildare, the Dop Doctor was only another nickname for the Town Drunkard. And now you know what you should have known before if I had not been a coward and a knave."

She turned her eyes softly upon him, and they could not rest, it seemed to her, upon a man of braver and more lofty bearing.

"I *was* the Town Drunkard," Saxham went on, in the cold, clear voice that cut like a knife to the intelligence. "Known in every liquor-saloon, and familiar to every constable, and a standing butt for the clumsy jests that the most utter dolt of a Police Magistrate might splutter from the Bench." His jarring laugh hurt her. "The Man in the Street, and the Woman of the Street, for that matter—pardon me if I offend your ears, but the truth must be told—were my godfather and my godmother, and they gave me that name between them. You are trembling, Miss Mildare. Sit down upon that balk, and I will finish."

There was a remnant of timber lying near that had been used in the construction of a gun-mounting. She moved to it and sat down, and the Doctor went on:

"I am not going to weary you with the story of how I came to be—what I have told you. But that I had lived a clean and honourable and temperate life up to thirty years of age—when my world caved in with me—I swear is the very truth!"

She said gently: "I can believe it, Dr. Saxham."

"Even if you could not it would not alter the fact. And then, at the height of my success, and on the brink of a marriage that I dreamed would bring me the fulfilment of every hope a man may cherish, one impulse of pity and charity towards a wretched little woman brought me ruin, ruin, ruin!"

Pity for a wretched woman had brought it all about. She was glad to see the Saxham of her knowledge in that Saxham whom she had not known. He folded his great arms upon his broad breast and went on:

"Nothing was left to me. Everything was gone. Rehabilitation in the eyes of the Law—for I gained that much—did not clear me in the eyes of Society—that hugs the guilt-stained criminal to its heart in the full consciousness of what his deeds are, and shudders at the innocent man upon whom has once fallen the shadow of that grim and bloody Idol that civilisation misnames Justice. I was cast out. Even by the brother I had trusted and the woman I had loved. I had in a vague way believed in God until then; I know I used to pray to Him to bless those I loved, and help me to achieve great things for their sakes. But nothing at all was left of that except a dull aching desire to throw back in the face of the Deity

the little He had left to me. My health, and my intellectual powers, and my self-respect...."

Her voice came to his ears in the half-whispered words:

"Had He left you so little, after all?"

"Little enough," said Saxham doggedly, "compared with what I had lost. And as it is the privilege of the Christian to blame either the Almighty or the devil for whatever ills are brought on him by his own blind, reckless challenging of the Inevitable—termed Fate and Destiny by classical Paganism,—so I found myself at odds with One I had been taught to call my Maker."

In His own acre, close to her beloved dead, with all those little white crosses marking where other dust that had once praised Him with the human voice lay waiting for the summons of the Resurrection, it was incredibly awful to her to hear Him thus denied. She grew pale and shuddered, and Saxham saw.

"You see that I wish to be honest with you, and open and above-board. I would not ever have you say to yourself, 'This man deceived—this man misled me, wishing me to think him better than he was.' There is not much more to tell you—save that I took what money remained to me at the bank and from the sale of my last possessions—about a thousand pounds—and shook the dust off from my shoes, and came out here, drunk, to carry out my purpose of self-degradation to the uttermost. And I became a foul beast among beasts that were even fouler, but less vile and less shameful because their mental and moral standard was infinitely lower than my own. And they gave me the name you know of." His voice

had the ring of steel smitten on steel. He drew himself up with a movement of almost savage pride, and the knotted veins swelled on his broad white forehead, and his blue eyes blazed under his thunderous smudge of black eyebrows.

"The name you know. It used to be called after me when I reeled the streets—they whispered it afterwards as I rode by. To-day it is forgotten." His nostrils quivered, and he threw out his hands as if with that action he tossed something worthless to the winds. "Miss Mildare, I have not touched Drink—the stuff that was my nourishment and my sustenance, my comfort and my bane, my deadliest enemy and my only friend—since that hour when with the last effort of my will I rallied all my mental and bodily forces to resist its base allurement."

"I know it, Dr. Saxham. I am sure of it." She rose and held out her hands to him, but he folded his arms more closely over his starving, famished heart, and would not see them yet.

"You can be sure of it. Alcohol is no longer my master and my god. I stand before you a free man, because I willed to be free." There was a little blob of foam at one corner of his mouth, but the square pale face was composed, even impassive. "Once, not so long ago, I filled a place of standing in the professions of Surgery and Medicine; I knew what it was to be esteemed and respected by the world. For your dear sake I promise to regain what I have lost; be even more than I used to be, achieve greater things than are done by other men of equal powers with mine. I am not a man to pledge my word lightly, Miss Mildare...." His voice shook now and his blue eyes glistened. "If you would be so—so

unutterably kind as to become my wife, I promise you a worthy husband. I swear to you upon what I hold dearest and most sacred—your own life, your own honour, your own happiness, never to give you cause to regret marrying me! For I may die, indeed, but living I will never fail you!"

There was a lump in her throat choking her. Her eyes had gone to that other grave some fifty paces distant from the Catholic portion of the Cemetery. There were freshly-gathered flowers upon it, as upon the grave that lay so near, and two gorgeous butterflies were hovering about the blooms, in mingled dalliance and greediness.

"You loved him," said Saxham, following the journey of her wistful eyes. "Love him still; remember him for every trait and quality of his that was worthy of love from you. But give me the hope of one day gaining from you some shadow of—of return for what I feel for you. Is it Passion? I hardly know. Whether it is Love, in the sense in which that word is employed by many of the women and nearly all the men I have met, I do not know either. But that it is the life of my life to me and the breath of my being—you cannot look at me and doubt!"

She was not looking at him. Her eyes were on the little white cross above the Mother's grave; there was an anxious fold between the slender dark eyebrows.

"You—you wish to marry a Catholic—you, who tell me that you were once a Christian and are now Agnostic?"

"If I have not what is called Faith," said Saxham, "I may at least lay claim to the quality of reverence. And I honour the religion that has made you what

you are. Cleave to your Church, child—hold to your pure beliefs, and keep a little love back, Lynette, from your Holy Family and your Saints in Heaven, to give to a poor devil who needs it desperately!"

The sweet colour flushed her, and her face was more than beautiful in its compassion. She said:

"I pray for you now, and I will always. And one day our Lord will give you back the faith that you have lost."

"Thank you, dear!" said Saxham humbly. She was opening her lips to speak again when he lifted his hand and stopped her.

"There is one other thing I should like to make clear. I—am not rich. But neither am I absolutely poor. Letters that I have received from a firm of solicitors acting for the trustees and executors of—a near relative deceased, will prove to you that I am possessed of some small property, bringing in an annual income of something like two hundred pounds, and funds sufficient to settle a few thousands upon my wife by way of marriage-jointure. Believe me," he added, in answer to her look, "I know you to be incapable of a mercenary thought. But what I should have explained to"—he pointed to the grave that lay so near—"to *her*, I must make clear to you. It could not be otherwise."

She went over to the grave and knelt beside it, and laid her pure cheek upon it, and spoke to the Dead in a low, murmuring tone. Saxham knew as he watched her, breathing heavily, that the consent of the Mother would never have been given to the marriage he proposed. That other obstacle in the road of his desire, the lover who had deceived, had been swept

away, with the stern and tender guardian, in one cataclysm of Fate. He went back in thought to the ending of his long shooting-match *à outrance* with Father Noah, and remembered how he had promised himself that all should go well with Saxham provided Saxham's bullet got home first.

Were not things going better than he had hoped? She had not even recoiled from him when he had told her of those degraded days of wastrelhood. Surely things were going well for Saxham, he said, as he waited with his hungering eyes upon his heart's desire. What it cost him not to step over to her, snatch her from the ground, and crush her upon his heart with hot and passionate kisses and wild words of worship, he knew quite well. But in that he was able to exercise such a mastery over himself and keep that other Saxham down, Saxham gave praise to that strange god he had set up, and worshipped, and bowed down before, calling it The Omnipotent Human Will.

She rose by-and-by, and stood with clasped hands, thinking. It was very still, and the air was sweet and balmy, and beyond the lines of the defence-works miles upon miles of sunlit veld rolled away to the hills that were mantled in clear hyacinth-colour and hooded with pale rose.

"If I married you, you would take me away from this country and these people who have killed her?"

She had the thought of another in her heart and the name of another upon her lips. But only her eyes spoke, travelling to that more distant grave where the butterflies were hovering above the flowers, as Saxham answered:

"I would take you away, if you wished it."

"To England?"

"Back to England."

"I should see London, and the house where Mother lived...." She seemed to have forgotten Saxham, and to be uttering her thoughts aloud. "I might even see the green mountains of Connemara in Ireland—her own mountains she used to call them. I might one day meet people who are of her blood and name ——"

"And of *his*," thought Saxham, following her eyes' wistful journey to that other grave.

"But," she went on, "it would all depend"—she breathed with agitation and knitted her slim white fingers together, and looked round at him with that anxious wrinkle between her fine eyebrows—"upon how much you asked of me! Suppose I——" His intent and burning eyes confused her, and she dropped her own beneath them. "If I were to marry you, would you leave me absolutely free?"

"Absolutely," said Saxham. "With the most complete freedom a wife could possibly desire."

"I meant—a different kind of freedom from a wife's." She knitted and unknitted her hands. "It is difficult to explain. Would you be willing to ask nothing of me that a friend or a sister might not give? Would you be content——"

Her transparent skin glowed crimson with the rush of blood. Her bosom laboured with the hurry of her breathing. Her white lids veiled her eyes, or the sudden terrible change in Saxham's face might have

wrung from her a cry of terror and alarm. But he mastered the raging jealousy that tore him, and said, with a jarring note of savage irony in the voice that had always spoken to her gently until then:

"Would I be content to enter, with you for my partner, into a marriage that should be practically no marriage at all—a formal contract that is not wedlock? That might never change as Time went on, and alter into the close union that physically and mentally makes happiness for men and women who love? Is that what you ask me, Miss Mildare?"

She looked at him full and bent her head. And the man's heart, that had throbbed so wildly, stopped beating with a sudden jerk, and the divine fire that burned and tingled in his blood died out, and the cold sickness of baffled hope weighed on him like a mantle of lead. And the voice that had whispered to him so alluringly, telling him that it was not too late, that he might even yet win this virginal pure, sweetly-budding maiden, and know the bliss of being loved at last, sank into silence. His face was set like granite, and as grey. His eyes burned darkly under his heavy brows. He waited, sombrely and hopelessly, for her to speak again.

"There are such marriages——?"

The question was diffidently and timidly put. He answered:

"Assuredly there are. But not between those who are —physically and mentally, sane and healthy men and women,—at least, in my experience. One case, of three I am at liberty to quote, was that of an aged and wealthy woman of position and a young and rising public man."

"Were—weren't they happy?"

The face of the inward, unseen Saxham was twisted in a miserable grin, but the outward man preserved immobility.

"He enjoyed life. She sat by, and saw, every day joining nearer, her death, that was to leave him free."

"And the others?"

She asked it with an indrawn breath of anxiety.

"The second case was that of a man, middle-aged and helplessly paralysed by an accident in the hunting-field, and of a beautiful and high-spirited young woman—almost a girl. She took a romantic interest in him—talked of his ruined career and blighted life, and all that sort of thing. And—they married, and she found her bondage intolerable.... It ended in his divorcing her. The *decree nisi* was made absolute a few days before I left London. The third case bears more analogy to yours and mine."

"Please go on."

"There was no great disparity of age between these two people. They were sympathetic, cultured, independent both. Their views upon many subjects—including the sex question—were identical," said Saxham slowly. "And they entered into a bond of union that had for its ultimate aim the culture of the intellect and the development of what they called the Soul. The Flesh had nothing in it; the Body," said Saxham, with a grating sarcasm, "was utterly ignored. I forget whether they were Agnostics, Buddhists, or Christians. They certainly suffered for their creed. But"—his voice softened and deepened —"at any rate, the woman suffered most!"

Her lips parted, her eyes were intent upon him.

"You have lived with Sisters of Mercy in a Convent," went on Saxham. "You know of their lives even more than I—greatly to my advantage—have learned. Energetic, useful, stirring, active, never complaining, always ready to make the best of the world as they find it, and help others to do the same; always regarding it as the preparatory school or training-college for a state of being infinitely greater, nobler, and more glorious than anything the merely mundane imagination can conceive—you can realise how infinitely to the nuns' advantage is the contrast between them and the laywomen of Society, peevish, hysterical, neurotic, sensual, and bored. But before these chastened, temperate bodies, these serene and well-balanced minds attained the state of self-control and crossed the Rubicon of resignation, what struggles their owners must have undergone!—what ordeals of anguish they must have endured! Did that never strike you?"

Her lips were pale, and there were shadows under her eyes. She bent her head.

"The woman, who was not a nun, did for the sake of a man what the nun feels supernaturally called upon to do for her God," said Saxham. "She thrust her hand deep into her woman's bosom, and dragged out her woman's heart, and wrung from it every natural human yearning, and purged it—or thought she purged it—of every earthly desire, before she laid the pulseless, emptied thing down before his feet for him to tread upon. And that is what he did!"

He heard her pant softly, and saw her hand move upward to her beating heart. His deadly earnestness appalled her. Was he not fighting for what was more

than life to him? He folded his arms over his great chest, and said:

"For ten years he and she lived together in a union called ideal by ignorant enthusiasts and high-minded cranks. Then she drooped and died—victim of the revolt of outraged Nature. A little before the end they sent for me. I said to the man: 'A child would have saved her!' And he—I can hear him now, answering: 'Ah! but that would have nullified all the use and purpose of our example for humanity.' The idiot—the abortive, impossible, dreary idiot! And if ever there was a woman intended by wholesome Nature to bear and nurture babes, it was that woman, who died to prove the possibility of carrying on the business of living according to his damned theories."

His broad chest heaved; a mist came before his eyes; his deep vibrating voice had in it a passionate appeal to her.

"The nun would tell you that in the lofty, mystical sense marriage and motherhood are hers, 'Christ being her Spouse.' I echo this in no spirit of mockery. But this woman of whom I have told you knew no vocation and took no vow. She merely tried to ignore the fundamental truth that every normal woman of healthy instincts was meant to be a mother."

He added:

"And every husband who loves his wife sees his manhood proved and perfected in her. She was dear and beloved before; she is holy, sacred—worshipped in his eyes, when they look upon his child in her arms, at her breast."

Something like a sob broke from him. His heart cried:

"Lynette! have pity upon yourself and upon me!"

He stood and waited for her reply. She was so exquisite and so full of womanly allure, and yet so crystal-cold and passionless, that he knew his arguments thrown away, his entreaties mere dust upon the wind.

"Tell me," he said at length, "do I inspire you with antipathy? Am I physically repulsive to you, or disagreeable? Answer me frankly, for in that case I would—cease to urge my suit with you, and go upon my way, wherever it might lead me."

She looked at him, and there was no shrinking in her regard—only a gentle friendliness, as far removed from the feeling he would have roused in her as the North is from the South.

"I will tell you exactly how I feel towards you." He writhed under the knowledge that it was possible to her to analyse and to explain. "I like you, Dr. Saxham. I am deeply grateful to you——"

"Gratitude!" He shrugged his shoulders. "You owe me none; and even if you did, what use is gratitude to a man who asks for love?"

"I trust you; I rely upon you," she said. "It is—pleasant to me to know that you are near." A line of perplexity came between the dark fine eyebrows; the sweet colour in her face wavered and sank. "But—if you were to touch me—to take me in your arms—I ——" She shivered.

"You need not say more!" If she was pale, Saxham's

stern, square face was ashen. His eyes glowered and fell under hers, and a purple vein swelled in the middle of his broad white forehead. "I understand!"

"You do not understand quite yet." She moved away from the Mother's grave, saying to him with a slight beckoning gesture of the hand, "Please come!..."

Saxham followed her, hearing the harsh, jeering laughter of that other Saxham above the faint rustle of her dress. His covetous, despairing eyes dwelt on her and clung about her. Ah! the exquisite poise of the little head, with its red-brown waves and coils; the upright, slender elegance of shape, like a young palm-tree; the long, smooth, undulating step with which she moved between the graves, picking her way with sedulous, delicate care among the little crowding white-painted crosses; the atmosphere of girlish charm and womanly allurement that breathed from her and environed her!...

His torpid pulses throbbed again. The voice began again its whispering at his ear.

"You cannot live without her. Accept her conditions. Better to be unhappy in the sight and sound and touch of her, unpossessed, than to be desperate, lacking her. Accept her conditions with a mental reservation. Trust to Time, the healer, to bring change and forgetfulness. Or, break your promise to that dead man, and tell her—as he would have had you tell her, remember!—as he would have had you tell her!—that when he asked her hand in marriage, he was the wedded husband of the dancer, Lessie Lavigne!"

He knew where she was leading him—to Beauvayse's grave. The voice kept whispering, urging as they

went. He saw and heard as a man sees and hears in a dream the pair of butterflies that hovered yet about the fresh flowers her hands had gathered and placed there. One jewel-winged, diamond-eyed insect rose languidly and wavered away as Lynette's light footsteps drew near. The other remained, poised upon the lip of a honeyed, waxen blossom, with closed, vertically-held wings and quivering antennæ, sucking its sweet juices as greedily as the dead man had drunk of the joy of life.

Now she was speaking:

"Dr. Saxham, I have brought you here because I have something to tell you that *he*"—her face quivered —"should have been told. When you spoke a little while ago of openness and candour—when you said that you would never mislead or deceive me for your own advantage, that I should know the worst of you together with the best—you held up before me, quite unknowingly, an example that showed me—that proved to me"—her voice wavered and broke—"how much I am your inferior in honesty and truth!"

"*You* my inferior!" Saxham almost laughed. "*I* an example of light and leading, elevated for your guidance! If you were capable of irony——"

He broke off, for she went on as though he had not spoken:

"When first we met—I mean yourself and me—I remember telling you, upon a sudden impulse of confidence and trust in you, what I had determined my life-work was to be——"

"Dear, innocent-wise enthusiast," thought Saxham, "dreaming over your impossible plan for regenerating

the world! Beloved child-Quixote, tilting at the Black Windmills, how dare I, who was once the Dop Doctor of Gueldersdorp, love you and seek you for my own? Madness—madness on the face of it!" But, madness or sanity, he could not choose but love her.

"Your life-work!... It was to be carried out among *those others* whose voices you heard calling you. See," he said, with the shadow of a smile, "how I remember everything you say, or have ever said, in my hearing!"

"You think too well of me," she broke out, with sudden energy.

"It is not possible to think too well of you!"

"You think so now, perhaps, but when you know ——"

Her eyes brimmed and the tears welled over her white under-lids. She put up both her little hands, and rubbed the salt drops away with her knuckles, like a child.

"When I have told you, you will alter—you cannot help but alter your opinion!"

"No!" denied Saxham; and the monosyllable seemed to drop from his grim lips like a stone. Her bosom heaved with short, quick sobs.

"I meant to go out into the world, and meet those women who think and work for women, and hear all they have to say, and learn all they have to teach. Then——"

She was Beatrice again, as she turned her face full on Saxham, and once more the virginal veil fell, and he was conscious of strange abysses of knowledge

opening in those eyes.

"—Then I meant to seek out those women and girls and children of whom I spoke to you, those who lie fettered with chains that wicked men have riveted, in the dark dungeons that their tyrants and torturers have quarried out of the living rock, out of the reach of fresh air and sunshine, beyond the reach of those who would pity and help ... I meant to go down to them, and comfort them, and raise them up. I meant to have said: 'Trust me, believe me, listen to me, follow me! For my sorrow is your sorrow, and my wrong your wrong, and my shame yours—O! my poor, poor unhappy sisters!...'"

There was a great drumming and surging of the blood in Saxham's ears. His heart beat in heavy laboured, measured strokes, like the tolling of a death-bell. He saw her cover her face with her hands, and drop upon her knees amongst the grasses that greenly clothed the red soil. He saw the butterfly, startled from its feast, rise and waver away. And he saw, too, his veiled nymph, his virginal white goddess, his chaste, veiled maiden Artemis, toppled from her pedestal and lying in the gutter.

Her sorrow the sorrow of those spotted ones! her wrong theirs, and theirs her shame!... So this was the sordid secret that haunted the depths of those eyes—the eyes of Beatrice! He turned his head away, so as not to look upon her, and his face grew dark with the rush of blood. But still he heard her speaking, as a man hears in a dream.

"At school all the older girls thought and talked of nothing but Love, and most of the younger ones did the same.... And I, who knew the dreadful, cruel, hideous side of the thing that each of them set up

and worshipped—I who shuddered when a man's breath, and a man's voice, and a man's face came near—I said in my heart that Love should never find a dupe and a slave and a tool in me. I meant to live for the Mother, and be to those poor sisters of mine what she was—oh, my darling! my darling!—to me! And all the while Love was coming nearer and nearer, and at last——"

She swept the tears from her face with the palms of her slight open hands, and drew a deep, shuddering breath, and went on brokenly, with sobs between the gasped-out sentences:

"—At last it came. I never tried to struggle against it; it wrapped me in a net of exquisite sweet softness, that held me like a cage of steel. I gave myself up to the blissfulness and the joy of it. I was unfaithful to those others—I forgot them for Beauvayse! Oh, why should Love make it so easy to do unlovely things? to be unworthy, to break promises, and to be false to vows? You are in earnest when you make them ... you are proud to be so sure that nothing shall change or turn you.... Then eyes that are like strange jewels look deep into yours. A voice that is like no other voice whispers at your ear. It says strange, sweet, secret things—things that come back and burn you—and his breath upon your cheek drowns out your scruples in wave upon wave of magical, thrilling, wonderful sensation!..." She shuddered. "And everything else is blotted out, and no one else matters! You are not even sorry that you have left off caring.... Love has made you indifferent as well as unkind!"

She looked up at Saxham from where she crouched down at his feet among the grasses, and her distress

melted some of the ice that was closing round his heart.

"Love cannot be good. It brings no peace, no happiness—nothing but restless misery and burning pain. It makes you even willing to deceive *him*." Her lids fluttered and she caught her breath. "When another to whom I was dear, and who knew, said, 'Never tell him! I command you never to tell him!' I pretended to myself that the words had not been spoken out of pity, because my darling loved me too well to see me suffer; and I told myself that it was right to obey."

Saxham, following the yearning look that went back to that other's grave, heard the unforgettable voice uttering the command.

"*He* never dreamed of my miserable secret. He was so free, so frank, so open himself. He had nothing to hide—he was incapable of deceit! It never occurred to him—oh, Beau! Beau!"

Saxham's face was set like a mask carved in granite, but that other Saxham, within the man she saw through her tears, was wrung and twisted and wrenched in spasms and gusts of insane, uncontrollable, helpless laughter.

"*Nothing to hide—incapable of deceit!*" It seemed to him that the dead man, all that way down under the red earth and the grass and the flowers, must be laughing, too, at the Dop Doctor who was fool enough not to speak out and end the farce for ever.

Should he? Why not? But for what reason now, and to what end, since his virginal-pure, dew-pearled, Convent lily lay trodden in the mire? And yet, to

look in those eyes....

They did not falter or droop under his again, as she told him in few and simple words the story of what had happened in the tavern on the veld.

"Now you know all!" she said; "now you understand!... Sister Tobias knows, too, and there is one other.... I do not speak of ..."—she shuddered and grew pale—"but of a man whom all of us here have learned to look up to, and believe in, and trust. No confidence has ever passed between us. I cannot give you any reason for this belief of mine in his knowledge of my story. I only feel that it is no secret to the Colonel, whenever he looks at me with those wise, kind, pitying eyes."

There was a look in Saxham's eyes that was not pity. The sunbeam that shone through the loose plait of her coarse straw hat, and gilded the edges of the red-brown hair-waves, aureoled again for him the head of Beatrice.

"I have no faith left, but I am capable of reverence," he had said to her.

Now, as he knelt down in the grass before the little brown shoes, and lifted the hem of her linen gown and kissed it, the hulking-shouldered Doctor proved his possession of the quality. Devouring desire, riotous passion, were, if not killed in him, at least quelled and overthrown and bound. Pure pity and tenderness awakened in him. And Chivalry, all *cap-à-pie* in silver mail, rose up to do battle for her against the world and against that other Saxham.

"I accept the trust you are willing should be mine. Take my name—take all I have to give! I make no

reservations. I stipulate no conditions. I ask for nothing in return, except the right to be your brother and guardian and defender. Trust me! The life-work you have chosen shall be yours; as far as lies in my power, I will help you in it. Your pure ends and noble aims shall never be thwarted or hindered. And have no fear of me, my sweet saint, my little sister. For I may die," said Saxham once again, "but, living, I will never fail you!"

LVII

Saxham, of St. Stephen's, had long ago faded from the recollection of London Society, but Saxham, M.D., F.R.C.S., Late Attached Medical Staff, Gueldersdorp, and frequently mentioned in Despatches from that bit of debatable soil, while it was in process of debating, was distinctly a person to cultivate. Not that it was in the least easy—the man was almost quite a bear, but his brevity of speech and brusqueness of manner gave him a cachet that Society found distinguished. He was married, too—so romantic! married to a girl who was shut up with him in Gueldersdorp all through the Siege. Quite too astonishingly lovely, don't you know? and with manners that really suggested the Faubourg St. Germain. Where she got her style—brought up among Boers and blacks—was to be wondered at, but these problems made people all the more interesting. And one met her with her husband at all the best houses since the Castleclares had taken them up. Indeed, Mrs. Saxham was a relative—was it a cousin? No—now it all came back! Adopted daughter, that was it, of an aunt—no, a step-sister of Lord Castleclare, that ineffable little prig of twenty-two, who as a Peer and Privy Councillor of Ireland, and a Lord-in-Waiting to boot, was nevertheless a personage to be deferred to.

One had heard, hadn't one, ages ago, of the famous beauty, Lady Bridget-Mary Bawne? Well, that was the very person, who had been Abbess, or Prioress, or something-else-ess of a Roman Catholic Sisterhood

at Gueldersdorp, and died of pneumonia during the Siege, or did she get shot? That was it, poor dear thing, and how quite too horrid for her!

We may know that that belated letter of the Mother's —written to her kinswoman when the first mutterings of the storm were yet dulled by distance, and the threatening clouds were beginning to build their blue-black bastions and frowning ramparts on the horizon—had got through at last. The Bawnes, true to their hereditary quality of generous loyalty, threw open their doors and their hearts to dead Bridget-Mary's darling; and Saxham was undisguisedly grateful when he saw how she warmed to them. But he gave no encouragement, verbal, written, or tacit to their desire to fulfil the dead woman's wishes in the settlement of a sum of money upon Lynette. He had made such provision for her himself as his means permitted. His books had been selling steadily for the past six years, his publishers had paid him a handsome sum in royalties, and a thousand guineas for the copyright of a new work. Plas Bendigaid was secured to his wife; and Saxham's life was heavily insured, and the bulk of the sum remaining from the purchase of the furniture and fixtures of the house in Harley Street, with the practice of the physician who was giving up tenancy, had been invested in her name with the other funds. Why should strangers interfere with his sole privilege of working for her?

"I should prefer that the decision should be left entirely to my wife," he said, when the Head of the House of Bawne, with the pompous solemnity distinctive of a young man who takes himself and his position seriously, formally broached the subject.

"Lady Castleclare has—arah!—already approached Mrs. Saxham on the question," said Lord Castleclare, tapping the shiny surface of the leather-covered writing-table near which he sat with the long, thin, ivory-hued fingers, ending in long, narrow, bluish-tinted nails, that had descended to him—with the peculiar sniffing drawl that prolonged and punctuated his verbal utterance—from his late father. "And I regret to hear from Lady Castleclare that Mrs. Saxham gave no encouragement to the suggestion. I confess myself disappointed equally with my wife and my elder step-sister, the Duchess of Broads, to whom the letter was written—the letter that you will understand conveys to the family I represent, the last wishes of one whose memory we hold in the most sacred love and reverence——"

The Right Honourable Privy Councillor had here to stop and dry his eyes, that were frankly overflowing. Though short, and not at all distinguished of appearance, having derived from his mother, the Dowager Countess, née Miss Nancy McIleevy, of McIleevystown, County Down, certain personal disadvantages to counterbalance the immense fortune amassed by her uncle, the brewer, this little gentleman of great affairs possessed the kindly heart, and the quick and sensitive nature of the paternal stock. Now he continued:

"—Under the circumstances you will permit me to renew the proposal with a slight modification. The sum we proposed to invest in Government securities for Mrs. Saxham's benefit, carrying out a charge that we regard it as a privilege to—to have received—is not large, merely five thousand pounds." He coughed. "Well, now it has occurred to me that Mrs. Saxham's objection to receive what she seems to

regard as a gift from people upon whom she has no claim—that is how she expressed herself to Lady Castleclare—might be got over—if I may employ the expression, by our settling the money upon your children?"

"Upon our children——"

They were sitting in Lord Castleclare's library at Bawne House, Grosvenor Square. Great books in gilded bindings gleamed from their covered and latticed shelves, and the perfume of Russia leather and cedar mingled with the aroma of rare tobacco in the air. A thin fog hung over the West End, deadening the sound of traffic, and dimming the polish of the tall plate-glass windows. The fire burned red behind bars of silvered steel, the ashes fell with a little clicking whisper. It seemed to Saxham that he could hear his pierced heart bleeding, drip, drip, drip! But he sat like a man of stone, his white, firm, supple hand clenched upon the carved knob of the chair-arm. Then he said, looking the Right Honourable Privy Councillor full in the face with those gentian-blue eyes of his, now sunk in caves that grew deeper day by day:

"Let it be so, my lord. I am willing, if my wife consents, that the money should be settled upon—her children."

He prescribed, at Lord Castleclare's request, for a political dyspepsia, and took leave in his brusque, characteristic way, and sent away his waiting motor-brougham, and walked home, thinking, by that new light that had flashed upon him.

It was January, the London January of whirling dust clouds below, and racing, murky vapours above.

They had been settled in the Harley Street house four months. It seemed to Saxham as though they had lived there for years. The routine of professional life was closing in upon him once again. Patients thronged to his door; Hospitals, and Societies, and Institutions were open to him as of old; Society courted and flattered him, and gushed about the beauty of Mrs. Saxham. It was as though that celebrated Criminal Case, The Crown *v.* Saxham, had never developed into ugly, sinister shape under the dirty skylight of the Old Bailey.

He crossed Grosvenor Square, and turned down Brook Street, thinking as he went. Pretty women in furs, their make-up subdued by silk-gauze veils, nodded to him from motor-broughams and victorias.

Though the horse-drawn hansom yet plied for hire, petrol was driving brute-power off the streets. The hooting and clanking of the motor-omnibus made Oxford Street hideous. And that St. Vitus's Dance of the Tube Railway swept under the pavement beneath Saxham's tread as he had passed up New Bond Street. Certainly London was not more beautiful or pleasanter to live in for the six years that had gone by.

The Tube Works were responsible for much. The Companies were linking up the North with the West, and strings of trolleys, coupled together like railway-trucks, and laden with yellow clay or great balks of timber, or giant scales of bored armour-plating, or moleskin-clad, brawny navvies, progressed incessantly and at all hours through the thoroughfares of the metropolis behind huge, giraffe-necked, splay-wheeled, smoke-vomiting traction-engines. Houses and other buildings were being

pulled down to make stations; great hoardings were up, enclosing spaces where work went on all day, amidst clankings and groanings of machinery, and clouds of oily-smelling steam, and where work went on all night, with more groanings and more clankings, deplorable shrieks of steam-sirens and hellish flares that might have been reflections from a burning Tophet, cast upon yet bigger and denser clouds of the oily-smelling steam.

Yes! the big black opulent city was greatly changed. But the change in the people, affecting all ranks and every class, was even greater. There were compensations, if you could balance against the decay of good manners the improvements in sanitation, or set against the crop of evil sown by the dissemination of the vilest literature in the cheapest printed forms, the attainability, by the poorest, of the noblest productions of literary genius. Or if in congratulating yourself upon the marvellous progress of Scientific Inventions, hailing from the keen-brained West, you could condone the degradation of the English language in the mouths of Shakespeare's countrymen and countrywomen by the use of American slang phrases, common, vulgar, coarse, alternating with choice expressions culled from the vocabulary of the East End costermonger.

Privacy and reticence had become unfashionable, impossible in this, the era of the guinea-hunting Press-Interviewer. The barriers of social exclusiveness had given way before the push of the plutocrat. The Rubicon between good Society and bad Society had become invisible. Racial suicide and sexual licence most hideously prevailed, spreading like some vile disease from rank to rank, and class to class. Woman had become less womanly, man more

effeminate. Home was a word that had no longer any meaning. Religion had decayed; the fear of God had been forgotten. But Socialism was springing up, a rank and lusty weed, in crude neglected soil that might have been tilled to good purpose; and a cheap and rowdy form of patriotism was in a very healthy state, although the Union Jack had not yet replaced the Bible in the Board Schools.

Yes, things had changed, and not for the better! There was a tang upon the moral atmosphere that made the material petrol-fumes of the motor-omnibus almost acceptable by comparison. The air of Gueldersdorp had been cleaner, even with that taint from the crowded trenches heavy on it. Things had changed; and in the midst of all these changes, the last sands of the Great Victorian Age were running out of the glass.

That wonderful life was drawing to its simple, peaceful, noble, profoundly touching close, this January of 1901. And its ending had been hastened by the War.

Truly of her it has been said, and shall be; even when scholars of another race and another civilisation, springing from the ashes of this, wrest from the relics of a history of to-day the secrets of an ancient Past:

"She was not only the Sovereign, but the Mother of her people."

* * * * *

Saxham turned into Cavendish Square, and was in Harley Street. The white-enamelled door of a prosperous-looking corner-house bore a solid brass plate with his name. He thought, as he opened the

door with his Yale key, how strange it was that this, the very house he had planned to live in with Mildred, and had leased, and beautified, and decorated for her, should have been offered for his inspection by the first West End house-agent he applied to upon returning to London, whose dust he had shaken off the soles of his feet forever, barely six years before.

The practitioner who occupied the house—not the same man who had taken over the lease and fittings from Saxham—was ready to give it up, with all its costly appurtenances and up-to-date appointments, together with the practice, for quite a moderate slice of that legacy of thousands that had come to Saxham from Mildred's dead boy. Saxham, diagnosing the man's fever to realise and depart, wondered what secret, desperate motive lay at the back of his hurry? The reason was soon evident. Like thousands of other men, professional and private, the physician had been a dabbler on the Stock Exchange, and had gone in heavily for South African mining-stock, and had been ruined by the War.

It was a year of ruin. Society, led by Messrs. Washington P. Jukes and Themistocles K. Mombasa, six-foot, full-blooded buck niggers, elegantly scented, white-gloved, and arrayed in evening garments of Bond Street cut, danced the newly-imported Cake Walk through its ball-rooms and reception-saloons, with laughter on its reddened lips, and paste imitations of its family jewels in its waved coiffure and on its powdered bosom, and Ruin in its heart.

Great manufacturing enterprises, paralysed by lack of funds and lack of hands, were ruined. Managers producing plays to empty houses were ruined.

Publishers publishing books that nobody cared any longer to buy, were ruined. Painters expending time, and money, and toil, upon pictures that no longer found purchasers were ruined. Millions of smaller folks were ruined by the ruin of their betters. Only the great Mourning Warehouses prospered exceedingly, like the Liquor Trade and the Drug Trade. And the Remount and Forage Trades, and the Army-Contractors, flourished as the green bay-tree.

Saxham's motor-brougham had gone on in advance, twisting knowingly in and out of various corkscrew thoroughfares. It was waiting outside the house in Lower Harley Street as the Doctor reached the door. The chauffeur, a spare, short young man, punctiliously buttoned up in a long dark green, white-faced livery overcoat, a cap with a white-glazed peak shading a lean, brickdust-coloured face, with ugly, honest eyes that are familiar to the reader, cocked one of the eyes inquiringly at his employer, and receiving a sign implying that his services would not be required for some space of time to come, pulled up the lever, moved on, and turned down the side-street where were the entrance-gates of the stable-yard that had been turned into a garage. He had been in Saxham's employment nearly two months.

W. Keyse, late Corporal, Gueldersdorp Town Guards, had learned to clean, manage, and drive a motor-car belonging to an officer of the Garrison in spare hours during the Siege. This accomplishment, with some other learning gained in those strenuous and bracing times, had justified him in answering a *Times*

advertisement for a sober, active, and intelligent young man, possessing the requisite knowledge of London—"Cripps!" said W. Keyse, "as if I couldn't pick my way about the Bally Old Dustbin blindfolded!"—to act in the capacity of chauffeur to a West End medical practitioner.

An acquaintance who was a waiter at a Pall Mall Club gave him the tip, and the chance came in the nick of time, for Mr. and Mrs. W. Keyse were up against it, and no gay old error. "If you was to offer to blooming-well work for people for nothing," said Mrs. Keyse, "my belief is, they wouldn't 'ave you at the price!"

The Old Shop, as W. Keyse affectionately called his native island, had drawn the exiles home. Good-bye to the bronzed, ungirdled vastness of veld and karroo, and the clear, dark, distant blue of level-topped mountains bathed in the pure stimulating atmosphere that braces like champagne. Old England called with a voice there was no resisting, great draggle-tailed, grimy London beckoned to her boy and girl, as the big grey liner, with the scarlet smoke-stacks, engulfed her mails and passengers, dipped the Red Ensign in farewell to Table Mountain, and sped homewards on even keel over the heaving sapphire plain.

Southampton Dock was a pure delight to Mr. and Mrs. W. Keyse. The Waterloo Arrival platform sent thrills through their boot-soles to the roots of their hair. They sat in the Pit at the Oxford that night, and there was a South African sketch on with two of the chronic-est jossers you ever see, gassing away in khâki behind earthworks of sacks stuffed with straw, and standing up to chuck sentimental and patriotic

ballads off their chests, while the Enemy, who had kept up an intermittent rifle-practice at the wing, left off—presumably to listen. "After being used to the Reel Thing," W. Keyse said, "it was enough to make you up and blub!"

That was the first disillusion. Others followed. The aunt who had inhabited one of the ginger-brick almshouses over aginst 'Ighgyte Cemetery was dead when they took her a whole pound of tea and three-quarters of best cooked ham, and the delicacies had to be given to the old woman next door, with whom the deceased had always had words. You couldn't 'ave expected the old gal to last much longer, but still it was a blow.

Lobster had long ago given 'Melia the go-by, they learned, in return for the ham and the tea; and they got her address and hunted her up in a back-street behind the Queen's Crescent, and W. Keyse failed to recognise his charmer of old in a red-nosed, frowsy slattern, married to a sweated German in the baking-trade and mother of two of the dirtiest kids you ever ——! And Mrs. Keyse, to whom her William had expatiated upon the subject of his family, maintained a portentous dumbness, punctuated with ringing sniffs, during the visit, and was sarcastic on the bus, and tearfully penitent when they got back to the Waterloo Road lodging that was cheap at the weekly rent, she said, if you were paying for dirt and live-stock.

You couldn't spend your time enjoying yourself for ever, she added a little later on, as their small joint purse of savings dwindled and that pale ghost that men call Want began to hover about their hired bolster. W. Keyse had thought of soliciting a re-

engagement at the fried-fish shop in the High Street, Camden Town, but it had been swept away in favour of an establishment where they mended your boots while you waited. So he sought elsewhere. The War had drained away so many men, one would have thought employment could be had by any chap who took the trouble to walk about and look for it. But the soles of W. Keyse's boots were worn to their last thickness of brown paper, and all his clothes and Emigration Jane's, with the exception of the things him and her had on, had been pawned before it occurred to the man that that kind of walking ended in the Workhouse. The woman had known it from the very beginning. The valorous deeds of W. Keyse stood him in no good stead. London was stiff with liars who boasted of having been through the Siege, and their lies were more ornamental and sparkling than his truths.

Mrs. W. Keyse would have took a situation as General, and glad, but there were family reasons against that. She had broke down and cried somethink dreadful on her William's shabby tweed shoulder the morning he went out to answer the West End Doctor's advertisement. He kissed her and told her to keep her hair on, but she was so hysterical that he was fair afryde to leave 'er. So he took her along, and his good Angel must have suggested that.

Cripps!—when the manservant in plain clothes said, "Step this way, upstairs please"—W. Keyse and wife having applied at the area-door—"and Dr. Saxham will see you," the name, not having been mentioned in the advertisement, which gave only the address and an initial, imparted to both an electrical shock of surprise. They had looked a very small and very

shabby and very lost and lonely little couple under those high-moulded ceilings and upon the Turkey carpets that covered the polished parquet of the handsomely-furnished and well-appointed consulting-room that the practitioner who had caved in through South African Gold-Mines had considered an adequate setting for his bald-browed and portly presence. Now both curved backbones assumed the perpendicular, and their wide Cockney mouths were wreathed in joyful smiles.

The man sitting in the Sheraton armchair at the writing-table that matched it, the man with the black head and square pale face and heavy muscular shoulders, who looked up from among his papers and notebooks with the receiver of a telephone at his ear, rose to his feet, and came to them with a kind, outstretched hand. Saxham never wasted a word or forgot a face. And here were two faces from Gueldersdorp. He shook the hands that belonged to them, and said in his curt way:

"How are you, Mrs. Keyse? And you, Keyse? You may guess when I heard that somebody had called to answer my advertisement I hardly imagined that two old patients had dropped down on me from the skies!"

The young woman stared at Saxham with her mouth agape and the tears trickling down her hollow cheeks. The young man swallowed something with a violent effort, and blurted out:

"Lumme, Doctor! it's more by 'arf like bein' shot up out of the Other Shop—an' landin' in the middle of New Jerusalem! Weeks along"—he picked up the shabby bowler that had dropped upon the Turkey carpet—"for weeks along I've been tryin' to find out

what was the matter wi' me! Now I knows! I've bin 'omesick—fair old 'omesick for a sniffer of the very plyce I was 'oppin' with 'appiness to git away out of four months back. Good old Gueldersdorp!" He winked the wet out of his eyes and pointed to Mrs. Keyse with his elbow. "An' look at 'er! Doin' a blub on the strength of it! That's wot it is to be a woman! Ain't it, sir?"

Saxham's keen glance took in the altered shape of the thin girl in the mended jacket and the large and feathered hat that topped the colossal structure of fair, frizzled hair, even as she dried her eyes with a twopenny handkerchief edged with cotton lace, and tried to laugh. He took the lean chin of W. Keyse between his white, strong, supple fingers, and turned the triangular, hollow-cheeked face to the light, and said, touching the little round blue scar left by the enemy's bullet at the angle of the wide left nostril and the other mark of its egress below the inner corner of the right eye:

"You found out what a woman can be, my man, when she helped to nurse you at the Hospital."

"Gawd knows I did!" affirmed W. Keyse. "An' since she's bin' my wife——" The prominent Adam's apple in his thin throat jerked. He gulped a sob down as he looked at her. And the red flew up in her pale cheeks, and in her eyes, as she returned the look of him, her master and her mate, there shone the answering light of love. And Saxham's face darkened with angry blood, and his strong, supple surgeon's hand clenched with the savage impulse to dash itself in the face of this ragged, seedy, out-at-elbows Millionaire who flaunted riches in the face of his own beggary.

Never, never would a woman's eyes kindle with that sweet fire in answer to the challenge of his own! Empty, empty the heart whose chambers were swept and decked and garlanded for a guest who never came! Lonely, lonely, desolate this life lived within sound of her, sight of her, touch of her—dearer inexpressibly than ever woman was yet to man!

He had said to her: "But come to me, and I shall be content—even happy. Live under my roof, take the shelter of my name—I ask no more!"

He asked more in the lonely nights that would never be companioned, in the silence that would never be broken by Love's whisper or Love's kiss. He was not content; his craving for her fretted the flesh from his bones and gnawed his heart like some voracious, sharp-fanged, predatory animal. Happy—was he? Happy as one who sits beside a stream of living water and yet must perish of drought. He could only imagine one greater misery, one more excruciating torture, one more exquisite unhappiness than this happiness she had conferred upon him—and that was to be without her.

He drew a deep breath, and drove back his fierce, snarling misery, and kicked it into its kennel, and befriended the absurd little couple. W. Keyse was tested, proved capable of manipulating the steering-wheel, duly certificated, and engaged. There were a couple of living-rooms over the coach-house that was now a garage. Saxham sent in some plain furniture, and behold an Eden! Pots of ferns purchased from a street hawker showed greenly behind the tidiest muslin blinds you ever sor! and Mrs. William Keyse, expectant mother of a potential Briton, sat behind them, and as she patched the shirts that had been

taken out of pawn—and whether they're let out on hire to parties wanting such things or whether the mice eat 'oles in 'em, who can say? but the styte in which they come back from Them Plyces is something chronic!—she sang, sometimes "Come, Buy My Coloured 'Erring," which they learned you along of the Tonic Sofa at the Board School in Kentish Town; and sometimes "The Land Where Dreams Come True!"

This was a fulfilled dream, this little, cheap home of two rooms—one of them opening upon nothing by a loft-door—over a garage that had been a coach-house, at the end of the paved yard looking towards the rear of the tall, drab-stuccoed house whose high double plate-glass windows were shielded from plebeian eyes by softly-quilled screens of silk muslin running on polished brass rods. But when the electric lights were switched on, before the inner blinds were drawn down, you could see quite plain into the consulting-room, a little below your level, where the Doctor sat at his big writing-table that was heaped with notebooks and papers and had a telephone on it, and all sorts of mysterious instruments in shining brass and silver, as brightly polished as the gleaming thing with a lid, shaped like a violin-case and with a spirit-lamp underneath it, in which all sorts of wicked-looking knives and forceps were boiled when they were taken out of the black bag; or into Mrs. Saxham's bedroom, that was on the floor above, and was done up in the loveliest style you ever! "Not that Missis W. Keyse would exchange 'er present quarters for Buckin'am Palace," she declared, pouring out her William's tea, "if invited to do so by 'er Majesty the Queen 'erself."

William stopped blowing at his smoking saucer.

"They s'y She's dyin'!" His face lengthened. He put the saucer down. "They 'ave it in the evenin' pypers!"

Mrs. Keyse had a flash of inspiration.

"I reckon it don't seem dyin' to 'Er!"

"Wot are you gettin' at?" asked the man in bewilderment.

"I'm gettin' at it like this," said the lighter brain. "All 'er long life she's 'ad to be a queen first, an' a wife after. Now she lays there she's no more than a wife—a wife wots goin' to meet 'er 'usband agin after yeers an' yeers o' waitin'. For 'er Crown she leaves be'ind 'er for 'er son, but 'er weddin' ring goes wiv' 'er in 'er coffin! See?"

"I pipe. Wonder wot 'Er an' 'Im 'll s'y to one another fust thing they meet?"

"They won't s'y nothink," said the visionary, soberly taking tea. "But I shouldn't be surprised but wot they'd stand an' look in one another's fyces wivout s'yin' a word, for a week or so by the Time Above, an' the tears a-runnin' down an' never stoppin'!"

"Garn! There ain't no cryin' in 'Eaven," said W. Keyse, beginning on the bread-and-butter. "The Bible tells you so!"

"That's right enough. But I lay Gawd lets folks do a bit o' blub—just once," said Emigration Jane, "before 'E wipes their eyes, becos you don't begin to know wot 'appiness means until you've cried for joy!"

"I pretty near did when the Doctor give me this chauffeuring job, and so I tell you stryte," affirmed her lord. "D'you know I 'ad a shy at thankin' 'im agyne, an' got my 'ead bit orf. 'Shut your damned

mouth!'—that's wot the Doctor s'ys to me. Well, I 'ave shut it!" He closed his jaws upon an inch-thick slice. "But wot I s'y to myself is," he continued, masticating, "that makes the Third Time, an' the Third Time's the Charm!"

"Wot do you mean by the third time, deer?" asked Mrs. Keyse, putting more hot water in the teapot.

"The First," said W. Keyse, with an air of mystery, "was in a saloon-bar full o' Transvaal an' Free State Dutchies at Gueldersdorp."

"Lor'! You don't ever mean——" began his wife, and stopped short. The scene of her first meeting with W. Keyse flashed back upon her mental vision. She saw the big man waking up out of his drunken stupor and lurching to the rescue of the little one. "Was it 'im?" she panted, as the teapot ran over on the clean coarse cloth. "Was it Dr. Saxham?"

"You may tyke it from me it was." W. Keyse rescued the kettle, restored it to the hob, returned to his place, and shook his finger at her warningly. "And if you go to remind me as wot 'e were drunk when 'e done wot 'e did——" He looked portentous warnings.

"I never would. Oh, William!"

"Mind as you never do, that's all!... I tried to thank 'im then," went on W. Keyse, "an' 'e wouldn't 'ave it. I tried to thank 'im agyne at the Hospital—an' e' wouldn't 'ave it. I tried to thank 'im yesterday on 'is own doorstep, an' 'e wouldn't 'ave it. So wot I'm a-going to do is—Wait! When I was a little nipper at Board School there was a fairy tyle in the Third Standard Class Reader, all about a Lion wot 'ad syved the life of a Louse, an' 'ow the Louse laid out to do

somethin' to pay the Lion back...."

"I remember the tyle, deer," confirmed Mrs. Keyse, "But it was a mouse"—she repressed a shudder—"an' not the—thing you said."

"Mouse or Louse, it means the syme," declared W. Keyse with burning eyes. "And the Doctor's goin' to find it does." He held up his lean right hand and swore it. "So 'elp me, Jimmy Cripps!"

LVIII

Lynette Saxham came into the consulting-room that was on the ground-floor of the house in Harley Street, behind the room where patients waited their turn. Her quick, light step and the silken rustling of the lining of her gown broke the spell that had bound the man who sat motionless in the armchair before the Sheraton writing-table, staring with fixed eyes and gripping the arms of his chair with unconscious force ...

A faint, pleasant odour of Russia leather and camphor-wood came from the dwarf bookcases that dadoed the walls. The room was quite dark; the two high windows, screened by clear muslin blinds running on gilded rods, showed pale parallelograms of cold twilight. The coachhouse and stable building at the end of the paved yard showed as a cube of blackness. One window in the centre of the wall was lighted up, and on its white cotton blind the shadows of a man and woman acted a Domestic Play.

Perhaps Saxham had been watching this? The shadow-man seemed to sit at a table reading a newspaper by the light of the lamp behind him, the shadow woman sat nearer the window, employed upon some homely kind of needlework. Her outline when she rose, showed that the woman's great, mysterious ordeal, the sacrament of keenest anguish by which her dearest and most sacred joy is won, was very close upon her. She passed behind the man as if to fetch something, stopped behind his chair, and drew her arm about his neck, leaning her cheek down to his so that their two shadows became one.

The starving waif outside the window of the cook-shop knows no more excruciating aggravation of his pangs than to look at food, and yet keeps on looking. It may have been like this with Saxham, empty of all love, and gnawed by the tooth of a sharper hunger than that which is merely physical. He started out of his lethargy when his wife's voice reached him.

"Owen!... Why, you are sitting in the dark!"

Lynette heard someone moving among the shadows. The electric reading-lamp upon the writing-table diffused a mellow radiance under its green silk shade. Two other globes sprang into shining life, and showed her, smiling, and shrinking a little from the sudden incursion of light, as Saxham, with the quiet, unhurried, scrupulous courtesy he always showed towards his wife, received the heavy driving-mantle of sables that she dropped from her shoulders, and laid it over a chair. A frosty breath from the outer atmosphere clung to it, but the silken lining was penetratingly warm, and instinct with the sweetness of the woman, so much so that it was agony to the man....

She wore a white cloth gown of elegantly-simple cut, that revealed with unostentatious art the lovely lines of the slender shape. A knot of white and golden freesias, exhaling a clean, delicate perfume, was fastened at her breast; her wonderful red-brown hair was shaded by a broad-brimmed brown felt hat of Vandyke shape, with creamy drooping plumes. The rare promise of her beauty had fulfilled itself in the last six months. She was bewilderingly lovely.

She drew out the jewelled pins that fastened her hat, and threw it down, and took a favourite seat of hers beside the fire, and looked across at the man who was her husband, smiling faintly as she held her little foot, delicately shod, high-arched and slim, to the blaze of the wood-fire.

"Do I interfere with your work? Are any patients waiting?"

"It is past my hour for seeing patients," said Saxham, with a smile. "And if anyone were waiting, you are an older client, and have the prior claim."

"We will have tea in here, then," she said, and touched the bell, adding: "I am fond of this room."

It was just now a place that was dear to Saxham. He came across to the hearth and stirred the fire to a ruddier blaze, and stood at the opposite side of it, leaning an arm upon the mantelshelf. The shining mirror above it reflected a square black head that was getting grizzled, and the profile of a face that was haggard and worn.

The servant came with tea, and drew down the upper blinds, shutting out that mocking shadow-play at which Saxham had been staring. As Lynette busied

herself with the shining silver and delicate Japanese porcelain, there was a chance of studying, unobserved, the beloved book of her face—a locked book to Saxham since that day in the Cemetery at Gueldersdorp.

Ah, what a face it was! It fascinated and held him. Such long, thick, shadowy eyelashes, sweeping the white cheeks! Such a low, wide, perfectly modelled forehead above them, with fine arched eyebrows, much darker than the richly rippling, parted hair that was coiled and twisted and roped into a mass behind the small, delicate ears, as though its owner were impatient of its luxuriance. Such a close-folded, mysterious mouth, with deep-cut curves, hiding the pure white, rather overlapping teeth. An irregular nose, rather square-ended, with eager nostrils; a rounded chin, with a little cleft in it, went to the making of the face that Saxham and many others thought so beautiful.

Only something was wanting to it. "Animation," the physiognomist would have said. "Vitality, mobility." "Health," might have thought the ordinary observer, mistaking the bluish shadows under the drooped eyelids and about the mouth and nostrils for the usual signals of debility.

But Saxham, when he looked into the golden-hazel eyes, so often hidden by the thick white eyelids, with their deep fringe of black-brown lashes, said to himself with bitterness: "She is quite well. Nothing on earth is wrong with her, except that she is not happy! I can give her everything else on earth, it seems, but what she needs most of all!"

Let Joy, that radiant torch of the soul, illuminate those dim windows, let Happiness sink like sweet

rain into the dry heart, and the whole woman would awaken into vivid glowing beauty, like the parched South African veld after the spring rains. Red tulips would bloom between the boulders; exquisite glowing pelargoniums and snow-white or pale-blue iris would clothe the baked earth. The ice-plant would no longer be the only green thing growing in the crannies of the rock. Delicate ferns and dew-gemmed pitcher-plants would quiver there, and the spikes of the many-coloured gladioli would thrust from the earth like spears; and the sweet-scented clematis and the passion-vine would trail and blossom in rose and white and purple on the edges of the kloofs and gorges, every stem and leaf and bud and blossom growing and rejoicing in the balmy breeze and the glorious June sunshine; the cruel, lashing rains, the devastating floods, and the burning droughts forgotten as though they had never been.

Meanwhile the heavy fringe of dark lashes drooped wearily on Lynette's white cheeks, and the long-limbed, slight, supple body leaned back in the favourite chair by the fireside with a little air of languor that only added to her allure. And Saxham, looking at her, said again in his heart:

"Her children—let them settle the money upon her children!"

She had learned to love, and thrilled at the touch of passion. Well, Beauvayse was dead, but Love would come again. He would read its resurrection in the radiance of those eyes. Then, exit Saxham! Such a marriage as theirs could be easily dissolved, but he would not take the easy road. He had decided. His should be the strait and narrow way of death. His death was a debt he owed her. You are to learn why!

While he reviewed, for the thousandth time, this determination of his, and told himself again how the thing should be done, his tea had grown quite cold. She leaned forwards and touched his sleeve in drawing his attention to the neglected cup, and flushed because he started and looked at her so strangely.

He never, if it could be avoided, touched her. Her old shrinking from him had worn away. His companionship, though he did not guess it, was to her desirable—even dear. The light, firm tread of his small muscular feet, the curt, decided utterance, made welcome music in her ears. She would watch him without his knowledge when they went abroad together. The esteem in which his peers and seniors held him, the deference with which his opinions were solicited and listened to gave her strange delightful throbs of pride.

She had felt the first stirring of that pride in him when the man who had been the thinking brain and the beating heart of beleaguered Gueldersdorp had said, wringing her husband's hand:

"'*If* you have been of any use to me.... 'If.... You have been my right hand and my mainstay from first to last, Saxham, and while I live I shall remember it!"

Brave words—heartsome words for the hearing of a woman who had loved him. Lynette was almost sorry that she did not.

He did not believe that he had won any hearts in Gueldersdorp. His curtness, his roughness, his harshness had been unfavourably commented upon many and many a time. Yet when he left them, how the people cheered! What volumes of roaring sound

from lusty throats had bidden him good-bye and God-speed!

"Hurrah for the Doctor! Three cheers for Saxham! Don't forget us, Doc! Come back again! God bless you, Saxham! Bravo, Saxham! Saxham! Saxham! Hurrah!"

A woman who had loved him would have wept for joy. A pity his wife did not!

How strangely Owen had looked at her just now, when she had brushed his sleeve lightly with her finger-tip! How curious it was that he never touched her if he could help it! She had quite forgotten having told him that, while she liked to know him near, she could not endure the thought of being taken by him, caressed by him, held in his embrace.... That had been the frank, truthful expression of her feelings at the time. She did not recoil so from his contact now. She had not realised how deeply her words had wounded the man's great, suffering, patient heart. Spoken, they had passed from her memory. It is so natural for a fair, sweet woman to forget! It is so impossible for a man who has been stabbed to help remembering, with the deep, bleeding wound unclosed!

There was another thing that Saxham did not know. Although, as time went on, the beloved image of the Mother, cherished in the innermost shrine of her adopted daughter's heart, suffered no change in the clear, firm beauty of its outlines or deterioration in the richness of its tender and austere and gracious colouring; and each new day supplied some fresher garland of old imperishable memories to grace it with;—that Shape with the grey-green jewel-eyes and the gay mouth that laughed had faded—faded!

She would not own it even to herself, but the keen edge of her grief for Beauvayse was blunted. The anniversary of his death, occurring in the coming month of February, was to be a solemn retreat of sacred prayer for her. But it was the Mother's death-day also, when to the palm of martyrdom had been added the Saint's crown. She was going to spend three days at the Kensington Convent, where the dead nun had taken the vows. She told Saxham now of the arrangement she had made through Lady Castleclare, who was intimate with the Superior.

"It will be a little like old times," she said to Saxham, "living in a Convent again. And there are many Sisters there who knew Mother, and loved her——"

Her eyes swam in sudden tears. And Saxham, as he looked at her, felt his heart contract in a spasm of bitter jealousy. All that love for the dead, and not a crumb for the living! He saw Beauvayse, his rival still, stretching a hand from the grave to keep her from him. And he could have cried aloud:

"Those tears are for a trickster who cheated you into loving him. Listen, now, and I, who have never lied, even to win you, will show him to you as he really was!..."

But he did not yield to the temptation to enlighten her. A vision rose up before him of a dying man on a camp-bed, and he heard his own voice saying:

"I will never tell her! I will not blacken any man's reputation to further my own interests!"

She was speaking, telling him something. He came back out of the fierce mental struggle to listen to the voice that was so sweet and clear, and yet so cold, so

cold....

"Imagine it! I met an old friend to-day at my dressmaker's in Conduit Street. Not a man. A girl who was a pupil at the Convent at Gueldersdorp—or, rather, I should say a woman, for she is married."

Saxham asked:

"Is she an Englishwoman or a Colonial?"

"She is of mingled French and Dutch blood. She was a Miss Du Taine. Her father was a member of the Volksraad at Pretoria. He controls large interests on the Rand, and has an estate near Johannesburg. She is married to an English gentleman. He is very rich, and has a title. She told it me, but I have forgotten it. She asked me to drive home and lunch with her...." She hesitated. "I did not want to go," she said.

"Well, and what happened then?" Saxham asked.

"I made some kind of excuse, and hailed a hansom, and drove to Lady Castleclare's. I lunched with her. She is always very kind. She thought the pearls were beautiful. But—but surely they cost you a great deal of money?"

She touched a string of the gleaming, milky things that encircled her white throat above the lace cravat. Saxham said, smiling:

"They did not cost more than I could afford to pay. I am glad you liked them. I told Marie to put them on your dressing-table, where you would be likely to see them in the morning."

"You are too good to me!" she said, with quivering lips, looking at him. Her white hand wavered in the air, as though she meant to stretch it out to him.

"It is not possible to be too good—to you!" said Saxham curtly. He would not see the outstretched hand. She drew it back, and faltered:

"You give me everything——"

"You have given *me* what I most wanted in the world!" he lied bravely.

"But"—she rose and stood beside him on the hearthrug, tall, and fair, and slender, and oh! most seductively, maddeningly sweet to his adoring thought—"but you take nothing for yourself. That bedroom of yours at the top of the house is wretchedly bare and comfortless; and then, those absurd pictures!"

She laughed ruefully, recalling the row of pictorially-illustrated nursery rhymes that adorned the brown-paper dado of Saxham's third-floor bedroom, the previous tenant having been a family man.

"—Little Miss Muffet and Georgy Porgy; the Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds, and the Cow that jumped over the Moon. How can you endure them?"

She looked at him, and was startled by the set grimness of his face and the thunderous lowering of the black smudge of eyebrow. He said:

"You went to my room to-day. Why?"

She crimsoned, and stammered:

"It was this morning, after you had gone out. I—it struck me that your linen ought to be overlooked and

put to rights from time to time. How did you know?"

He did not explain that the perfume of her hair, of her breath, of her dress, had lingered when she had gone, to tempt and taunt and torture him. He said nothing of the little knot of violets that had dropped from her breast upon the floor, and he had found there. His heart beat against it even then. He answered:

"You told me yourself. And, as for the linen, let it be. The housekeeper knows that she is expected to attend to it."

"She isn't your wife!"

Her golden eyes flashed at him rebelliously. He was provoking her, in his innocence of all intention, as a subtle wooer might have planned to do.

"I am extremely glad that she is not." His mouth relaxed in a smile, and his thunderous brows smoothed themselves. "And now, don't you think you ought to go and dress? You are dining with Lady Hannah and Major Wrynche at The Carlton at seven, and going on to a theatre." He held his watch out. "Six-thirty now," he said, and restored the chronometer to his waistcoat pocket.

"Very well." She moved a step or two in the direction of the door, and turned her head as gracefully as a young deer, and looked back at him. "But you are coming, too?" she said, and her eyes were very soft.

He shook his head.

"It is impossible. I have several urgent cases to visit, and there is an article for the *Scientific Review*." He moved his hand slightly in the direction of some

sheets of manuscript that lay upon the blotting-paper. "I have a heavy night's work before me with that alone. My excuses have already been telephoned to Lady Hannah."

"Owen!"——

She spoke his name in a whisper.

—"Owen!"

"Yes?"

"Couldn't I?—would you care to have me?—may I stay and dine at home with you?"

"And disappoint your friends!... Most certainly not. Unless, indeed"—his tone warmed to interest —"unless you are not feeling well?"

"I am perfectly well, thanks!" she said coldly.

"Then go to your dinner and your play, child," said Saxham, with the smile that changed and softened his harsh features almost into beauty. "I will drive with you to The Carlton, and fetch you from the play. Which of the theatres have you decided to patronise?"

"Lady Hannah and the Major left the choice to me," she said, with a little touch of girlish importance, "so I telephoned to Nickalls in Bond Street for a box at The Leicester. He had not got one; he sent me three stalls for 'The Chiffon Girl' at The Variety instead. It is a revival. I don't quite know what that means," she added, rather puzzled by Saxham's silence and the grimness of his face. "You do not mind at all? You do not think it is the kind of play the Mother would not have liked me to see?"

"No!" said Saxham curtly, and with averted eyes.

She bent her head to him as he opened the door, and went away to her own rooms on the floor above, the drawing-room that was upholstered and hung with delicate, green-and-white, rose-garlanded Pompadour brocade, and graceful water-colours from famous hands, and furnished with every luxury and elegance that the heart of woman could desire; the charming boudoir, pink as a sea-shell, and full of new books and old china; the bedroom, with the blue-and-white decorations, where an ivory Crucifix that had always stood upon the Mother's writing-table hung above the dainty bed....

"I think he is a little hard on me at times," she said, as she passed through the warm, firelit, perfumed rooms that were fragrant with the narcissi and violets and lilies that were sent in by his orders, and strewn with the costly, pretty trifles that she, who had been used to the barrack-like bareness of the Convent, delighted in like a child, and the gleaming mirrors gave her back her loveliness. "He treats me as if I were a stranger. And, after all, I am his wife...."

Saxham's patients found him even curter and more brusque in manner than usual that evening, and the article for the *Scientific Review* made little way. He threw down his pen at last, and leaned his head upon his hands and wondered, staring at the unfinished page of manuscript with eyes that saw no meaning in the sentences, whether any man born of woman had ever been so great a fool as the man who had written them?

To have made that promise of secrecy to the dead traitor was an act of sheer, quixotic folly. To have kept it was madness, nothing less. And yet Saxham

knew that he would keep it always. That if she ever learned the truth, it would be hinted by the chance remark of some stranger, gathered from a paragraph in some newspaper. There was a small-print line at the bottom of the quarter-column devoted by the compilers of Whittinger's "Peerage" to the Marquisate of Foltlebarre, which might have enlightened her. He turned to it now, and read:

> "Viscountess Beauvayse, Esther, dau: of Samuel Levah, Esq., of Finsbury, E.C., mar: June, 1899, the late John Basil Edward Tobart, Lieut. Grey Hussars, 11th Viscount Beauvayse. Killed in action during the defence of Gueldersdorp, Feb., 1900, while atta: as Junior aide to the Staff of Colonel Commanding H.M. Forces, leaving issue one dau: The Hon. Alyse Rosabel Tobart, now aged eighteen months."

At the Clubs, Service and Civil, Saxham had heard the impromptu marriage of the late John Basil Edward Tobart freely discussed. The story of his subsequent entanglement "with some girl or other at Gueldersdorp" had been mooted in his presence a dozen times by Society chatterers, whose enjoyment of the scandal would have been pleasantly stimulated by the knowledge that "Saxham, M.D., F.R.C.S., late Attached Medical Staff," was married to the girl. But they did not know, and she ...

What use—what use in her knowing? Of what avail could be the melting of the ice about her heart, the loosening of the fetters of her tongue, the quickening of her nature, the miracle vouchsafed? Of none, now, for a reason! Saxham told himself, in those hours when he propped his burning forehead on his hands

and looked into the starless night of his desolate soul, that he had ceased even to desire that she should come to love him. Far better that she should never know!

It was growing late, and he had promised to fetch her from the theatre. The silver clock upon the mantelshelf chimed ten. He had stretched his hand to the telephone to ring up his motor-brougham from the garage, when he heard the click of her latchkey in the outer door and the silken whisper of her garments passing quickly through the hallway. Then came a knock at the consulting-room door—sharp, quick, imperious, oddly unlike Lynette's soft tap.... At the summons Saxham made two strides across the carpet and opened to her, a question on his lips.

"Why have you come back so early? Has anything happened?"

Even as he asked, her look told why. She knew....

She knew.... Her face was rigid, a pure white mask of ivory; there was not a trace of colour even in the set lips. Her eyes burned upon him, twin flames of dark amber, steady under levelled brows. She was wrapped in a long ermine-caped and bordered black brocade mantle, that gleamed with jet *passementerie*; a scarf of white lace covered her head. It hid the red-brown hair with the Clytie ripple in it, and the great silken coils, transfixed by a sapphire and diamond dagger, that were massed at the nape of the slender neck. Seen so, she was nunlike in her chaste severity, but for those stern, resentful eyes.

"I have come to tell you that I am no longer in ignorance. I have found out what you have hidden from me so long—what the Wrynches knew and

would not tell me; what the world has known while I sat in the dark...."

A spasm wrung her mouth. Saxham rolled a chair towards her. He said guardedly, avoiding her eyes:

"Until you acquaint me in detail with what you have heard, I cannot explain or defend myself. Will you not sit down? You are looking pale and overwrought."

She laid one slight gloved hand upon the chair-back, and leaned upon it.

"I would rather stand, if you have no objection, whilst I tell you what I have learned to-night. I dined alone with Lady Hannah at the Carlton; we went together to the theatre—Major Wrynche had had a summons to attend at Marlborough House."

She untied the knot of lace beneath her chin, and stripped away the long gloves with nervous haste and impatience, and tossed them with the scarf upon the chair beside her, and went on:

"I had heard much of 'The Chiffon Girl.' I wanted to see it. When the First Act began I wondered very much why they called it a Musical Comedy, when the noise the orchestra made could hardly be called music; and there was no comedy—only slang expressions and stupid jokes. But the actress who sang and danced in the principal part ... Miss Lavigne ..." She had loosened her mantle; now she let it drop upon the Eastern carpet, emerging from its blackness as a slender, supple, upright shape in clinging, creamy-white draperies; her exquisite arms bare to the shoulder, and clasped midway by heavy, twisted bracelets of barbaric gold, her nymph-like bosom

swelling from the folded draperies of the low-cut bodice like a twin-budded narcissus flowering from the pale calyx, her sweet throat clasped about with Saxham's gift of pearls.

"She could not sing, though the people applauded and encored her"—there was a gleam of disdain in the golden eyes—"but she was very pretty ... she danced with wonderful grace and lightness ... it was like a swallow dipping and darting over the shallows of the river-shore—like a branch of red pomegranate-blossoms swayed and swung by a spring breeze.... I admired her, and yet I was sorry for her.... To have to pose and bound and whirl before all those rows and rows of staring faces night after night!..."

Saxham did not smile. But a muscle twitched in his cheek as he said:

"She would hardly thank you for pitying her."

"She would be right to resent my pity!" Lynette burst out with sudden vehemence. "She has been injured, and I was the cause! Oh! how could you be so cruel as to let me go on loving him? Was it kind? Was it fair to yourself and me?"

Saxham's square, pale face was perfectly expressionless. He waited in silence to hear the rest.

"You know of whom I speak ..." said Lynette. "He was gay and beautiful and winning—not chivalrous, as I believed him; not honest, or sincere, or true. Months before we met at Gueldersdorp he was the husband of this actress—the woman I saw upon the stage to-night. And you knew all this, and never told me! You knew that his memory was sacred in my heart. A woman I was introduced to here in London once

tried to blacken it. She said she wished to act towards me as a friend. I remember that I laughed in her face as I turned and left her. 'You thought to make me hate him,' I said. 'You have failed miserably. If it were possible to love him better—if I could honour his memory more than I do now, I would, because of the evil you have spoken of my dead!'"

She heard Saxham draw breath heavily. She went on with increased passion, and gathering resentment:

"All my life long I might have gone on in my blindness, honouring the dishonourable, cherishing the base, but for the idle gossip of two strangers in the theatre to-night—a man and a woman in the stalls behind us. They talked all the louder when the lights went down. They wondered 'why the Lavigne did not star on the programme as a Viscountess?' but, of course, they said, 'the Foltlebarres would never stand that! They were nearly wild when that handsome scamp of theirs married her—poor Beauty Beauvayse, of the Grey Hussars.' He and she had kept house together; there was a kiddie coming; they said the little woman played her cards uncommonly well!... The marriage was pulled off on the quiet at a Registrar's a week or so before Beau got his appointment on the Staff. Straight of the fellow, but afterwards, at Gueldersdorp, didn't he kick over the matrimonial pole? Somebody had seen his engagement to a Miss Something-or-other announced in a Siege newspaper, published the very day he got killed.... Poor beggar! Rough on him, and rough on the Foltlebarres, and a facer for Lessie ... and what price the girl?' And I was the girl!... It was of me they were talking!..."

Her lips writhed back from her white teeth. She winced and shuddered. "Oh! can't you see me sitting and listening, and every word vitriol, burning to the bone?"

"Why did you remain," said Saxham, wrung by pity, "to be tortured by such prurient prattlers? Why did you not get up and leave the place?"

"I could not move," she said.... "I could only sit and listen. Then the First Act ended, and the lights went up, and Lady Hannah touched my arm. I knew when our eyes met that she had heard as I had. She got up, saying, 'I think we have had enough of this?' and then we came away."

She caught her breath and bit her underlip, and he saw her eyes grow misty.

"She sent a Commissionaire to call a hansom.... She took my hand as we stood waiting in the empty vestibule. She said: 'Those chattering pies behind us have saved me some bad half-hours! Your husband, for some reason of his own, has never told you. And it has more than once occurred to me that if I were the true friend I want to be to both of you, I'd have proved it before now by telling you myself. But I've learned to be doubtful of my own inspirations!...' I asked her then if all they had said was true? She shrugged her shoulders and nodded: '*Pour tout dire*, they let Beau down rather gently.... But if he never could tell the truth to a woman, he never went back on a man; and, after all, these things run in the blood. *Passons l'éponge là-dessus.* Forget him, and thank your good Angel you're married to an honourable man!'"

Saxham's eyes were on the carpet. He did not raise

them or move a muscle of his face.

"She told me to forget him. It is easier to forgive him; there are deceits that smirch the soul of the deceived no less than the deceiver. He lied to the Mother—that I cannot pardon! Perhaps some day—but I do not know. Lady Hannah called you honourable.... I needed no one to tell me what you are and have always been! You hide the things that other men boast of.... You are loyal even to those you scorn. You kept his secret. I have reproached you to-night for keeping it, even while I honoured you in my heart!"

"Do not honour me," said Saxham harshly, "for behaving with common decency! Can a man tell tales on another who is dead? To commit murder would be a crime less cowardly. I do myself mere justice when I say that I am incapable of an act so vile! Nor would I blacken a living man to make myself show whiter in any man's—or woman's eyes!"

She was no longer pale. A lovely colour flushed her, and her eyes were wistful and very kind. Her draperies rustled as she moved towards him. "Owen ..." she said, and her white hands were held out to him, and her sweet mouth quivered, and her voice was a sigh, "I am alive at last to your infinite generosity. I beg you to forgive me for being blind before!"

"Generosity," said Saxham, "does not enter into the question. My silence has no merits whatever. What good could I have gained by telling you?" He lifted his eyes, and met hers full, dropping the words coldly one by one. "The advantage one has ceased to desire can hardly be called gain, in any sense of the word. And—I have left off crying for the moon. Even

were you willing to give it me, I have ceased to wish for your love!"

She looked at him with piteous, incredulous wistfulness, as he told the hardy lie. His mask of a face revealed nothing, but he could not disguise the rage of hunger for her that ravened in his famished eyes. They were upon her lips, her throat, the lovely curves of her young bosom even as he spoke; she felt them as the kisses of a fierce, possessive mouth, and glowed with sudden shame, and something more. He saw her beauty change from the pale rose to the fire-hearted crimson, tore away his eyes, and mastered himself. He stepped back, and the still out-stretched, quivering hands dropped nervelessly at her sides.

"You have asked me to pardon you," he said, "for some fancied lack of perception. It is I who owe an apology to you. Try and forgive me for having married you.... I should have known from the first that no good or happiness could ever come of a contract like ours."

"Have I ever said I was unhappy?" she demanded. Her breath came quick and short.

"Your face has said so very often," returned Saxham, looking at it, "though you were too considerate to tell me so in words. But I ask you on this night that sees you freed from an illusion, to have courage and not yield to depression. Your fetters may be broken sooner than you think!"

"Owen!..."

She was paler than before, if that could be possible. She swayed a little, and caught at the back of a chair that was near, and there was terror in her darkened,

dilated eyes....

"Do you say this to prepare me? Have you any illness? Do you mean that you are going to die?"

"I meant nothing ..." answered Saxham, "except that men are mortal, sometimes fortunately for the women who are bound to them! Go to bed, my child; to sleep will do you good."

"Good-night," she said, and dropped her head, and went away. He opened the door for her, and locked it after her, and went back to the writing-table, and sat in his chair. He gripped the arms of it in anguish, and the sweat of agony stood on the broad forehead where a woman who had loved him would have laid her lips.

He had repelled her, slighted her, wounded her.... He knew what it had cost him not to take those offered hands.... He was tortured and wrung in body and in soul as he took a key that hung upon his chain and unlocked a deep drawer, and took a flask from it that gurgled as if some mocking sprite had laughed aloud when he shook it close to his ear. He whom she had praised as honourable was a traitor no less than the dead man. He had said to her, months ago in the Cemetery at Gueldersdorp:

"I may die, but I will never fail you!"

He had not died, and he had failed her. The Dop Doctor of Gueldersdorp was drinking hard again.

LIX

Before you turn away in loathing of the man whose experience of Life's game of football had been chiefly gained from the ball's point of view, hear how it happened that the work of all those months of stern self-repression and strenuous denial had been rendered useless.

In the previous July, when Sir Danvers Muller was visiting Lord Williams of Afghanistan at Pretoria, Owen Saxham, M.D., F.R.C.S., had been married to Lynette Bridget-Mary Mildare at the Registrar's Office, Gueldersdorp, and at the Catholic Church. One hour after the ceremony the happy pair left by the mail for Cape Town.

Gueldersdorp turned out to do them honour. We have heard the people cheer. Three days and three nights of the Express, delayed in places by the wrecking of the line, and then the Alpine mountain-ranges sank and dwindled with the mercury in the thermometer. The little white towns succeeded each other like pearls on a green string. Humpy blue hills gave way to the flats, and then in the shadow of Table Mountain—Babel's confusion of tongues—and the stalwart flower of many nations, arrayed and armed for battle, and the glory, and pomp, and power of War.

The grey and white transports disgorged them, ants of sober, neutral colours, marching in columns to attack other ants. They grew upon the vision and filled it, and the sound of their feet was louder than the beating of the surf on Sea Point, and although martial music beat and blew them on—a brazen whirlwind dominating the mind, blaring at the ears

—the trampling of men's feet and the hoofs of horses, and the rolling of iron-shod wheels, triumphed in the long-run.

Saxham engaged rooms at the Trafalgar Hotel, a handsome caravanserai standing in its own gardens at the top of Imperial Avenue, for himself and his wife, and the savage irony that can be conveyed in the term struck him, not for the first time since he had laid gold and silver on the open book, and endowed a woman with the gift of himself and all his worldly goods.

It was early in the forenoon. They were to sail next day. The big building was crammed, not only with officers under orders for the Front, and their wives, who had come to see them start. Society had descended like a flock of chattering, gaudily-plumaged paroquets upon the spot where new and exciting sensations were to be had. For the trampling feet and the rolling wheels that ceaselessly went North imparted one set of thrills, and the long trains of wounded and dying that met and passed them, coming down as they went up, gave another kind. Amongst the poor dears in the trucks, and waggons, and Ambulance-carriages you might eventually find a man you knew.... The sporting odds were given and taken on these exciting chances; and the fluttering and screaming paroquets that crowded the Railway Stations, in spite of their gay feathers, bore no little resemblance to carrion-feeding birds of prey.

Saxham, Recently Attached Medical Staff, Gueldersdorp, suffered from the notoriety inseparable from the name of a man who has been thrice mentioned in Despatches, and has been publicly thanked by the representatives of an

Imperial Government. The Interviewer yapped at his heels whithersoever he went, and the Correspondent strove to lure him into confidences, and Society fluttered at him with shrill squawkings, and wanted to know, don't you know? It must have been "devey" and "twee" to have gone through all those experiences. It was the year when "devey," and "twee," and similar abbreviations first became fashionable.

There were pleasanter episodes than these, when soldierly, bronzed warriors and simple, unaffected men of great affairs, expressed to Saxham in few words their belief that he had done his duty. The approval of these warmed him and helped to raise him higher. It was a little creature, a human insect no bigger than a bar-tender, that brought about the mischief.

There was an American bar on the ground-floor of the Trafalgar. Saxham stood upon the threshold of the place, replying to the questions of a group of Colonial officers, New South Wales Mounted Engineers and Canadian Rangers, when somebody suggested Drinks, and led the way in. Invited to make his choice from a long list of alcoholic mixtures, beginning with Whisky Straight, and ending with Bosom Caresser and Gin Sour, Saxham said that he would take a glass of ice-water.

"Well, boss, since you're on the Temperance Walk," said the Australian, his would-be host, a little huffily, "you'll please yourself, I suppose?" He collected the preferences of his other guests, and gave the orders to the man behind the bar.

The barman had the misfortune to be a joker of the practical kind. Seeing Saxham held in conversation

by one of the other men, he winked portentously at the New South Waler, and whispered in his ear.

The Australian understood. A reason for Saxham's abstinence had been given him. The new-made bridegroom as a rule shuns Alcohol. And in proportion to his desire to avoid, grows the determination of other men to compel him to drink. The bridegroom is fair game all the world over for the Rabelaisian jest and the clown's horseplay.

The bar-tender, hoisting his eyebrows to his scollops of gummed hair, winked at the New South Waler with infinite meaning, and pointed to a cut-glass carafe that stood on the shining nickel-plated counter. It appeared to contain pure sparkling water, but the liquor it held was knock-out whisky, a tintless drink of exceeding potency, above proof. The Australian shook his head. But he laughed under his neat moustache as he turned away, and the bar-tender concluded to carry his joke through. He dealt out the drinks to their respective owners, and with a dexterous sweep of a shirt-sleeved arm brought the innocent-seeming carafe and a gleaming, polished tumbler immediately before the square-faced hulking doctor with the queer blue eyes, whose pretty bride of three days was waiting for him in their room upon the third floor of the humming, overcrowded caravanserai. Saxham, absorbed by the thought of her, poured out a tumblerful of the clear, sparkling stuff, and had half emptied it before he realised the trick. His eyes grew red with injected blood, and his hair bristled on his head. He struck out once across the narrow counter. The long wall-mirror behind the bar-tender cracked and starred with the crashing impact of the joker's skull, and the man fell senseless, bleeding from the mouth and nostrils.

Another attendant came running at the crash, and the exclamations of those who had seen the swift retaliation wreaked. Saxham, leaving a banknote lying on the counter, wheeled abruptly, and went out of the bar.

His brain was on fire. His blood ran riot in his burning veins, and the vice he had deemed dead stirred in the depths of his being, lifted its slender head, and hissed, quivered a forked tongue, and struck with poisoned fangs. He went out into the purple night that wedded lovers would have found so perfect. The great white stars winked down at him jeeringly, and a little mocking breeze sniggered among the mimosas and palms of the hotel gardens. He passed out of them into the many-tongued Babel of the streets, packed with humanity, throbbing with virile life, and tramped the magnificent avenues and wide electric-lighted streets of Cape Town with the thousands who had no beds at all, and the ten thousand who had, but preferred not to occupy them. To his narrow couch in the dressing-room adjoining Lynette's bedroom her husband dared not go.

So he wore the night out, doggedly wrestling with the demon that boils the blood of strong fierce men to forgetfulness of compacts and breach of oaths. Daybreak touched him with a chilly shivering finger, a hulking figure dozing on one of the white-painted iron seats near the Athletic Ground on Greenpoint Common. The last lingering star throbbed itself out, a white moth dying in the marvellous rose and orange fires of dawn, and the overwhelming, brooding bulk of Table Mountain gleamed, an emerald and sapphire splendour against the rising sun, and the two lesser peaks that are the mountain's

bodyguard shone glowing in golden mail as Saxham got to his feet, and shook some order into the disorder of his dress, and faced hotelwards.

Despair was in the heart of the Dop Doctor, and for him the wonder of the dawn, the marvel of the sunrise meant no more than if he had been born blind. A menial's trick had wrought him confusion; his will, in the saving strength of which he had trusted, was a leaf in the wind of his desire. Even now his throat and tongue were parched, his being thirsted for the liquor he had abjured.

What was to be done? What was to happen in the future? He asked himself in vain. As Mouille Point shut its fixed red eye in apparent derision, and the Greenpoint Light winked a thirteen-mile wink and went out, unlike the Hope that had burned in Saxham, and would be rekindled never more.

LX

Pity the man now as he sat brooding alone in the consulting-room, consumed by the thirst he shuddered at, once more an unwilling slave to the habit he abhorred.

He unscrewed the large flask and drank, and his lips curled back with loathing of the whisky, and his gorge rose at it as it went down. Then he put the flask back and locked the drawer, and laid his head down upon his folded arms in silence. No help anywhere! No hope, no joy, no love!

Death must come. Death should come, before the shadow of disgrace fell upon the Beloved, of whose love he knew now that he had never been worthy. Well for Lynette that he had never won it! Happy for her that she had never even learned to care for him a little!

* * * * *

A few days more, and the great Victorian Age had drawn its last breath.

The people went about the London streets softly, as though their footsteps led them through the stately, grand, and solemn chamber where lay the august, illustrious Dead.

A subdued, busy hum of preparation was perceptible to the ear. The eye saw the thoroughfares being covered with sand, the draperies of purple rising at the bidding of the pulley and the rope, the carts laden with wreaths and garlands of laurel, passing from point to point, discharging their loads, often renewed.

A lady was ushered into Saxham's consulting-room as a long procession of those carts went creaking by. She was a dainty, piquante, golden-haired, blue-eyed little woman, quite beautifully dressed. Her gown was of black, in deference to the national mourning, but it glittered with sequins, and huge diamonds scintillated in her tiny ears, and she wore a mantle of royal ermine, that reached to the high heels of her little shoes. Her hat was of the toque description. Ermine and lace and artificial blooms from Parisian shop-window-gardens went to make up the delicious effect. A titled name adorned her card, which bore a Mayfair address. She seemed in radiant health. As

Saxham waited, leaning forward in his consulting-chair, to receive the would-be patient's confidence, you can imagine those blue eyes of his, once so hard and keen, looking out of their hollowing caves with a sorrowful, clear sympathy that was very different from their old regard. To his women-patients he was exquisitely considerate. Only to one class of patient was he merciless and unsparing.

Upon the woman who desired to rid herself of her sex-privilege, upon the wedded wanton who sought to make of her body, designed by her Maker to be the cradle of an unborn generation, its sepulchre, Saxham's glance fell like a sharp curved sword. He wasted few words upon her, but each sentence, as it fell from his grim mouth, shrivelled and corroded, as vitriol dropped on naked human flesh. He listened now in silence that grew grimmer and grimmer, and as in flute-like accents, their smooth course hampered by the very slightest diffidence, the little lady explained, those heavy brows of his grew thunderous.

Ah, the tragic errand, the snaky purpose, coiled behind those graceful, ambiguous forms of speech! Not new the tale to the man who sat and heard. She admired the black-haired, powerful head, and the square, pale face with its short, aquiline, rather heavily-modelled features, and the broad, white forehead that the single smudge of eyebrow barred pleased her, as it did most women. Only the man's vivid blue eyes were unpleasantly hard and fixed in their regard, and his mouth frightened her, it was so stern and set.

She was not as robust as she appeared, she said. When she had been married, the family physician

had mentioned to her mother that it would hardly be advisable.... Delay for a year or two would be wise. And her husband did not care for children. He was quite willing. He had sent her to Saxham, in fact. Of course, the Profession of Surgery had made such huge strides that risk need not enter into consideration for a moment.... And heaps of her women friends did the same. And expense was absolutely no object, and would not Dr. Saxham——

Saxham struck a bell that was upon his table, and rose up with his piercing eyes upon her and crossed the room in two strides. He flung the door wide. He bowed to her with cool, withering, ironical courtesy as he stood waiting for her to depart.

She hesitated, laughed with the ring of hysteria, fluttered into speech.

"You are not, of course, aware of it, but I happen to be an old schoolfellow of your wife's." Her pretty, inquisitive eyes went back to the writing-table, where stood a photograph of Lynette, recently taken —an exquisite, delicate, pearly-toned portrait in a heavy silver-gilt frame. "We used to be great friends. Du Taine was my maiden name. Surely Mrs. Saxham has spoken to you of Greta Du Taine? I left Gueldersdorp at the beginning of the siege. Later, we went to Cape Town. I met my husband there. He is Sir Philip Atherleigh, Baronet." She italicised the word. "He was with his regiment, going to the Front. We were married almost directly. It was a case of love at first sight. Now we are staying at our town house in Werkeley Square. Mrs. Saxham must visit us —my husband is dying to know her."

"I regret that the desire cannot be gratified, madam." The angry blood darkened his face. His tone, even

more plainly than his words, told her that the boasted friendship was at an end.

Greta reddened too, and her turquoise-hued eyes dealt him a glance of bitter hatred.

"I did not stay long at the Convent at Gueldersdorp. Nuns are good, simple creatures, and easily imposed upon. And—mother did not wish me to be educated with strays and foundlings—dressed up like young ladies—actually allowed to mingle upon equal terms with them——"

It was Cornelius Agrippa, I think, who once materialised the Devil as an empty purse. The necromancer should have evoked the Spirit of Evil in the shape of a spiteful woman. Greta went on:

"—Such Society as there was, I should say. You were at Gueldersdorp throughout the siege, and for some time before it, I think, Dr. Saxham?"

Two pairs of blue eyes met, the man's hard as shining stones, the woman's dancing with malicious intention. Saxham stiffly bent his head. But her fear of him had evaporated in her triumph. Those inquisitive, turquoise eyes had an excellent memory behind them. Something in the shape of the square black head and hulking shoulders quickened it now.

"It's odd——" Her smile was a grin that showed sharp little white teeth ready to bite, and her speech was pointed with venomed meaning. "I used to go out a great deal in such Society as the place possessed. Yet I do not remember ever having met you!"

Saxham's cold eyes clashed with the malicious turquoises.

"I did not mingle in Society at Gueldersdorp."

He signed to the waiting manservant to open the hall-door. She drew her snowy ermines about her and rustled over the threshold. But in the hall she turned and dealt her thrust.

"No? You were too busy attending cases. Police-Court Cases ..."

Her light laugh fluttered mockingly about his ears.

"I remember the funny headings of some of the newspaper reports.... 'Another Rampant Drunk! The Town Painted Red Again by the Dop Doctor!'"

"Door!" said Saxham, shaping the word with stiff grey lips. His face was the face of Death, who had come close up and touched him. Her little ladyship went out to her waiting auto-brougham, and her light, malignant laugh fluttered back as the servant shut the hall-door.

Saxham went back into the consulting-room. The Spring sunshine poured in through the tall muslin-screened window. There was a cheerful play of light and colour in the place. But to the man who sat there it was full of shadows, dark and gloomy, threatening and grim. And not the least formidable among them was the shadow of the Dop Doctor of Gueldersdorp, looming portentously over that fair face within the silver-gilt frame upon the writing-table, stretching out long octopus-arms to drag down shame upon it, and heap ashes of humiliation undeserved upon the lovely head, and mock her with the solemn altar-vows that bound her to the drunkard.

LXI

The Great Victorian Age was laid to rest.

The great pageant of mortality had wound along the officially-appointed route, under the cold grey sky, an apparently endless, slowly-marching column of Infantry, Artillery, and Cavalry of the Line, progressing pace by pace between the immovable barriers of great-coated soldiers, and the surging, restless sea of black-clad men and women pent up on either hand behind them. The long rolling of muffled drums, and the dull boom of cannon; the baring of men's heads; the wail of the Funeral March, the flash of suddenly whitened faces turned one way to greet Her as She passed, borne to Her rest upon a gun-carriage, as fitting an aged warrior Queen; drawn to her wedded couch within the tomb by the willing, faithful hands of her sons of the twin Services, who shall forget, that heard and witnessed?

Who shall forget?

The Royal Standard draped across the satin-white, gold-fringed pall, where on rich crimson cushions rested the Three Emblems of Sovereignty. The dignified, kingly figure of a man, no longer young, bowed with sorrow under the Imperial heritage, preceding the splendid sombre company of crowned heads; the blaze of uniforms and orders, the clank of sword and bridle, the potent ring of steel on steel, the sumptuously-trapped, shining horses pacing slowly, drawing the mourning-carriages of State, their closed windows, frosted with chilly fog, yielding scant glimpses of well-known faces. One most beloved, most lovely, and no less so in sorrow than in joy. "*Did you see her?*" the women asked of

one another, as the pageant passed and vanished, and one good soul, all breathless from the crush, gasped as she straightened her battered bonnet and twitched her trodden skirt: "There never was a better than the blessed soul that's gone, but there couldn't be a sweeter nor a beautifuller Queen than the one she leaves behind her!"

The last wail of the Funeral March having died away into silence, the last cannon-shot gone booming out, down came the foggy dusk on bereaved London. A chill rime settled on the swaying laurel wreaths, and on the folds of the fluttering purple draperies at the close of the dismal day. The shops were shut, and many of the restaurants, but the windows of the Clubs gleamed radiantly down Piccadilly, and every refreshment-bar and public-house was thronged to bursting. Noon changed to evening, and evening lengthened into night, and the pavements began to be crowded. The Flesh Bazaar was being held in Piccadilly, and all up Regent Street and all down the Haymarket the chaffering went on for bodies and for souls.

A deadly physical and mental lassitude weighed on Saxham. His soul was sick with the long, hopeless struggle. He would end it. He would die, and take away the shadow from Lynette's pure life, and leave her free. His will devised to her everything he possessed, leaving her untrammelled. Let her learn to love once more, let her marry a better man, and be happy in her husband and her children....

* * * * *

He turned in at one of the chemist's shops. One or two gaudily-dressed, haggard women were at the distant end of the counter, in conference with an

assistant. Saxham spoke to the chemist, a grey-whiskered, fatherly individual, who listened, bending his sleek bald head. The chemist bowed, but as he had not the honour of knowing his customer, would the gentleman oblige by signing the poison-book, in compliance with Schedule F of the Pharmacy Act, 1868?

Saxham nodded. The chemist produced the register, and opened it on the counter before Saxham, and supplied him with pen and ink. Then he found that he had business at the other end of the shop, and when he returned he smartly closed the book, without even satisfying himself whether the client had written down his name and address, or merely pretended to. Then he filled a two-ounce vial with the fragrant, deadly acid, and put on a yellow label that named the poison, but not the vendor, and stoppered and capsuled, and sealed, and made it into a neat little parcel, and Saxham paid, and put the parcel in his inner breast-pocket, and turned to leave the shop.

It was crowded now; the roaring business of the little hours was in full swing. The three assistants ran about like busy ants; the chemist joined his merry men at the game of making money, serving alcoholic liquors, mixing pick-me-ups, dispensing little bottles of tabloids and little boxes of jujubes, taking cash and giving change.

The crush was terrific. Saxham, his hat pulled low over his broad brows, his great chest stemming the tide of humanity that incessantly rolled over the threshold, was slowly making his way to the door, when he felt the arresting touch of a hand upon his arm.

The owner of the hand belonged, as ninety per cent. of the women in the place belonged, to François Villon's liberal sisterhood. Something in the pale square face and massive shoulders had attracted her vagrant fancy. She had quitted her companions—two gaily-dressed, be-rouged women and a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, moustached young German, whose stripy tweeds, vociferously-patterned linen, necktie of too obvious pattern, and high-crowned bowler hat, advertised the Berlin tailor and haberdasher and hatter at their customer's expense, as Saxham went by. Now she looked up into the strange, sorrowful eyes that were shaded by his tilted hat-brim, and twined her thin hands caressingly about his arm, asking:

"Why do you look so queer, dear? Is anything wrong? —excuse me asking—or is it the Funeral has given you the blue hump? It did me! I've not felt so bad since mother——" She broke off. Then as a shrill peal of laughter from one of her female companions followed a comment made by the other—"One of those ..."—she jerked her chin contemptuously, tossing an unprintable epithet in the direction of her lady friends—"says you're ugly. I don't think so. I like your face!" Her own was cruelly, terribly young, even under the white cream of zinc, the rouge, and the rice-powder. "Were you looking for a friend, dear?" she asked tightening the clasp of her thin, feverish hands.

"Yes," said Saxham, with a curious smile that made no illumination in his sombre face. "For Death! There is no better friend than Death, my child, either for you or me!"

Gently he unloosed the burning hands that clutched

him, and turned and pushed his way out through the noisy, raving, chaffering, patchouli-scented crowd, and was gone, swallowed up in the roaring torrent of humanity that foamed down Piccadilly, leaving her frozen and stricken and staring.

LXII

Months went by. The slight overtures Lynette had made towards a more familiar friendship had ceased since that rebuff of Saxham's. She had never since set foot in his third-floor bedroom, where Little Miss Muffet and Georgy Porgy and the whole regiment of nursery-rhyme characters, attired in the brilliant aniline hues adored of inartistic, frankly-barbaric babyhood, adorned the top of the brown-paper dado, and flourished on the fireplace-tiles.

Only a few weeks more, he said to himself, and he would set her free. Before the natural craving for love, and life, and happiness should brim the cup of her fair sweet womanhood to overflowing; before her sex should rise in desperate revolt against himself her gaoler, Death should unlock her prison-doors and strike the fetters from those slender wrists, and point to Hope beckoning her to cross the threshold of a new life.

Soon, very soon now. The two-ounce vial that held the swift dismissing pang was in the locked drawer of the writing-table beside the whisky-flask. When he was alone and undisturbed—for Lynette seldom came to his consulting-room now—Saxham would

take it out and dandle it, and hold it in his hands.

He would put the vial back presently, and lock the drawer, and, it being dark, perhaps would delay to light his lamp that he might torture himself with looking at that pitiless shadow-play, that humble comedy-drama of sweet, common, unattainable things that was every night renewed in those two rooms over the garage at the bottom of the yard.

There was a third performer in the shadow-play now. You could hear him roaring lustily at morn and noon and milky eve. The Wonderfullest Baby you ever!

When W. Keyse was invited by Saxham to inspect his son and heir, crimson, and pulpy, and squirming in a flannel wrap, the Adam's apple in the lean throat of the proud father jumped, and his ugly, honest eyes blinked behind salt water. The nipper had grabbed at his ear as he stooped down. And that made the Fourth Time, and he hadn't even thanked the Doctor yet!

A date, he hoped, would arrive when a chalk or two of that mounting score might be wiped off the board. He said so to Mrs. Keyse, the first time she was allowed to sit up and play at doing a bit of needlework. Not that she did a stitch, and charnce it! With her eyes—beautiful eyes, with that new look of mother-love in them; proud eyes, with that inexhaustible store of riches all her own,—worshipping the crinkly red snub nose and the funny moving mouth, and the little downy head, and everything else that goes to make up a properly-constituted Baby.

"I think the time'll come, deer. Watch out, an' one d'y you'll see!"

"I'll watch it!" affirmed W. Keyse. "And wot are you cranin' your neck for, tryin' to look out o' winder? Blessed if I ever see such a precious old Dutch!—--"

The song was in the mouths of the people that year. She laughed, and rubbed her pale cheek against his.

"You be my eyes, deer. Peep and see if the Doctor is in 'is room."

It was ten o'clock on a shining May morning, and the clouds that raced over great grimy London were white, and there were patches of blue between. The trees in the squares were dressed in new green leaves, and the irises and ranunculuses in the parks were out, and the policemen had shed their heavy uniforms, and instead of hyacinths behind the glass there were pots of tulips in bloom upon the window-sills of the two rooms over the garage. And the Doctor, who had been seeing patients ever since nine, was sitting at the writing-table, said W. Keyse, with his 'ead upon 'is 'ands.

"Like as if 'e was tired, deer, or un'appy? Or tired an un'appy both?"

"Stryte, you 'ave it!" admitted W. Keyse, after cautious inspection.

"The Doctor—don't let 'im see you lookin' at 'im, darlin', or 'e might think, which Good Gracious know how wrong it 'ud be, as you was a kind o' Peepin' Pry—the Doctor 'ave fell orf an' chynged a good deal lately—in 'is looks, I mean!" said Mrs. Keyse, tucking in the corner of the flannel over the little downy head. "Wasted in 'is flesh, like—got 'oller round the eyes——"

"So 'e 'as!" W. Keyse whistled and slapped his leg.

"An' I bin' noticin' it on me own for a long while back—now I come to think of it. Woddyou pipe's the matter wiv 'im? Not ill? Lumme! if 'e was ill——" The eyes of W. Keyse became circular with consternation.

"No, no, deer!" She reassured him, in his ignorance that the maladies of the soul are more agonising far than those that afflict the body. "Down'arted, like, an' 'opeless an'—an' lonely——"

Downhearted, and hopeless, and lonely! The jaw of W. Keyse dropped, and his ugly eyes became circular with sheer astonishment.

"*Him!* Wiv a beautiful 'ouse to live in—an' Carriage Toffs with Titles fair beggin' 'im to come an' feel their pulses an' be pyde for it, an' Scientific Institooshuns an' 'Orspital Committees fightin' to git 'im on their staffs—an' all the pypers praisin' 'im for wot 'e done at Gueldersdorp, an' Government tippin' 'im the 'Ow Do? an' thank you kindly, Mister!—an'——" W. Keyse could only suppose that Mrs. Keyse was playing a bit of gaff on hers truly—"and him with a wife, too! Married an' 'appy, an' goin' to be 'appier yet!" He pointed to the little red snub nose peeping between the folds of the flannel. "When a little nipper like that comes——"

She reddened, paled, burst out crying.

"O William! William——"

Her William kissed her, and dried her tears. He called it mopping her dial, but you have not forgotten that, as the upper house-and-parlour-maid had at first said, both Her and Him were plainly descended from the Lowest Circles. She had melted afterwards, on learning that Mrs. Keyse had been

actually mentioned in Despatches for carrying tea under fire to the prisoners at the Fort; had sought her society, lent paper-patterns, and imparted, in confidence, what she knew of the secret of Saxham's wedded life.

"Dear William! My good, kind Love! Best I should 'urt you, deer, if 'urt you 'ave to be. You see them three large winders covered wiv lovely lace?"

"'Ers—Mrs. Saxham's!" He nodded, trying to look wise.

"Yes, darlin'. Mrs. Saxham's bedroom and dressin'-room they belongs to. I've bin inside the bedroom wiv the upper 'ouse-an'-parlour-myde, an' a Fairy Princess in a Drury Lane Pantomime might 'ave a bigger place to sleep in—but not a beautifuller. When the Foreign Young Person come in of evenin's to git 'er lady dressed for dinner, she snaps up the lights, bein' a kind soul, before she draws the blinds, to give me a charnst like, to see in." She stroked the tweed sleeve. "An' once or twice Mrs. Saxham 'as come in before they'd bin pull down, an' then—O William!—there was everythink in that room on Gawd's good earth a 'usband could ask for to make 'im 'appy, except the wife's 'art beatin' warm and lovin' in the middle of it all!"

"Cripps!... You don't never mean ...?" He gasped. "Wot? Don't the Doctor make no odds to 'er? A Man Like That?" ...

She clung to the heart that loved her, and told him what she had heard.... And if Saxham had known

how two of the unconscious actors in his shadow-play pitied him, the knowledge would have been as vitriol poured into an open wound.

LXIII

The card of Major Bingham Wrynche, C.B., was brought to Saxham one morning, as, his early-calling patients seen and dismissed, the Doctor was going out to his waiting motor-brougham.

Bingo, following what he was prone to call his pasteboard, presented himself—a large, cool, well-bred, if rather stupid-looking, man, arrayed in excellently-fitting clothes, saying:

"You were goin' out? Don't let me keep you. Look in again!"—even as he deposited a tightly-rolled silk umbrella in the waste-paper basket, and tenderly balanced his gleaming hat upon the edge of the writing-table, and chose, by the ordeal of punch, a comfortable chair, as a man prepared to remain. Saxham, pushing a cigar-box across the consulting-room table, asked after Lady Hannah.

"First-rate! Seems to agree with her, having a one-armed husband to fuss over!"

"She won't have a one-armed husband long," returned Saxham, not unkindly, glancing at the bandaged and strapped-up limb that had been shattered by an expanding bullet, and was neatly suspended in its cut sleeve in the shiny black sling.

"By the Living Tinker! she's had him long enough for me!" exploded Bingo, who seemed larger and fussier than ever, if a thought less pink. "So'd you say if they tucked a napkin under your chin at meals, and cut your meat up into dice for you, and you'd ever tried to fold up your newspaper with one hand, or had to stop a perfect stranger in the street, as I did just now outside your door, and ask him to fish a cab-fare out of your right-hand trouser-pocket if he'd be so good? because your idiot of a man ought to have put your money in the other one."

"You're lookin' at my head," pursued the Major, "and I don't wonder. She's been and given me a fringe again. 'Stonishing thing the Feminine Touch is. Let your servant part your hair and knot your necktie, and you simply look a filthy bounder. Your wife does it—and you hardly know yourself in the glass, and wonder why they didn't christen you Anna-Maria. Not bad weeds these, by half! You remember those cigars of Kreil's and the thunderin' price me and Beauvayse paid for 'em, biddin' against each other for fun?" The big man blew a heavy sigh with the light blue smoke-wreath, and added: "And before the last box was dust and ashes, poor old Toby was! And that chap Levestre—never fit to brown his shoes—is wearing 'em; and 'll be Marquess of Foltlebarre when the old man goes. Queer thing, Luck is—when you come to think of it?"

Saxham nodded and looked at the clock. A dull impatience of this large, bland, prosperous personage was growing in him. From the rim the top-hat had left upon his shining forehead to the tightly-screwed eyeglass that assisted his left eye; from the pink Malmaison carnation in the buttonhole of his frock-coat to the buff spats that matched his expansive

waistcoat in shade, the large Major was the personification of luxurious, pampered, West End swelldom, the type of a class Saxham abhorred. He had seen the heavy dandy under other conditions, in circumstances strenuous, severe, even tragic. Then he had borne himself after a simple, manly fashion. Now he had backslidden, retrograded, relaxed. Saxham, always destitute of the saving sense of humour, frowned as he looked upon the pampered son of Clubland, and the sullen lowering of the Doctor's heavy smudge of black eyebrow suggested to the Major that his regrets for "poor old Toby!" had been misplaced. The man who had married Miss Mildare could hardly be expected to join with heartiness in deploring the untimely decease of his predecessor.

"Not that it could have come to anything between poor Toby and her if the dear old chap had lived," reflected Bingo, and wondered if the Doctor knew about—about Lessie? "Bound to," he mentally decided, "if he keeps his ears only half as open as other men keep theirs. Didn't a brace of bounders of the worst discuss the story in all its bearin's, sittin' behind my wife and Mrs. Saxham in the stalls at the theatre the other night! Everybody *is* discussin' it now that the Foltlebarres have left off payin' Lessie not to talk, and provided for her and the youngster out of the estate, and Whittinger's given her a back seat in the family.... That family, too!... Lord! what a rum thing Luck is!"

The musing Major cleared his throat, and his large, rather stupid, blonde face was perfectly stolid as he smoked and stared at his host, reminding himself that Beauvayse had been jealous of Saxham, Attached Medical Staff, Gueldersdorp, and had

feared that, if the fellow knew of the scratch against him, he might force the running; and recalling, with a tingling of the shamed blood in his expansive countenance, how he—Wrynche—had let Beauvayse into the sordid secret that Alderman Brooker had blabbed. He wondered, looking at the square, set face, whether Saxham had ever really earned the degrading nickname that he could not get quite right. The 'Peg Doctor,' was it?—or the 'Lush Doctor?' Something in that way.... Not that Saxham looked like a man given to lifting his elbow with undue frequency....

"—But you never know," thought experienced Bingo sagely, even as, in his heavy fashion, he went pounding on: "The Chief's continuin' the Work of Pacification, and acceptin' the surrender of arms—any date of manufacture you like between the *chassepot* of 1870 and the leather-breeched firelock of Oliver Cromwell's time. The modern kind, you find by employin' the Divinin' Rod"—the large narrator bestowed a wink on Saxham and added—"on the backs of the fellows who buried the guns. Never fails—used in that way. And—as it chances—I have a communication to make to you."

"A communication—a message—from the Chief to me?"

Saxham's face changed, and softened, and brightened curiously and pleasantly.

Major Bingo nodded and cleared his throat. He rebalanced his shiny hat upon the table corner, and said with his eyes engaged in this way:

"I was to remind you—from him—that—not long before the ending of the Siege, a lady who is now a

near connection of yours sustained a terrible bereavement through the—infernally dastardly crime of a—person then unknown!"

Saxham's vivid eyes leaped at the speaker's as if to drag out the knowledge he withheld. But Bingo was balancing the glossy triumph of a Bond Street hatter, and looked at it and not at the Doctor, who said:

"You refer to the murder of the Mother-Superior at the Convent of the Holy Way on February the —th, 1900. And you say a person *then* unknown.... Has the murderer been arrested?"

Major Bingo shook his head.

"He hasn't been arrested, but his name is known. You remember the runner who came in from Diamond Town with a letter for a man called Casey? Not long after—after my wife was exchanged for a spy of Brounckers'?"

"I did not see the man myself," returned Saxham, "but I perfectly recollect his getting through."

Major Bingo said:

"I thought you would. Well, the letter was a blind; the bearer an agent of the firm of Huysmans and Eybel, sent to make certain of our weakest points before they put in the attack on the Barala town; and —that's the man who committed the murder!"

"The man who committed the murder?"

Saxham's vivid eyes were intent upon the Major's face. The Major coughed, and went on:

"My wife came across that man at Tweipans under curious circumstances, which I'm here to put before

you as plainly as may be.... She'd met him before the Siege, travelling up from Cape Town. He scraped acquaintance, called himself a loyal Johannesburger, and an Agent of the British South African War-Intelligence-Bureau. Not that there ever was such a Bureau." Major Bingo blinked nervously, and ran a thick finger round the inside of his collar as he added: "The beggar spoofed Lady Hannah up hill and down dale with that, and she believed him. And when she subsequently flew the coop—dash this cold of mine!..."

The Major drew out a very large pink cambric pocket-handkerchief, and performed behind its shelter an elaborate but unconvincing sneeze:

"—When she shot the moon with Nixey's mare and spider, it was by private arrangement with this oily, lying blackguard, who had given her an address—a farm on the Transvaal Border, known as Haargrond Plaats—where she might communicate with him through another scoundrel in the Transport Agency line, supposin' she chose to do a little business on her own in Secret Intelligence——"

Saxham interrupted:

"I shall say nothing to my wife of this, and I trust you will impress upon Lady Hannah that it would be highly inadvisable for her to do so."

"She won't, you may depend on it." Major Bingo palpably grew warm, and mopped the dew from his large, kind, rather stupid countenance with the pink cambric handkerchief—"She's awfully afraid, as it is, that a word or two she dropped quite innocently, to that infernal liar and swindler, who'd bled her of a monkey, good English cash—paid for procurin' and

forwardin' items of information that he took damned good care should reach us at Gueldersdorp too late to be of use, led up to—to the crime!... By the Living Tinker! it's out at last!"

The big man, so cool and nonchalant a minute or so before, fanned himself with the pocket-handkerchief, and turned red, and went white, and went red, and turned white half a dozen times, in twice as many beats of his flurried pulse.

"—Out at last, Saxham, and that's why I've been gulpin' and blunderin' and bogglin' for the last ten minutes. Poof!" Major Bingo exhaled a vast breath of relief. "Tellin' tales on a woman—and her your wife —even when she's begged you to, isn't the sweetest job a man can tackle!"

"Let me have this story in detail once and for all," said Saxham, turning a stern, white face, and hard, compelling eyes upon the embarrassed Major. "What utterance of Lady Hannah's do you suppose to have led to the tragedy in the Convent Chapel? Upon this point I must and shall be clear before you leave me!"

"You shall have things as clearly as I can put 'em. This pretended Secret Agent of the War-Intelligence-Bureau that never existed, and who called himself Van Busch—a name that's as common among Boers as Murphy is among Irishmen—arranged to pass off my wife as his sister, a refugee from Gueldersdorp, who'd married a German drummer, and buried him not long before. Women are so dashed fond of play-actin'! Kids, Saxham,—that's what they are in their weakness for dressin' up and makin'-believe! And my wife——"

The large Major was in a violent lather as he ran the

thick finger round inside his collar, and swallowed at the lump in his throat.

"—My wife saw Van Busch at Kink's hotel at Tweipans from time to time. He came, I've already explained, to sell bogus information for good money. And as the boodle ran low, the cloven hoof began to show, and the brute became downright insolent."

"As might have been expected," said Saxham, coldly.

"—Kept his hat on in my wife's room, talked big, and twiddled a signet-ring he wore," went on the Major. "And, bein' quick, you know, and sharp as they make 'em, you know, my wife recognised the crest of an old acquaintance cut upon the stone. I knew the man myself"—declared Major Bingo—"and a better never stepped in leather. A brother-officer of the Chiefs, too, and a rippin' good fellow!—Dicky Mildare, of the Grey Hussars."

"Mildare!" repeated Saxham.

"You understand, Saxham, the name did it. My wife had seen the present Mrs. Saxham at Gueldersdorp, and, not knowin' that the surname of Mildare had been taken by her at the wish of her adopted mother, supposed—got the maggot into her head that the Mother-Superior's ward might possibly be a—a daughter of the man the seal-ring had belonged to, knowing—Lord! what a mull I'm making of it!—that Mildare had at one time been engaged to marry that"—the Major boggled horribly—"that uncommonly brave and noble lady, and had, in fact, thrown her over, and made a bolt of it with the wife of his Regimental C.O., Colonel Sir George Hawting."

The faint stain of colour that had showed through

Saxham's dead-white skin faded. He waited with strained attention for what was coming.

"South Africa Lady Lucy and Mildare bolted to," went on Bingo, "and now you know the kind of mare's-nest her ladyship had scratched up. And," declared Bingo, "rather than have had to spin this yarn. I'd have faced a Court-Martial of Inquiry respectin' my conduct in the Field. For my wife has a kind heart and a keen sense of honour, and rather than bring harm upon Miss Mildare that was, or anyone connected with her, she'd have stood up to be shot! By G——!" trumpeted Bingo, "I know she would!"

Saxham's face was blue-white now, and looked oddly shrunken. His voice came in a rasping croak from his ashen lips as he said:

"Lady Hannah mentioned my wife to this man, thinking that she might prove to be the daughter of the owner of the ring. What could possibly lead her to infer such a relationship?"

"You must understand that the blackguard had given my wife details of Mildare's death at a farm owned by a friend of his in Natal, and that Hannah—that my wife knew poor little Lucy Hawting had had a child by Mildare," Major Bingo spluttered. "That was why she asked Van Busch outright whether the girl with the nuns at Gueldersdorp was—could be—the same child, grown up? By the Living Tinker!—I never was in such a lather in my life! The better the light I try to put the thing in, the dirtier it looks. And I'm not half through yet, that's the worst of it!"

He mopped and mopped, and took several violent turns about the room, and subsided in a chair at length, and went on, waving the large pink cambric

handkerchief, now a damp rag, in the air, at intervals, to dry it.

"She says—Lady Hannah says—that the eagerness and curiosity with which the brute snapped up the hint she'd never meant to drop, warned her to shunt him off on another line, and give no more information. They got on money matters; and, seeing plain how she'd been bilked, my wife gave the welsher a bit of her mind, and he showed his teeth in a way that meant Murder. Just in time—before he could wring her neck round—and he'd started in to do it, you understand—Brounckers came stormin' and bullyin' in, to tell the prisoner she was exchanged, and would be sent down to Gueldersdorp.... They packed her back that very day.... And not a week after, the pretended runner came in from Diamond Town with the bogus letter from Mrs. Casey."

Saxham had thought. He said now:

"This man, this rascally Van Busch, acting as a spy for Brounckers, was disguised as the runner? Is that what has been proved? Did Lady Hannah see the man and recognise him?"

Bingo leaned forward to answer.

"Lady Hannah never set eyes on the man from Diamond Town. But the day the *Siege Gazette* came out, with a blithering paragraph in it that never ought to have appeared, announcin'"—he coughed and crimsoned—"Lord Beauvayse's formal engagement to Miss Mildare;—my wife was rung up at the Convalescent Hospital by a caller who wouldn't say where he telephoned from. And the message that came through—couched in queer,

ambiguous language, and purportin' to come from an old friend—was a message for the young lady who is now Mrs. Saxham!"

Saxham's eyes flickered dangerously. He said not a word. The Major went on:

"My wife didn't then and there identify the voice with Van Busch's. She remembered the name given her as that of the owner of the farm at which Mildare died, a place which by rights was in what's now the Orange River Colony, and not Natal at all. She asked plump and plain: 'Are you So-and-So?' There was no answer to the question. But seven hours later the Mother-Superior was shot; and the nuns and Miss Mildare, on their way to the Convent, were passed by a thickset, bearded man, who ran into one of the Sisters in his hurry, and nearly knocked her down."

"That," said Saxham, "has always been regarded as a suspicious circumstance. But the man was never subsequently traced."

"No! Because," said Bingo, "the runner from Diamond Town evaporated that night."

Saxham said, with his grim under-jaw thrust out:

"Surely that circumstance, when reported to the Officer commanding the Garrison, might then have awakened his suspicions?"

"Naturally," agreed Bingo, "and therefore he kept 'em dark. As for my wife, the shock of the murder, accompanied with her own secret conviction that, in some indirect way, she'd helped to set a malicious, lurking, watchful, dangerous Force of some kind working against your wife—when she dropped that hint I've told you of—bowled her over with a

nervous fever."

"I remember," said Saxham, who had been called in.

"Consequently, it wasn't until some days after the Relief—a bare hour or two before the Division—Irregular Horse and Baraland Rifles, and a company or so of Civilian Johnnies that had made believe they were genuine fightin' Tommies till they couldn't get out of the notion—marched out of Gueldersdorp for Frostenberg, that her ladyship got a chance of makin' a clean breast to the Chief. Hold on a minute, Doctor ——"

For Saxham would have spoken.

"—The Chief had had his own private opinion, from the very first. He heard what my wife had to say. As you may guess, she'd worked herself up into a regular cooker of remorse and anxiety—told him she was ready to go anywhere and do anything—he'd only got to give her orders, and all that sort of thing! He charged her with the simple but difficult rôle of holdin' her tongue, and keepin' her oar out, and findin' him—if by good luck she'd got it by her—a specimen of the handwritin' of the clever scoundrel who'd played at bein' a War Intelligence Agent, and waltzed with her five hundred pounds, which sample, as it chanced, she was able to supply. And the fist of the man who'd swindled her, and the writin' of the Mrs. Casey who'd sent a letter per despatch-runner from Diamond Town to a husband who didn't exist, tallied to an upstroke and the crossin' of a '*t*'!"

"Is it beyond doubt that the letter from the supposed Mrs. Casey was not a genuine communication?" Saxham asked.

"Beyond doubt. As a fact, the neatly-directed envelope had simply got a sheet of blank paper inside. Another odd fact brought to light was, that the person who communicated with my wife at the Convalescent Hospital about half-past twelve on the day of the murder, rang her up on the telephone belongin' to the orderly-room at the Headquarters of the Baraland Rifles. We had up the orderly, and after some solid lyin', he owned that the man from Diamond Town had bribed him with 'baccy to let him put a message through. And that's another link in the evidence, I take it?" said Major Bingo.

"Undoubtedly!"

"There's not much more to tell, except," said Bingo, "that the first march of the Division on its route to Frostenberg led past the Border farm called Haargrond Plaats. It looked deserted and half-ruined, with only a slipshod woman and a coloured man in charge; but something was known of what had gone on there, and might be going on still, and the Boers are clever stage-managers, and it don't do to trust to appearances! So the Chief detached a party with dynamite cartridges and express orders to make the ruin real. Our men searched the place thoroughly before they blew it up; and hidden in a disused chimney—solid bit of old Dutch masonry big enough to accommodate a baker's dozen of sweeps—were a few things calculated to facilitate that search for the needle in the haystack—you understand? Disguises of various kinds—a suit of clothes lined with chamois-leather bags for gold-smugglin'—a good deal of the raw stuff itself, scattered all over the shop by the blow-up—and in a rusty cashbox a diary or private ledger, posted up in a clumsy kind of thieves' cipher, impossible to make out, but with the name

written on it of the identical man my wife suspected and the Chief believed to be the murderer of Miss Mildare's adopted mother! And that's what you may call the Clue Direct, Saxham, I rather fancy?"

Major Bingo Wrynche leaned back with an air of some finality, and with some little difficulty extracted a biggish square envelope from the left inner pocket of the accurately-fitting frock-coat. He lightly placed the envelope upon the blotter before Saxham; reached out and took the shiny top-hat off the writing-table, fitted it with peculiar care on his pinkish, sandy, close-cropped head, and said, looking at Saxham with a pleasant smile.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind throwin' your eye over the contents of that envelope? There are three photographs of handwritin' inside, marked on the backs respectively." He waited for Saxham to take the enclosures from the big envelope, examining the polish of his own varnished patent-leather boots with a fastidious air of anxiety that was extremely well assumed, if it was not strictly genuine. His large face was as bland and expressionless as the face of the grandfather-clock in the Sheraton case that ticked against the wainscot behind him, as he advised:

"Take 'em in numerical sequence. No. 1 is the photographed facsimile of the cover of the bogus letter to Mr. Casey. No. 2"—the speaker lightly touched it with a large round finger-tip—"that's the replica—also photographed—of a card the man we're after wrote on and gave to Lady Hannah, in case she found herself inclined to invest a hundred or so in the kind of wares he professed to supply. Photo No. 3 is a reproduction of an autograph and address that's written on the inside cover of the ledger —posted up

in thieves' cipher—that was in the cashbox found at Haargrond Plaats." He waited, screwing painfully at the stiff, waxed ends of the scrubby moustache.

Saxham took the photographs in their order. The envelope of the bogus letter brought by the supposed runner from Diamond Town had been addressed in a big bold black round hand with curiously malformed capitals, to

"Mr. BARNEY CASEY,
"Commercial Traveller,
"Gueldersdorp.

"Care of the Officer Commanding H.M. Forces"

"—Don't put it back in the envelope," said Major Bingo. "Compare the writin' with No. 2."

No. 2 was the photograph of an oblong card. On it was written in ink, in the same bold hand:

"Mr. HENDRYK VAN BUSCH,
"C/o Mr. W. Bough,
"Transport Agent,
"Haargrond Plaats,
"Near Matambani,
"Transvaal."

LXIV

There was a silence in the consulting-room, only broken by street noises filtered thin by walls and curtains, and the ticking of the Sheraton grandfather

clock, and the breathing of two people. Saxham glanced at Major Bingo with eyes that seemed to have been bleached of colour, and laid the second calligraphic specimen beside the first, and took up No. 3, and read in the same large nourishing round hand:

"W. BOUGH,
"Free State Hotel,
"50 m. from Driepoort,
"Orange Free State."

After that the silence was intense. The clock ticked, and the faint, far-off street noises came through the intervening screens, but only one of the men in the room seemed to be breathing. At last Saxham's grey lips moved. He said in a horrible clicking whisper:

"Van Busch and Bough are—one?"

Major Wrynche's large face nodded in the affirmative. But it was as expressionless as the grandfather clock's.

"One man!—and that's what I may call the pith of my verbal Despatch for you!"

Saxham said with hard composure:

"Van Busch is a Dutch surname that, as you say, is common in South Africa. With the name of Bough, as the Chief is aware, I have—associations. It was, in fact, one of the many aliases used by the witness for Regina in an Old Bailey case in which I was concerned nearly seven years ago."

The Major nodded once more, and said with brevity:

"Same man!"

Saxham seemed always to have known that the man was the same man. The tense muscles of his face told nothing. Bingo added:

"—But the wrong and injury done to you by Bough amount to little compared with the wrong and injury inflicted upon Mrs. Saxham! That—— Good Lord! what's the matter?"

For Saxham, with a madman's face, had leapt to his feet, knocking over his chair, and stuttered with foam on his blue lips:

"What wrong? What injury? What—what are you hinting at?——"

"Hinting!" The astonishment in the Major's round light blue eyes was so palpably genuine that the crazy flame died out of the Doctor's, and his clenched hand dropped. "I didn't hint. I referred to the murder of your wife's adopted mother by this Bough, or Van Busch, that's all!"

"I beg your pardon, Major!" Saxham picked up his chair and sat down on it, inwardly cursing his lack of self-control. "My nerves have been giving trouble of late."

Going by the evidence of the haggard face and fever-bright eyes, the Doctor looked like that—uncommonly like that! And the big Major, remembering Alderman Brooker's revelation, wondered, as he screwed at the stiff, blunt ends of his sandy moustache, whether Saxham might not have reverted to the old vice? "Bad for the girl he's married if he has!" he thought, even as he said:

"Overworked. Get away for a bit. Nothin' like relievin' the tension, don't you know? Norway in

June, or the Higher Austrian Tyrol. Make up your mind and go!"

"I have made up my mind," Saxham answered, smiling bitterly, as he remembered the little phial with the yellow label that lay beside the whisky-flask in the drawer beneath his hand. "I shall go very soon now!"

"But not immediately?"

"Not immediately." There was something strange, almost exalted, in the look that accompanied the words. Saxham added: "If you could give me an approximate date as regards the finding of that—needle in the haystack of South Africa, it would—facilitate my departure more than you can guess!"

"Would it, by George!" Bingo slipped the thumb and forefinger of the useful hand into his waistcoat-pocket. Something sparkled in the big pink palm he extended to Saxham—something sparkled, and spurted white and green and scarlet points of fire from a myriad of facets. The something was an oval miniature on ivory. A slender gold chain, broken, dangled from its enamelled bow. From within a rim of brilliants the lovely, wistful face of a young, refined, high-bred woman looked out, and with all his iron self-control Saxham could not restrain a sudden movement and a stifled exclamation of mingled anger and surprise.

For at the first glance the face was Lynette's.

With a dull roaring of the blood in his ears and an unspeakable rage and horror seething in him, he took the portrait from the Major's palm, and held it with a steady hand, in a favourable light.

Marvellously like, but not Lynette's face!

The eyes were larger, rounder, and of gentle blue-grey, the squirrel-coloured hair of a brighter shade, the sensitive mouth sensuous as well, the little chin pointed. She might have been a few years under thirty; the arrangement of the hair, the cut of the bodice, might have indicated the height of the latest fashion—say, twenty-two or even three years back. Some delicately fine inscription was upon the dull gold of the inner rim of the miniature-frame, within the diamonds that surrounded it. Saxham deciphered: "Lucy, to Richard Mildare. For ever! 1879."

* * * * *

The dull, dark crimson that had stained the Dop Doctor's opaque skin had given place to pallor. His face was sharp and thin, and of waxen whiteness, like the face of one newly dead. His blue eyes burned ominously in their caves under the heavy bar of meeting black eyebrows. His voice was very quiet as he asked: "How did you come by this?"

"It dropped down out of the sky," said Major Bingo measuredly, "with the bits of evidence I've told you of, and a few others, when the big stone chimney at Haargrond Plaats blew up with a thunderin' roar. The other bits of evidence were bits of a man—two men you might call him! And, by the Living Tinker, considerin' how he was mixed up with the rest of the rubbish, he might have been half a dozen instead of Bough Van Busch!"

"He had this upon him? He—wore it round his neck?" Saxham asked the question in a grating whisper, dropping the clenched hand that held the

diamond-set miniature upon the arm of his chair.

"I should think it probable he did," said Bingo placidly, "when he had a neck to boast of." He added, as he got up to take his leave: "The thing has been carefully cleaned. The chain is broken, and the crystal cracked in one place, but otherwise it has come off wonderfully. Perhaps you'd hand it over to —anybody it belongs to? Hope I haven't mulled many professional appointments. Remember me to Mrs. Saxham. Thanks frightfully! So long!"

LXV

In the days that followed Saxham had a letter, written by a man with whom he had been fairly intimate at Gueldersdorp during the strenuous days of the Siege—a man who would undoubtedly not have lived to go through those days but for the Dop Doctor. It was rather an incoherent letter, written by an unsteady hand.

Saxham tore it up and dropped it into the waste-paper basket with a contemptuous shrug. But he had made a mental note of the address, and drove there that afternoon.

The Doctor's motor-brougham stopped at the door of the grimy stucco Clergy-House that is attached to St. Margaret's in Wendish Street, West. Saxham rang a loud bell, that sent iron echoes pealing down flagged passages, and brought a little bonneted woman in rusty black to answer the door and the Doctor's

query whether Mr. Julius Fraithorn was at home and able to receive a visitor?

The little woman, who had a nose like a preserved cherry, and wore one eyebrow several inches higher than the other, shook her rusty crape-trimmed bonnet discouragingly, as she informed Saxham in a husky voice strongly flavoured with cloves that Father Julius 'ad been in the Confessional all the morning, it being the Eve of the Feast of the Ascension, and was quite wore out. If there was anything she could do, she inferred, with quite a third-hand air of clerical responsibility, she would be happy to oblige the gentleman.

"I shall be obliged by your conveying my card to Mr. Fraithorn. You see that I am a doctor," said Saxham, with unsmiling gravity, "and not an ordinary caller on business connected with religion."

The little cherry-nosed woman in rusty black snorted as scenting godlessness, and conducted Saxham down a cream-washed, brown-distemper-dadoed passage, smelling of kippered haddocks and incense, to a sitting-room at the rear. It was a severe apartment, commanding a view of mews, and had a parquet-patterned linoleum on the floor, and a washable paper of a popular ecclesiastical design suggestive of a ranunculus with its hands in its pockets.

Stained deal bookcases contained Julius's Balliol library; chrome-lithographic reproductions of Saints and Madonnas by Old Masters hung above. The Philistine School of Art was represented by a Zoological hearthrug; three Windsor chairs offered accommodation to the visitor; a table of the kitchen

pattern was covered by a square of green baize; and a slippery hair-cloth sofa, with a knobbly bolster and a patchwork cushion, supported the long, thin, black clad figure of the Reverend Julius Fraithorn, who was lying down.

"I have come," said Saxham, standing grimly over the prone figure, a single stride having taken him to the side of the sofa, "to prescribe for a man whose nerves are playing him tricks. I have torn up your letter—the epistle in which you ask me to afford you an opportunity of making an avowal which will prove to what depths of infamy a man may descend at the bidding of his lower nature. Lower nature! If I am any judge of a man's physical condition, a lower nature is what you want!" He threw down his hat and stick upon the green-baize-covered table, took one of the Windsor chairs, and crashed it down beside the sofa, and planted his hulking big body on it, and reached out and captured the thin wrist of his victim, who mustered breath to stammer:

"There is nothing whatever the matter with my health. I am well—that is, bodily." He got up from the sofa, and crossed to the Zoological hearthrug, and poked the smoky little fire burning in the narrow grate, for the May day was wet and chilly. "I shall be better, mentally," he said, with an effort, looking over his shoulder towards Saxham, "when you have heard what I have to tell." He rose up, and turned round, his thin face flaming. "Mind, I'm not to be gagged by your not wanting to," for Saxham had impatiently waved his hand. "Hear you shall, and must!"

He ground his boot-heel into the orange-yellow lion that couched on a field of aniline green hearthrug,

and drove his hands down deep into his pockets, and the painful scarlet surged over the rim of his Roman collar and dyed his thin, sensitive, beautiful face and high, white forehead to the roots of his dark, curling hair.

"Perhaps you may recall an oath I swore at your instigation one day in your room at the Hospital at Gueldersdorp?"

"Yes—no! What does it matter?" said Saxham thickly, with his angry, brooding eyes upon the floor.

"It matters," said Julius doggedly, "in the present case. I need hardly tell you that I have kept that oath. If the man had not been dead, I might have ended by breaking it—who knows? What I have to tell you is that, some two months after the Relief, when your engagement to the lady who is now your wife was first made public, I, impelled and prompted by a despicable envy of the great good-fortune that had fallen—deservedly fallen—to your lot, sought out Miss Mildare, and told her—something I had learned to your detriment, from a man called Brooker, a babbling, worthless creature, a Gueldersdorp tradesman who, on the strength of a seat upon the local Bench, claimed to be informed."

Saxham's head turned stiffly. He looked at the wall now instead of the floor, and breathed unevenly and quickly. His right hand, resting on the table near which he sat, softly closed and opened, opened and closed its supple muscular fingers, with a curious, rhythmical movement. He waited to hear more. And Julius groaned out, with his elbows on the parted wooden mantelshelf, and his shamed face hidden:

"I knew that the man lied—on my soul, I knew it!

But the opportunity he had given me of lowering your value in—in another's eyes was too tempting to resist. The man had told me——"

"In effect, that I was a confirmed and hopeless drunkard," said Saxham; "and, as it happens, he told the truth!" He added: "And what I was then I am now. There is no change in me, though once I thought it!"

"Saxham!... For God's sake, Saxham!" stuttered Julius. But Saxham, hunching his great shoulders, and lowering his square, black head, not at all unlike the savage bull of Lady Hannah Wrynche's apt comparison, went on:

"It is a drunken world we live in, Parson, for all our sham of abstinence and sobriety. But there are nice degrees and various grades in our drunkenness, as in our other vices, and the man who is a druggard despises the common drunkard; and the sippers of ether look down with infinite contempt—or, more ludicrous still, with tender, pitying sorrow, upon the toper and the slave of morphia and cocaine, and take no shame in seeing the oxygenated greyhound win the coursing-match and the oxygenated racehorse run for the Cup! A year or so, and the Transatlantic oxygen-outfit will be an indispensable equipment of the British athlete. Even to-day the professional footballer and cricketer, runner and swimmer, inhale oxygen as a preliminary to effort, and bring the false energy that is born of it to aid them in their trial tests of strength. The man who scales an Alpine summit winds himself up with a whiff or so; the orator, inspired by oxygen, astonishes the House of Commons or the Bar. And the actor, delirious with oxygen, rushes on the stage; and the clergyman,

drunk on oxygen, mounts the pulpit to preach a Temperance sermon. And the Dop Doctor of Gueldersdorp prescribes palliatives for guinea-paying tipplers; and there is not an honest man to rise up and say: 'Physician, heal thyself!'"

The Windsor chair creaked under Saxham's heavy figure as he got up. His fierce blue eyes blazed in their sunken caves as he took his hat and stick from the table.

"What more have you to 'confess'? You did not wrong me. Moralists would say that you acted conscientiously—played the part of a true friend in telling—*her*—what you knew!"

"Of my benefactor—the man who had saved my life!" Julius moistened his dry lips. "Your approving moralist would be the devil's advocate. But I have not forgotten what your own opinion is of the man who tries to enhance his own virtues in a woman's eyes by pointing out the vices of a rival. And, if you will believe me, I was punished for the attempt. Her look of surprise ... the tone in which she said, 'Did he not save your life?' that was enough!... Then I—I lost my head, and told her that I loved her—entreated her to be my wife, only to learn that she never had—never could——" Julius's thin white fingers knotted themselves painfully at the back of his stooped head, and his voice came in jerks between his gritted teeth: "It was revolting to her—a girl reared among nuns in a Catholic Convent—that a man calling himself a priest should speak to her of love. There was absolute horror in her look as she learned the truth." He groaned. "I have never met her eyes since that

day without seeing—or imagining I saw—some reflection of that horror in them!"

"Why torture yourself uselessly with imaginations?" said Saxham, not unkindly.

He was at the door, upon the threshold of departure, when Julius stopped him.

"One moment. Has—has Mrs. Saxham ever spoken to you of—this that I have told you?"

"Never!" answered Saxham, pausing at the door.

"One moment more! Saxham, is it hopeless? Could you not by a desperate effort break this habit that may—that must—inevitably bring misery to your wife? In the name of her love for you—in the names of the children that may be born of it——"

—"Unless you want me to murder you," advised Saxham, facing the passionate emotion of the younger man as a basalt cliff might oppose a breaking wave, "you had better be silent!"

"My right to speak," Julius retorted fiercely, "is better than you know. When I endeavoured—unsuccessfully—to injure you, I robbed myself of my belief in myself. But you—you who gave me back my earthly life, you have robbed me of my faith in the Living and Eternal God. Do you know the effect of Doubt, once planted in what was a faithful soul? It is a choking fungus, a dry rot, a creeping palsy! Since that day at the Hospital at Gueldersdorp, when you said to me, 'The Human Will is even more omnipotent than the Deity, because it has created Him, out of its own need!' I have done my daily duty as a priest to the numbing burden of that utterance—I have preached the Gospel with it sounding in my

ears." He wrung his hands, that were wet as though they had been dipped in water. "I have tended souls as mechanically as a gardener might water pots in which there was nothing but dead sticks and dry earth!"

"Try to credit me when I tell you," said Saxham, wrung by the suffering in the thin young face and in the beautiful haggard eyes, "that I never meant the harm that I appear to have done! Nor can I recall that I have habitually attacked your faith, or for that matter any Christian man's. I remember that I was suffering, physically and mentally, upon the day you particularly refer to, when you came upon me at the Hospital. I had seen an announcement in the *Siege Gazette* that ... I dare say you understand?" He laughed harshly. "As to my theory of the Omnipotence of Human Will, it is blown and exploded, and all the King's horses and all the King's men will never set it back on the pedestal it has toppled from. I owe you that admission, humbling to the pride that is left in me! Of how far Will, in another man, may carry him, I dare not judge or calculate. My own is a dead leaf, doomed to be the sport of any wind that blows!"

He took up the walking-stick he had leaned against a bookcase, and said, pulling his hat down over his sombre eyes:

"The best of us are bad in spots, Parson: the worst of us are good in patches. You Churchmen don't recognise that fact sufficiently.... And I think no worse of you for what you have told me! If I have anything to forgive—why, it is forgiven! Do you try, on the other hand, to think leniently of a man who broke your staff of faith for you, and has nothing of

his own to lean upon. As for my wife, in whose interests I know you to be honestly solicitous, I will tell you this much: She will be spared the 'inevitable misery' of which you spoke just now!"

"How? Have you decided to undergo a cure? I have heard," hesitated Julius, "that these things are not always successful—that they sometimes fail!"

"Mine is the only cure that never fails," returned Saxham.

A vision of the little blue-glass, yellow-labelled vial that held the swift dismissing pang, floated before him. He shook hands with Julius, and went upon his lonely way.

LXVI

Even the saintly of this earth are prone to rare, occasional displays of temper. Saxham's white saint had proved her descent from Eve by stamping her slender foot at her hulking Doctor; had, after a sudden outburst of passionate, unreasonable upbraiding, risen from the dinner-table and run out of the room, to hide a petulant, remorseful shower of tears.

Such a trivial thing had provoked the outburst—merely an invitation from Captain and Mrs. Saxham, who were settled for the London summer season in Eaton Square, for Owen and his wife to spend the scorching months of August and September at the old home, perched on the South Dorset cliffs, among its

thrush-haunted shrubberies of ilex and oleander and rose—nothing more.

But Mrs. Owen Saxham had passionately resented the idea. Why never occurred to Saxham. He had long ago forgiven and forgotten Mildred's old treachery. If David's betrayal had brought him shame and anguish, it had borne him fruit of joy as well. And if the fruit might never be gathered, if its divine juices might never solace her husband's bitter thirst, at least, while he lived, it was his—to look at and long for. He owed that cruel bliss to his brother and that brother's wife. And their meeting had been, upon his side, free of constraint, unshadowed by the recollection of what had once appeared to him a base betrayal—a gross, foul, unpardonable wrong.

Suppose he had married Mildred, and been uneventfully happy and successful. Then, Saxham told himself, he would never have seen and known Lynette. She would never have come to him and laid in his the slight hand whose touch thrilled him to such piercing agony of yearning for the little more that would have meant so much—so much....

Ah, yes! he was even grateful to Mildred. She had not worn well. She had grown thin and *passée*, and nervous and hysterical. But she was amiable, even demonstrative in her professions of admiration and enthusiasm for Owen's wife. Her regard for the Doctor was elaborate in the sisterliness of its expression when he was present, if in his absence it was tempered by a regretful sigh—even by a reference to the time:

"*When poor dear Owen thought me the only woman worth looking at in the whole world.* Ah, well! that is all over, long ago!" Mildred would say, with an

inflection that was meant to be tenderly reassuring. And she would tilt her still pretty head on one side and smile with pensive kindness at her successor upon the throne of poor dear Owen's heart.

These gentle, retrospective references were never made in the Doctor's hearing. With truly feminine tact they were reserved for Mrs. Owen's delectation. And possibly they might have rankled in those pretty shell-like ears, if their owner had loved Saxham.

But Saxham knew that she did not;—had even ceased to wish that the miracle might be wrought. Brainy men can be very dense. When she stamped her foot and cried, "I decline to accept Mrs. Saxham's invitation, either with you or without you. I wonder that you should dream of asking me to! If you can forget how hideously she and your brother have treated you, I cannot! I loathe treachery! I abominate ingratitude and deceit! And I hate her—and I shall not go!" Saxham opened his eyes, as well he might. He had never before seen his wife otherwise than gentle and submissive. He found his own bitter explanation of the sudden storm that had burst among the débris of dessert on the Harley Street dinner-table. Her fetters were galling her to agony, he knew! His square pale face grew more Rhadamanthine than ever, and the glass he had been filling with port overflowed unnoticed on the cloth. But he kept the mask of set composure before his agony of remorse. Then the frou-frou of light silken draperies passed over the soft carpet. The door opened and shut with a slam. Lynette had left the room. As Saxham sat alone, a heavy, brooding figure, mechanically sipping at his port, and staring at the empty place opposite, where the overset flower-glass, and the crookedly pushed-back chair, and the

serviette that made a white streak on the dark crimson carpet, marked the haste and emotion of her departure, he said to himself that the West End upholsterer who had the contract for refurnishing Plas Bendigaid must be warned to complete his work without delay.

For Plas Bendigaid, the solid, stone-built grange that had been a Convent in the fifteenth century, and probably long before, the South Welsh home of his mother's girlhood, perched in the shadow of Herion Castle upon a wide shelf of the headland that commands the treacherous shoals and snowy shell-strewn sands and wild tumbling waters of Nantmadoc Bay ... Plas Bendigaid, with that hoarded, invested money, was to be Saxham's bequest to his young widow.

Everything that loving care and forethought could plan had already been done to make the old home pleasant and charming. Nothing was needed but the upholsterer's finishing touches. Saxham had planned that Lynette should be there when he wiped out the shame of failure by keeping that promise made in the Cemetery at Gueldersdorp, little more than a year before.

He had always meant to keep it, but not when the north-east gales of winter and spring should be sweeping over the mountain-passes and lashing the waves to madness; not when the ceaseless scurry of hunted clouds should have piled the south-west horizon with scowling blue-black ramparts, topped by awful towers, themselves belittled by stupendous heights built of intangible vapours, and reproducing with added grandeur and terror the soaring peaks and awful vales and appalling precipices of snow-

helmed Frore and her daughters.

When the promise of Summer should have been fulfilled in sweetness, Saxham would keep his promise. When the swallows should hatch out their young broods between the huge stones that the hands of men who returned to dust cycles of centuries ago hauled up with the twisted hide-rope and the groaning crane, to rear with them upon the jut of the rugged headland two hundred feet above the waves that now break a mile away, the Lonely Tower, now merged in the huge dilapidated Edwardian keep that broods over Herion. When those blocks of cyclopæan masonry should be tufted with the golden wallflower and the perfumed wild geranium, and starred with the delicate blossom of the lavender scabious and the wild marguerite, then the little blue bottle that stood in the deep table-drawer near the big whisky-flask should come into use.

When the vast pale sweep of the sandy dunes should be covered for leagues by the perfumed cloth-of-gold spread by the broom and the furze; when the innumerable little yellow dwarf-roses should blossom on their prickly bushes, thrusting pertly through the powdery white sand, and every hollow and hillock should be gay with the star convolvulus and the flaunting scarlet poppies—then Death should come, borne on winged feet, and bearing the sword of keenness, to sever the iron bonds of Andromeda chained to the rock. And here was Summer, knocking at the door!

Lynette did not reappear. He did not seek her out

and ask the reason of her strange display of emotion. Only a husband could do that who had the right to take her in his arms and kiss the last remaining traces of her tears away. Saxham went to his consulting-room, and while all the clocks of London made time, and the moon veered southward, and the stars rose and set, he toiled over his notes and case-books in the brilliant circle cast by the shaded electric lamp upon his writing-table, and the tide in the big whisky-flask in the table-drawer ebbed low.

Hours hence he laid down his pen. The flask had long been emptied; the alcohol-flare was dying out in the grey chambers of his brain. Weariness of life weighed on him like a leaden panoply. He had almost stretched his hand to take the little blue-glass vial that sat waiting, waiting in the deep table-drawer aside the drained flask before sleep overcame him. His head sank against the chair-back. His was a sudden, heavy lapsing into forgetfulness, unmarred by dreams.

Time sped. The silver table-clock, the clock upon the mantelshelf, and the grandfather clock in the corner, ran a race with the chronometer in the pocket of the sleeping man. The brilliant unwavering circle of electric light did not reach the face of the Dop Doctor. It bathed his hands, that hung lax over the arms of the Sheraton chair, and tipped his lifted chin, leaving the strong brow and closed eyes in shadow. But as the pale glimmer of dawn began to outline the edges of the blinds and stretched at length a broad, pointing finger across the quiet room, the sleeping face showed greyish pale and luminous as a drawing

by Whistler in silver-point.

The dawn had not rested on it long before there came a knock upon the panel of the consulting-room door. It was so faint and diffident a knock, no wonder it passed unheeded. Then the door opened timidly, and a slender figure in pale flowing draperies of creamy embroidered cashmere stole upon small, noiseless, slippered feet over the thick Turkey carpet.

It was Lynette. She had risen from her bed, and looked out from the landing into the hall below, and, seeing the light of the unextinguished lamp shining under the lintel of the consulting-room door, had stolen timidly down to ask Owen's pardon. Why had she behaved so badly? She could not explain. Only she was sorry. She must tell him so. His name was upon her lips, when she saw the Dop Doctor sleeping in his chair.

Breathlessly silent, she crossed the room to his side. And then—it was to her as though she looked upon her husband's face for the first time.

There was no stain of his secret excess upon it—no bloating of the features. You would have said this was a sane and strong and temperate man, upon whom the mighty brother of all-conquering Death had come, like one armed, and overthrown in the heat and stress of the life-battle. Only the sorrow of a suffering soul was written as deeply on that pale mask of human flesh as though the sculptor-slaves of a Pharao, dead seven thousand years agone, had cut it with tools of unknown, resistless temper in the diamond-hard Egyptian granite.

He breathed deeply and evenly, and not a muscle

twitched as Lynette bent over and looked at him. A mass of her red-brown hair, heavy with the weight of its own glossy luxuriance, slipped from her half-bared bosom as she leaned over him, and fell upon his breast. A sudden blush burned over her as it fell. He never stirred. But as though the rod of Moses had touched the rock in Horeb, one slow tear oozed from between Saxham's black fringed, close-sealed eyelids, and hung there, a burnished, trembling point of steely light. And the deep, still, manly anguish of his face cried out to the reawakening womanhood in Lynette, and a strange, new, overwhelming emotion seized and shook her as a stream of white and liquid fire seemed to pass into her veins and mingle with her blood.

She began to understand, as she pored, with beating heart and bated breath, upon the living page before her eyes.

In its reticence and lonely strength of endurance, that face of Saxham's pleaded with her. In its stern acceptance of suffering and disappointment for Saxham, in its rugged confrontation of the inevitable; in its resolute long-suffering and grim patience; in its silent abnegation of any claim upon her gratitude or any right to demand her tenderness, the face was more than eloquent to-night. In the pride that would never stoop to beg for pity—would rather die hungered than accept one crumb of grudged and measured love; in its secret, inscrutable, unyielding loyalty to that promise given to a dead man; in the nobility of its refusal to shine brighter in its faith and truth and chivalry by the revelation of that other man's mean baseness; in its almost paternal solicitude; in its agony of love for her, insensible and careless; in the sick despair that had given up and

left off hoping: even in the pride that had—or so it seemed to her—asserted itself at the last, and said, "I have left off crying for the moon; I wish for your love no longer!"—it pleaded—pleaded.... Words struggled for answering utterance in her, but none came.... She leaned nearer, drawn by an irresistible fascination, and laid her lips lightly upon the broad white forehead, with the bar of black meeting eyebrow smudged across it, and then, with a sudden leap and thrill, she knew....

All that had been in the past went for nothing. Only this man mattered who sat sleeping in the chair. How easy to awaken him with a touch, and tell him all! She dared not, though she longed to.

He was her master as well as her mate. When he had said to her that he had ceased to care, his eyes had given his words the lie. He had looked at her.... She shivered deliciously at the recollection of that look. If he were to open those stern, ardent eyes now, he would know her his. His—all his, to deal with as he chose!... His alone!

If Saxham had awakened then.... But he slept on. She did not dare to kiss that broad white buckler of his forehead again. She kissed the sleeve of his coat instead, and, scared by a sudden sigh and movement of one of the hands that hung over the chair-arms, gathered her draperies around her, and stole as noiselessly as a pale sunbeam, out of the room.

LXVII

It was barely five o'clock, and the balmiest summer day at Herion is wont to waken, like a spoilt child, in a bad temper of angry wind and lashing rain. Lynette, who had risen from her bed and thrown her dressing-gown about her, to kneel on the broad window-seat and look out upon this strange new world, shivered, standing barefoot on the mossy carpet. Then she looked round the room, and smiled with delight. For she had found it, upon her arrival of the previous night, a reproduction, down to the smallest detail, of her blue-and-white bedroom at Harley Street, with this notable difference—that on the wall facing the bed-head hung a fine copy of a Millais portrait that was one of the treasures of Bawne House. Lady Bridget-Mary, in the glory of her beautiful youth, shone from the canvas splendid as a star.

How kind, how kind of Owen!... Her eyes filled as she gazed, comparing the glowing, radiant face upon the canvas with the enlarged photograph of the Mother in her habit that stood in an ebony and silver frame upon a little table beside the bed. A worn "Garden of the Soul" lay near, and the "Imitation" of inspired À Kempis. Both had been the Mother's gifts. The Breviary and the Little Office of Our Lady had belonged to the dead. Lynette had brought these treasured possessions with her from Harley Street, leaving the ivory Crucifix hanging in its place above the vacant pillow. So many sleepless nights she had known of late upon that pillow that there were faint bluish-shaded hollows under the beautiful eyes, and wistful lines about the mouth.

Since the revelation made to her by her own heart, when the heavy tress of hair dropped from her bosom upon the unconscious breast above which she

bent, an insurmountable wall of diffidence and shyness upon her side, and of stern, self-concentrated isolation on her husband's, had risen up between them, dwarfing the barrier that was already there.

His writing-table lamp had burned through the nights, but she had never ventured upon another stolen visit to Saxham's consulting-room. The memory of that kiss she had put upon the velvety-smooth space above the broad meeting eyebrows stung in her like a sense of guilt, and yet it had its sweetness. She had claimed her right. The man was hers, though she might never be his.... To know it was to realise at once her riches and her poverty.

Out of a vague yearning and a formless, nameless pain had come to her the knowledge of the true herb needed for her healing. The unsated hunger for sympathy and love and loveliness, the loneliness that gnawed him, she comprehended now. And as she looked about her at the dainty, carefully-chosen furniture, and the exquisite old-world-patterned chintz draperies, recognising what his care had been to please her, and how every little taste and preference of hers had been remembered and gratified, a sense of her own ingratitude pierced her to the quick.

She had parted from Owen without one tender word, without even one glance of greater kindness than she would have bestowed upon a stranger. She ached with futile remorse at the recollection of that frigid, distant good-bye at Euston Station, when Lady Hannah's shrill laugh had jangled through Major Bingo's blustering admonitions to perspiring porters to put the luggage in one compartment, to stow canvas bags of golf-clubs and fishing-rods in the

racks, and to damage bicycles at their personal peril, since the company evaded liability.

It had been Saxham's wish that Lady Hannah and Major Wrynche should be his wife's guests at Plas Bendigaid. Looking from her bedroom casements over the syringas and lilacs and larches, the laburnums and hawthorns and hollies of the low-walled garden that ended at the sheer cliff-edge, from whence you looked down upon the tops of the pines and chestnuts, whose green foliage hid the shining metals of the iron way, and made a sea of verdure in place of the salt blue waves that once had lapped and sighed there—gazing across the powdery sand-dunes that were prickly with sea-holly and gay with flaunting poppies and purple scabious, the pink and white convolvulus, and the thorny yellow dwarf rose, that somehow finds nourishment in the pale sand of Herion Links, to the line of white breakers that rose and fell more than a mile away. Lynette sighed a small sigh of resignation at the prospect of long weeks to be spent in the society of these pleasant, well-bred, rather fidgety people Owen had chosen to bear her company.

Of course, Owen could not leave his patients! He had explained that, and Lady Hannah and her big Major were old friends of hers and his. And the little woman with the jangling laugh and the snapping black eyes had known the Mother in her youth....

At that remembrance Lynette's eyes went lovingly to the copy of the Millais portrait, and as the sun burst through the streaming wind-chased clouds, and smote bright diamond-rays from the dripping window-panes, the firm lips seemed to curve in the rare, sudden smile, the great grey eyes to gleam with

life and tenderness.

Ah, to spend a long, sweet summer here, alone with that dearest of all companions! Lynette's white throat swelled at the thought, and a mist blotted out the noble face, crowned with its diadem of rich black tresses. She wiped the tears away, and beheld a world miraculously changed. For land and sea were drenched in radiant sunshine.

She unlatched the casements and threw them wide, and clean, salt, sweet air came streaming in, bringing the fragrance of mignonette and wallflower and sweetbriar, and the aromatic smells of the larch and pine. She leaned her white arms upon the grey stone window-sill, and drank the freshness and fragrance. And it seemed to her that this ancient grange, perched on the cliff-ledge in the tremendous shadow of Herion Castle, looking across the restless grey-blue waters of Nantmadoc Bay to St. Tirlan's Roads, was an ideal place to spend a honeymoon in, supposing you loved the man you had married, and were loved by him?

Her bosom heaved and her wild heart fell to throbbing. A blush burned over her, and she drove the thought away. It came back, whispering like a guest who wishes not to be dismissed. It pleaded and urged and compelled. Something like a strong hand closed upon her heart and drew her, drew her.... A voice called to her in the silence that was only broken by the voices of birds, and the rustling of wind-stirred leaves, and the crying of the gulls above the white restless breakers. And the voice was Owen's.

How strangely he had looked and spoken in that last moment of their parting! It came back in every detail

for the hundredth time, as she leaned her white arms upon the window-sill and looked out with wistful eyes upon the beauty of the blossoming world.

"Good-bye, good-bye! Be happy—and forget!"

The train had begun to move as he uttered the words He had gripped her hand painfully and released it. As he drew his arm sharply away, a button, hanging loosely by a thread or two, became detached from his coat-cuff, and fell upon the rubber matting of the corridor. She was conscious of the button as Saxham and the crowded, grimy platform receded from her view. And before she went back to her seat in the compartment that had been reserved for herself and her fellow-travellers, she picked up the tiny disc of black horn, and secretly kissed it, and slipped it into her purse. She was silent and preoccupied during the eleven hours' journey, turning over and over in her mind, mentally repeating with every shade of expression that could vary their meaning, Saxham's strange words of farewell.

She repeated them now aloud. They were tossed to and fro in her heart on waves of wonder and regret and apprehension. Did Owen really believe that to be happy she must forget him? Did he comprehend that she had long arrived at the conclusion that this loveless, joyless companionship, mocked by the name of marriage, was a miserable mistake?

He had never been under any illusion as concerned it. He had accepted the iron terms of the contract she offered him with open eyes and full knowledge. She heard his voice again, as it had spoken in the Cemetery at Gueldersdorp, saying:

"Would I be content to enter, with you for my

partner, into a marriage that should be practically no marriage at all—a formal contract that is not wedlock? That might never change as Time went on, and ripen into the close union that physically and mentally makes happiness for men and women who love? Is that what you ask me, Miss Mildare?"

That was just what she had asked. He had accepted her iron conditions, and stipulated for nothing. He had given his all. What had she given him? Nothing but suffering, being rendered pitiless by the ache and sting in her own bosom—absorbed, swallowed up by her agony of grief for the Mother, her passion of regret for dead Beauvayse.

Beauvayse.... Suppose he and Owen Saxham stood side by side down there on the green short grass beneath her windows, which of the two men would to-day be the dearer and the more desired? The tall, soldierly young figure, with the sunburnt, handsome face, the gay, amorous, challenging glance, the red mouth that laughed under the golden moustache, and the shallow brain under the close-clipped golden curls, or the black-haired, hulking Doctor, with the square-cut, powerful face and the stern blue eyes, the man of heart and intellect, whose indomitable, patient tenderness had led a stricken girl back from the borders of that strange land where the brain-sick dwell, to wholesome consciousness of common things, and renewed healthfulness of body and of mind?

She had hardly thanked him. She realised, with tears of shame, that this inestimable service she had accepted as matter of course. It was the way of Saxham's world to take of him and render nothing; he who was worthy to be a King among his fellow-

men had been their servant as long as she had known him.

To call him hard and stern, and seek his aid and sympathy at every pinch; to deem him cold and grudging, and accept his sacrifices as matter of course—that was the way of the world with grim-jawed, tender-hearted Owen Saxham. And she, who had done like the rest, knew him now, and valued him for what he was, and—loved him!

For this was love that had come upon her like a strong man armed, not as he had shown himself to her before—laughing and merry, playful and sweet.... This was no ephemeral, girlish passion, evoked by the beauty of gay, wanton, grey-green jewel-eyes and a bold, smiling mouth. This was a love that drew you with irresistible strength, and knitted you to the soul, and the heart, and the flesh of another, until his breath became your breath, and his life your life. It called you with a voice that plucked at the secret chords of your being, and was stern and compelling rather than sweet to implore. It drew you to the beloved, not with ribbons of silk, but with ropes of tempered steel. It was potent and resistless as death, and infinitely deeper than the grave. It reached out aspiring hands beyond the grave, into Eternity. And, newly born as it rose in the heart of this woman, it was yet as old as Eden, where Heavenly Love created the earthly love, that is more than half-divine.

Why, why had he sent her away, bidding her be happy and forget him?... The memory of his hollow eyes and haggard face pierced her to the quick. He

was ill—he was in trouble; he had sent her away that he might bear the burden solely.... Or ... an iron hand closed upon her heart, and wrung it until points of moisture started upon her fair temples under the fine tendrils of her hair ... could the reason be—another woman?

Another woman?... She set her little teeth and drove the unworthy thought away. But it came again and again—a persistent mental gadfly. Was Owen not worthy of love? Suppose another sweeter, gentler creature had found a throne in the heart that his wife had prized so lightly, would it be so very strange, after all? Perhaps that was why he had asked her to forgive him for having married her a little while ago!

She dropped her head upon her folded arms, and sobbed at the thought. Then she dried her tears and rang for her maid, and presently came down to breakfast with Lady Hannah, smiling and composed, cheerful and attentive as a hostess ought to be. But her reddened eyelids told tales.

"Misses her Doctor, no doubt," thought Lady Hannah, as she commended the country eggs and butter, and was enthusiastic over the thyme-scented Welsh mountain-honey, and apologetic over the absence of her Bingo from the board.

She would carry her nuisance his breakfast with her own hands, she vowed, as he had left his man behind, on hearing from the Doctor that the house was a small one.

"But why?" asked Lynette. "There is Marie, my maid, and the red-cheeked parlourmaid, whose name I don't yet know, and Mrs. Pugh, the housekeeper ..."

"Who was Dr. Saxham's nurse when he was a little boy, and adores him. And Mrs. Pugh's husband, who is gardener, and handy-man, and coachman when required." Lady Hannah's laugh jangled out over the capacious tray, containing the comprehensive assortment of viands representing what the invalid was wont to term his "brekker." "But I'm not to be deprived of my privilege, for all that. Do you suppose you young married creatures are the only wives who enjoy cosseting their husbands? There! it's out, and I ought to be ashamed of myself, I suppose, but I'm not. Is that collared brawn on the sideboard? Bingo has a devouring passion for collared brawn." She added a goodly slice to the contents of the tray. "I warn you, if you regard the billing and cooing of a middle-aged couple as indecent," she went on, "to look the other way a great deal while we're here. For I was for the first time seriously smitten with my husband when he rode out to meet me, returning from ignoble captivity in the tents of Brounckers, eighteen months ago. When I nursed him through enteric in the Hospital at Frostenberg—I won't disguise it—I fell in love! With a bag of bones, for he was nothing else: but genuine passion is indifferent to the personal appearance of the beloved object, though I hadn't suspected it before. The wound completed my conquest, and since then I'm madly jealous if another woman looks at him!... I see red—green would be a better colour—because he prefers to have his valet brush his hair. I don't know that I didn't reduce the holding capacity of this house by a storey—there's a pun for you!—so as to engineer my hated rival being left at home in Wilton Place. Is that lovely murrey-coloured stuff in the cut-glass jar quince marmalade? No! I won't pamper Bingo, if he is the idol of my soul. And please don't wait for me.

He likes me to take off the tops of his eggs for him, and he usually eats three...."

Lady Hannah tripped off with her load, and deposited it before the idol, who was sitting up in a Japanese bed-jacket of wadded pink satin, left-handedly reading the Herion newspaper that comes out once a week, and is published at St. Tirlan's, twenty miles away.

"I've made a discovery," she announced. "No, don't look frightened. It's only that poor Biddy's *belle trouvaille* has got a heart. She's not the tinted Canova-nymph, the piece of correct inanity, I honestly believed her.... She idolised Biddy—small credit, for who could help it? She submitted to be adored by that poor foolish boy who's dead.... Now she's her black-avised Doctor's humble worshipper and slave."

"Can't understand a woman worshippin' a chap with a chin like the bows of an armoured Destroyer, and eyebrows like another man's moustaches," Bingo objected.

"Chin or no chin, eyebrows or not a hair, what does that count to a woman in love?" She placed the laden tray before him, and with a maternal air proceeded to tuck a napkin under his chin. He grumbled:

"There's no knowin' what will take the female fancy. But even if you haven't harked away on a wrong scent, slave's a dash too strong. Struck me they parted uncommon chilly and off-hand at Euston yesterday mornin', considerin' they've not been married much above a year! Do take this thing from round my neck! Makes me feel like Little Willie!"

Lady Hannah unpinned the napkin that framed the

bulldog jowl, and said, patting the sandy-pink bullet-head:

"That's what it is to be Eyes and No Eyes in amatory affairs. No Eyes sees two people part, 'uncommon off-hand and chilly.'" She mimicked Bingo's tone. "Eyes sees that and something more! A man's coat-button dropped on the floor of a railway carriage, for instance, and a young woman who slyly picks it up—silly little *gage d'amour*—and kisses it when a considerate observer pretends not to be looking, and hides it away! Is that evidence, Major Mole?"

"By the Living Tinker!" he thundered, "I wouldn't have believed it of her!"

"Of course you wouldn't!" She rummaged in an open suit-case. "What necktie do you want to wear to-day?"

He mumbled ruefully, eyeing her over the coffee-cup:

"Any of 'em. It don't matter which. They're all alike when you've tied 'em!"

She beamed at what seemed to her a gallant speech.

"*Sans compliment?* You really mean it? And you won't miss Grindlay so frightfully, after all?"

He shook his head ambiguously.

"I shan't begin really to suffer for Grindlay—not till it comes to tubbin' with one fin."

"Mercy upon us!" She gasped in consternation. He said, controlling his features from wreathing into triumphant smiles:

"You were so cast-iron certain you could fill his

place, you know!"

Her bright black eyes were hidden under abashed and drooping eyelids. Blushes played hide-and-seek in the small cheeks that were usually pale.

"In—in everything essential," she stammered, avoiding his intolerable gaze.

"Then that's what it is to be Eyes and No Eyes in ordinary, everyday affairs!" The man pursued his advantage pitilessly. "Didn't you regard it as essential that I should wash?"

She winked tears away, though her laugh answered him.

"Most certainly I did, and do. One of the reasons that decided me on marrying you was that you were invariably *propre comme un sou neuf*."

"I thought, on mature reflection," said Bingo, lying down under the lightened tray with a replete and satisfied air, "that you would prefer a clean husband to a dirty one. Therefore I engaged a bedroom for Grindlay at the Herion Arms. That's his knock. Come in!"

The valet presented himself upon the threshold, backing respectfully at sight of her ladyship, who gave him a gracious good-morning, dissembling the intense relief experienced at sight of his smug, clean-shaven countenance.

"Good-morning, Grindlay. I hope the Hotel people made you comfortable. And now you have arrived to take responsibility off my hands," she announced, "I'll go and get some breakfast."

"Haven't you ... You're joking!" The tray shot from

the bed into Grindlay's saving clutch as Bingo suddenly assumed the perpendicular. "You don't mean to say that you've been starving all the time I've been gorging myself like—like a boa-constrictor?" he demanded furiously. "Why on earth are women such blessed——"

"—Idiots?" she supplied, turning on the threshold to launch her Parthian shaft. "Because if they were intellectual, logical beings they would know better than to lavish devotion upon stupid, selfish, unappreciative, heartless, dull dolts of men!"

The door slammed behind an injured woman. Grindlay's face was a study in immobility. Bingo, after a little more meditation, ponderingly rose and submitted himself to the hands of the attendant. When the Major's toilet had reached the stage of hair-parting, he roused himself from his reflections with a sigh.

"Hold on. Put down that comb and go and ask her ladyship to be good enough to step up here. Tell her that your style of hairdressin' don't suit me. I want a little more imagination thrown into the thing! Hurry up, will you!"

"O Lord! What a liar I am!" he murmured fervently, addressing his reflection in the glass. His wife's face appeared over his shoulder, bright, alert, and pleased. She said, as she adroitly assumed the office vacated by the discarded Grindlay, who discreetly delayed his re-entrance on the scene:

"So you can't get on, it appears, without your blessed idiot?"

"Blessed angel, you mean!" said mendacious Bingo,

blinking under a Little Lord Fauntleroy fringe. "You banged the door before I'd got out the word!"

"If I could believe that!" she sighed, and the ivory-backed hair-brushes played rather a tremulous fantasia upon her idol's head, "perhaps I might be induced to confide to you a piece of genuine Secret Intelligence."

"Concernin'——?"

"Concerning your wife, Hannah Wrynche."

"Well, what of her?"

She took him by the chin and began to part his hair. But her eyes were misty, and her hand travelled unsteadily.

"This of her. She owned to you, months and months back, that in your place she wouldn't have been one-millionth part as patient with a restless, ambitious woman cursed with an especial capacity for getting herself and other people into hot water." She made a little affected grimace that masked a genuine smart. "Not hot water only—boiling lava sometimes—fizzling vitriol——"

He said, looking kindly up at the small mobile face and quivering chin:

"Restlessness and ambition are in the blood, y' know, like gout and the rest of it. You can't eradicate 'em, however much you try. It's like shavin' a Danish carriage-dog to change his colour. You can't for nuts; his spots are in his skin! See?"

"*Merci du compliment!*" Her jangling laugh rang out as if a stick had been smartly rattled down the keys of a piano. But her eyes were wet. His own eyes reverted

to his reflection in the toilet-glass. Now his sudden bellow made her drop the comb.

"My Aunt Maria! See what you've been and done! Made a Loop Railway down the middle of my head, unless my liver's making me see things curly. Don't swot at it any more; let that ass Grindlay earn his pay for once.... By the Living Tinker! you're cryin'. Don't go and say I've been a brute!" he pleaded.

"Darling!—dearest!—you haven't—you've never!... The boot's on the other leg, though wild horses wouldn't get you to own as much!" His strong left arm was round her slight waist, her wet cheek pressed against her Major's bulldog jowl. Bingo cleared his throat in his ponderous, scraping way, admitting:

"Well, perhaps I may have dropped a briny or so—of nights in bed at Nixey's, or on duty at Staff Bombproof South, between ring-ups on the telephone when the off-duty men were snorin', and one had nothin' on the blessed earth to do but wonder whether one had a wife or not?"

"There were people ready to tell you—years before we saw Gueldersdorp—that the one you'd got was as good as none...."

"Lucky for 'em they refrained from expressin' their opinions!" She felt his great muscles swell as the big hand tightened on her waist. "Though, mind you, there have been times when for your own sake, by Jingo! I'd have given all I was worth to have you a bit more like other women——"

"Who weren't dying to dabble in Diplomacy and win distinction as War Correspondents. Who funk raw-

head and bloody bones"—she shook with a nervous giggle—"and all that sort of thing.... Would it please you to know that the plumes of my panache of ambition have been cut to the last quill—that henceforth my sole aim is to rival the domestic Partlet, clucking of barnyard matters in the discreet retirement of the coop?"

"You've said as much before!" he objected.

"But now I mean it! Put me to the test. Let the house in Wilton Place—we'll live at Wrynche Rodelands, if you think you won't be bored?"

He bellowed joyously!

"Me bored! With ten thousand acres arable and wood and moorland to farm and preserve and shoot over, two first-class packs meetin' within a fifty-mile radius of my doorstep, the Committee of the local Polo Association shriekin' for a President, and the whole County beggin' me with tears in its eyes to take the hint a Certain Person dropped when he gave me my C.B., and accept the Crown Commission as Lord-Lieutenant! 'Bored'—I like that!"

"If you would like it, be it!" she flashed. "Trust me to back you up. I can and I will! I'll help you entertain the military authorities and their women, keep the Rolls, sit on the Bench when you weigh in as Chief Magistrate, and prompt you when you get into a hat. I'll be all things to one man—and you shall be the man! Only"—she laughed hysterically, her face hidden against his big shoulder—"I don't quite know how far these things are compatible with my new rôle!"

"Of domestic Henny-Penny cluckin' in the Home

Coop." His big hand patted her almost paternally. "Leave cluckin' to hens with families. Do you suppose I'm such a pachydermatous ass that I can't understand that home is a make-believe to a real woman, when—when there isn't even one chicken to tuck under her wing! Worse luck for me and you!"

She laughed wildly, lifting her wet, flushed face up to him. Her black eyes were shining through the tears that rose and brimmed over and fell.

"If I told you that the luck had changed, would that make you happy?"

He cried out with a great oath:

"Yes, by G——!" and caught her to his leaping heart.

LXVIII

In the weeks that followed, Lynette, in the course of many interviews held with Janellan Pugh on the subject of lunch and dinner, learned much anent the difficulty of obtaining fresh fish in a sea-coast village, more as regards the Satanic duplicity with which even a Calvinistic Methodist butcher will substitute New Zealand lamb for the native animal, and still more about Saxham.

Janellan, who had been a rosy maid in the service of the Doctor's grandfather, the Parson, had thought the world's worth of Master Owen, from the first time she set eyes on him in a white frock, with a sausage-roll curl and diamond-patterned socks. She had a venerable and spotty photograph of him as a square-headed, blinking little boy in a velvet suit and lace collar, and another photograph, coloured by hand, taken at the age of fourteen, and paid for out of his own pocket-money, to send to Janellan, who had nursed him through a holiday scarlet-fever. And regularly had her blessed boy remembered her and Tafydd, said Janellan, until the Cruel Time came, and he was lost sight of in Foreign Parts. Then Mrs. Saxham died, and the Captain—mentioned by Janellan with the ringing sniff that speaks volumes of disparagement—had turned her and her old man out of the Plas "without as much as that!"—here Janellan snapped her strong thumb-nail against her remaining front tooth—in recognition of their forty years of faithful service.

But Master Owen, coming to his own again, "and 'deed an' 'deed, but the Plas ought to have been his from the beginning!" had sought out the old couple, living in decent poverty at St. Tirlan's, and reinstated them in their old home. And well might Tafydd, who was a better judge of the points of a pig than any man in Herion—or in all Wales for the matter of that—well might Tafydd declare that the Lord never made a better man than Dr. Owen Saxham! What grand things they had said of him in the papers! No doubt the young mistress would have plenty more to tell that had not got into print?

"I can tell you many things of the Doctor," said Lynette, smiling in the black-eyed, streaky-apple face "that you and Tafydd will be proud and glad to hear."

She shunned the giving or receiving of caresses as a rule but this morning she stooped and kissed the red-veined, wrinkled cheek within Janellan's white-quilled cap-border. Then, her household duties done, she pinned a rough, shady straw-hat upon the red-brown hair, and drew loose chamois-leather gloves over the slim white exquisite hands that were, perhaps her greatest beauty, chose a walking-stick from the hall-rack, ran down the steep cliff pathway, crossed the spidery, red-rusted iron foot-bridge that spanned the railway-line, descended upon the farther side of the wood of chestnut and larch that made green shadows at the base of the cliff, and was upon the sand-dunes, walking with the free, undulating gait she had acquired from the Mother, towards the restless line of white breakers that rose and fell a mile away.

She was happy. A glorious secret kept her bosom-company; a new hope gave her strength. She drank

in long draughts of the strong, salt, fragrant air, and as it filled her lungs, knew her soul brimmed with fresh delight in the beauty of the world. And a renewed and quickened sense of the joy of life made music of the beating of her pulses and the throbbing of her heart.

She was a child of the wild veld, but none the less a daughter of this sea-girt Britain: the blue, restless waves beyond that line of white frothing breakers washed the shores of the Mother's beloved green island, Emerald Airinn, set in silver foam. A few miles, St. George's Channel spanned—then straight as the crow flies over Wicklow, Queen's County, King's County, taking Galway at the acute angle of the wild mallard's flight; and there would be the chained lakes and winding silver rivers, the grey-green mountains and the beetling cliffs, the dreamy valleys and wild glens of Connemara, with the ancient towers of Castleclare rising from its mossed lawns studded with immemorial oaks. And Loch Kilbawne among the wild highlands, and Lochs Innsa and Barre, and Ballybarron Harbour, with its Titanic breakwater, and three beacons, and the dun-brown islands bidden in their veil of surf-edged spindrift, shaken by the voices of hidden waters roaring in their secret caves.

A faint smile played about her sensitive lips. Her golden eyes dreamed as she walked on swiftly, a slender figure dressed in a plain skirt of rough grey-blue, and a loose-sleeved blouse of thick white silk, her slight waist belted with a silver-mounted lizard-skin girdle, a pleasant tinkle of silver châtelaine appendages accompanying her steps.

And those steps were to her no longer

uncompanioned. It was as though the Mother were living, so enfolding and close was the sense of her presence to-day. God was in His Heaven, and the world, His footstool, bore the visible impress of His Feet. And it seemed to Lynette, who had learned to see the faces of Christ and of His Mother Mary through the lineaments of the earthly face that had first looked love upon herself in her terrible abandonment, that those Divine and glorious countenances looked down on her and smiled. And her chilled faith spread quivering wings, basking in their ineffable mild radiance as the little blue and tortoiseshell butterflies basked in the glorious sunshine that had followed the morning's storm.

The tangible presence seemed to move beside her, through the white powdery sand. Over the knotted grasses, between the tufts of poppies and the prickly little yellow roses that fringed the hollows, the garments of another seemed to sweep beside her own. The folds of a thin veil upborne on the elastic breeze fluttered beside her cheek, blew against her lips, bringing the rare delicate fragrance—the familiar perfume that clung to everything the Mother habitually wore and used and touched. She did not look round, or stretch out her hand. She walked along, drinking in blissfulness and companionship at every pore of her thirsty soul, joyfully realising that this would last; that by-and-by the great void of loneliness would not close in on her again.

Only the night before, upon the brink of the supreme discovery that the dead in Christ are not only living in Him, but for us also who are His, she had hesitated and doubted. Before the sunrise of this glorious day she had learned to doubt no more.

* * * * *

She had been restless and unhappy. Saxham had not written for a week. She bitterly missed the short, cold, kind letters in the clear, small, firm handwriting, that had reached her at intervals of three days, to be answered by her constrained and timid notes, hoping that he was well and not overworking, describing the place and her pleasure in it, without mention of her loneliness; giving details of Major Wrynche's progress towards recovery, and left-handed attempts at golf, winding up with messages from Lady Hannah and dutiful remembrances from Tafydd and Janellan, and signed, his affectionate wife, Lynette Saxham.

Trite and laboured and schoolgirlish enough those epistles seemed to their writer. To Saxham they were drops of rain upon the parching soil of his heart, the one good that life had for him in this final lap of the race. And yet he had ceased to write that they might come no more.

If he had known how his own letters to her were welcomed, how tenderly they were read and re-read, how sweetly kept and cherished.... But he did not know! He could only look ahead, and strain on to the nearing goal with the great, dim, mysterious curtain hanging beyond it, hearing the thudding of his wearied heart, and the whistling of those sharp breaths in his strained lungs, and the measured sound of his own footfalls bearing him on to the end, while night closed in on her, fevered and wakeful in her bed, thinking of him, praying for him, longing for the sight and sound of him. Sleep, when it came now, brought her dreams less crystal than of old. Hued with the fiery rose of opals some, because in

these he loved her; and that shadowy woman, in whose existence she only half-believed, had no part in him at all. But on the night preceding the revelation she had not dreamed.

She awakened in the grey of dawn, when the thrushes were calling, and lay straight and still, listening to the glad bird-voices from the garden, her soft, fringed eyelids closed, her white breasts gently heaving, her small feet crossed, her slender, bare arms pillowing the little Greek head; a heavy plait of the silken wealth that crowned it drawn down on either side of the sweet, pale face and the pure throat, intensifying their virginal beauty. The dull smart of loneliness, the famished ache of loss, were gone altogether. She felt strangely peaceful and calm and glad. Then she knew she was not at Herion; she was not even in London.... She was back at the Convent, in the little whitewashed room with the stained deal furniture—the room with the pleasant outlook on the gardens that had been hers from the first. Surely it was past the rising hour? Ah, yes! but she had had a touch of fever. That was why she was lying here so quietly, with the Mother sitting by the bed.

There could be no doubt.... The light firm, pressure that she knew of old was upon her bosom, just above the beating of her heart.... That was always the Mother's way of waking you. She sat beside you, and looked at you, and touched you, and presently your eyes opened, that was all!... Thinking this, a streak of gold glimmered between Lynette's thick dusky lashes; her lips wore a smile of infinite content. She stole a glance, and there it was, the large, beautiful, lightly clenched hand. The loose sleeve of thin black serge flowed away from the strong, finely moulded wrist;

the white starched *guimpe* showed snowy between the drooping folds of the nun's veil.... These familiar things Lynette drank in with a sense of unspeakable content and pleasure. Then—her eyes opened widely, and she knew.

She was looking into eyes that had seen the Beatific Vision—great grey eyes that were unfathomable lakes of heavenly tenderness and love divine. And the face that framed them was a radiant pale splendour, indescribable in its glorious beauty, unfathomable in its fulfilled peace. Her own eyes drank peace from them, deeply, insatiably, while the Herion thrushes sang their dewy matins, and the scent of mignonette and sweet-peas and early roses mingled with the smell of the sea, stole in at the open casement where the white blind swelled out like a breeze-filled sail.

How long Lynette lay there storing up content and rapture she did not know, or want to know. But at last the wonder of those eyes came nearer—nearer! She felt the dear pressure of the familiar lips upon her own. A fragrance enveloped her, an exquisite joy overbrimmed her, as a voice—the beloved, unforgotten voice of matchless music—spoke. It said:

"*Love your husband as I loved Richard! Be to a child of his what I have been to you!*"

* * * * *

Eyes and face and voice, white hand and flowing veil, were all gone then. Lynette sat up, sobbing for joy, and blindly holding out her arms, and the rising sun looked over the mountains eastward, and drew one hushing, golden finger over the lips of the cold,

grey, whispering sea.

LXIX

A thin, subterraneous screech, accompanied by a whiff of cinder-flavoured steam, heralded the Down Express as it plunged out of the cliff-tunnel, flashed across an intervening space, and was lost among the chestnuts and larches. A metallic rattle and scroop told that the official in the box on the other side of the Castle bluff had opened the points. And hearing the clanking bustle of the train's arrival in the station, Lynette reminded herself with a sigh of relief that her maid was packing, that she would presently make her excuses to Major Wrynche and Lady Hannah, and that the midnight up-mail should take her home to Owen.

Her course lay clear now, pointed out by the beloved, lost hand. But for this Heaven-sent light that had been cast upon her way, Lynette knew that she might have wandered on in doubt and darkness to the very end.

She was not of the race of hero-women, who deserve the most of men, and are doomed to receive in grudging measure. A pliant, dependent, essentially feminine creature, she was made to lean and look up, to be swayed and influenced by the stronger nature, to be guided and ruled, and led, and to love the guide.

Her nature had flowered: sun and breeze and dew

had worked their miracle of form and fragrance and colour, the ripened carpels waited, conscious of the crown of tall golden-powdered anthers bending overhead. Instead of the homely hive-bee a messenger had come from Heaven, the air vibrated yet with the beating of celestial wings.

She was going to Saxham to ask him to forgive her, to throw down the pitiless barrier she had reared between them in her ignorance of herself and of him. She would humble herself to entreat for that rejected crown of wifehood. Even though that conjectural other woman had won Owen from her, she said to herself that she would win him back again.

She reached the wet, shining strip of creamy sand where the frothing line of foam-horses reared and wallowed. The prints of her little brown shoes were brimmed with sea-water, she lifted her skirt daintily, and went forward still. Numberless delicate little winged shells were scattered over the moist surface, tenantless homes of tiny bivalves, wonderfully tinted. Rose-pink, brilliant yellow, tawny-white, delicate lilac, it was as though a lapful of blossoms rifled from some mermaid's deep-sea garden, had been scattered by the spoiler at old Ocean's marge. Lynette cried out with pleasure at their beauty, stooped and gathered a palmful, then dropped them. She stood a moment longer drinking in the keen, stinging freshness, then turned to retrace her steps, still with that unseen companion at her side.

The vast, undulating green and white expanse, save for a distant golf-player with the inevitable ragged following, seemed bare of human figures. The veering breeze shepherded flocks of white clouds across the harebell-tinted meadows of the sky. It

sang a thin, sweet song in Lynette's little rose-tipped ears. And innumerable larks carolled, building spiral towers of melody on fields of buoyant air. And suddenly a human note mingled with their music and with the thick drone of the little, black-and-grey humble-bees that feasted on the corn-bottles. And Lynette's visionary companion was upon the instant gone.

It was a baby's cooing chuckle that arrested the little brown shoes upon the verge of a deep sand hollow. Lynette looked down. A pearly-pale cup fringed with blazing poppies held the lost treasure of some weeping mother—a flaxen-headed coquette of some eighteen months old, arrayed in expensive, diaphanous, now sadly crumpled whiteness, the divine human peach served up in whipped cream of muslin and frothy Valenciennes. Absorbed in delightful sand-dabbling, Miss Baby crowed and gurgled; then, as a little cry of womanly delight in her beauty and womanly pity for her isolation broke from Lynette, she looked up and laughed roguishly in the stranger's face, narrowing her eyes.

Naughty, mischievous eyes of jewel-bright, grey-green, long-shaped and thick-lashed; bold red, laughing mouth—where had Lynette seen them before? With a strange sense of renewing an experience she ran down into the hollow, and dropping on her knees beside the pretty thing, caught it up and kissed it soundly.

"Where do you come from, sweet?" she asked, between the kisses. "Where are mother and nurse?"

"Ga!" said the baby. Then, with a sudden puckering of pearly-golden brows, and a little querulous cry of impatience, the Hon. Alyse Rosabel Tobart squirmed

out of the arms that held her, exhibiting in the process the most cherubic of pink legs, and the loveliest silk socks and kid shoes, and wriggled back into her sandy nest. Once re-established there, she answered no more questions, but with truly aristocratic composure resumed her interrupted task of stuffing a costly bonnet of embroidered cambric and quilled lace with sand. When the bonnet would hold no more, she had arranged to fill her shoe: she was perfectly clear upon the point of having no other engagement so absorbing.

Smiling, Lynette abandoned the attempt to question. Perhaps the missing guardians of this lost jewel were quite near after all, sitting with books and work and other babies in the shelter of some neighbouring hollow, from whence this daring adventurer had escaped unseen.... She ran up the steep side where the frieze of poppies nodded against the sky, and the white sand streamed back from under the little brown shoes that had trodden upon Saxham's heart so heavily.

No one was near. Only in the distance, toiling over the dry waves of the sand-dunes towards the steep ascent by which the hilly main street of Herion may be gained, went a white perambulator, canopied with white, and propelled by a nurse in starched white skirts and flying white bonnet-strings—a nurse who kept her head well down, and was evidently reading a novel as she went. Some yards in advance a red umbrella bobbed against the breeze like a giant poppy on a very short stem. The lady who carried the flaming object was young; that much was plain, for the fluttering heliotrope chiffons of her gown were held at a high, perhaps at an unnecessarily lofty, altitude above the powdery sand, and her

plumply-filled and gleaming stockings of scarlet, fantastically barred with black, and her dainty little high-heeled shoes were very much in evidence as they topped a rising crest. Then they disappeared over the farther edge, the red umbrella followed, and the nurse, in charging up the steep after her mistress, discovered, perhaps by a glance of investigation underneath the canopy, prompted by a too tardy realisation of the suspicious lightness of the perambulator, that the shell was void of the pearl.

Lynette heard the wretched woman's piercing shriek, glimpsed the red umbrella as it reappeared over the sand-crest, comprehended the horrible consternation of mistress and maid. She must signal to them—cry out.... Involuntarily she gave the call of the Kaffir herd: the shrill, prolonged ululation that carries from spitzkop to spitzkop across the miles of karroo or high-grass veld between. And she unpinned her hat and waved it, standing amongst the thickly-growing poppies and chamomile on the high crest of the sand-wave, while her shadow—a squat, blue dwarf with arms out of all proportion—flourished and gesticulated at her feet.

LXX

It is Fate who comes hurrying to Lynette under the becoming shadow of a red umbrella, on the starched and rustling skirts of the agitated nurse, whose mouth is seen to be shaping sentences long before she can be heard panting:

"Did you call, 'm? Her ladyship thought you did, and might have found ... Oh, ma'am! have you seen a baby? We've lost ours!"

Lynette nods and laughs reassuringly, pointing down into the hollow. The nurse, with a squawk of relief, leaves her perambulator bogged in the sand, flutters up the powdery rise like some large species of seagull, squawks again, and swoops to retrieve her lost charge. Miss Baby, perfectly contented until the scarlet face and whipping ribbons of her attendant appear over the edge of her Paradise, throws herself backwards, strikes out with kicking, dimpled legs, and sets up an indignant roar.

"There now—there! 'A was a pessus!" vociferates the owner of the streaming ribbons and the scarlet countenance. "And did she tumble out of her pram, the duck, and wicked Polly never see her? And thank Good Gracious, not a bruise on her blessed little body-woddy, nor nothing but the very tiddiest scratch!"

"Which is not your fault, Watkins, I am compelled to say it," pronounces the Red Umbrella, arriving breathless and decidedly indignant, on the scene. "The idea of a person of your class being so wrapped up in a rotten penny novel that you can't even keep your eye upon the darling entrusted to your charge is too perfectly shameful for words. Baby, don't cry," she continues, as the repentant Polly appears, bearing the retrieved treasure. "Come to mummy and kiss her, and tell her all about it, do!"

"I sa-t!" bellows Baby, now keenly alive to the pathos of the situation, and digging a sandy pink fist into either eye ...

"Don't, then, you obstinate little pig!" returns Red Umbrella, with maternal asperity. She looks up to the fair vision that stands on high amongst the poppies, and nods and smiles. "However I am to thank you!... Such a turn when we missed her!..." She utters these incoherences with a great deal of eye-play, pressing a small, plump, jewelled hand, with short, broad fingers, and squat, though elaborately rouged and polished, nails, upon the bountiful curve of a Parisian corsage. "My heart did a double flip-flap ... hasn't done thumping yet. Am I pale still, Watkins?" She appeals to the recreant Watkins, who is busily repacking Baby in her luxurious perambulator. "I felt to go as white as chalk!"

"Perfect gassly, my lady!" agrees Watkins, and it occurs to Lynette that the process of blanching must, taking into consideration the artificial blushes that bloom so thickly upon the pretty, piquante face under the red umbrella, have been attended with some difficulty.

Everything is round in the coquettish face, shaded by a hat that is an expensive triumph of Parisian millinery, trimmed with a whole branch of wistaria in bloom. The big brown eyes are round, so is the cherry-stained mouth, so is the pert, button nose. The thick, dark eyebrows are like inky half-moons, in the middle of the little round chin a circular dimple is cunningly set. Round, pinky-olive shoulders and rounded arms gleam temptingly through the bodice of heliotrope chiffon. Other roundnesses, artfully exaggerated by the Parisian *modiste*, are liberally suggested, as Red Umbrella gathers her frothy draperies about her hips, lifting her multitudinous frills to reveal black and scarlet openwork silk stockings, bedecking her plump legs and tiny feet,

whose high-heeled silver-buckled shoes are sinking in the hot, white, powdery sand.

"Please don't go on! I haven't half thanked you," she pleads, still pressing the podgy little bejewelled paw upon the heaving corsage. Then she sinks, with an air of graceful languor, down upon a long, prostrate monolith of granite, that is thickly crusted with velvety orange lichen and grey-green moss, starred with infinitesimal yellow flowers. And Lynette, habitually courteous and rather amused, and not at all unwilling to know a little more of the affected, slangy, overdressed little woman, sits down upon the other end of the sprawling stone column, and says, smiling at Baby, who is clutching at a hovering butterfly with her eager, dimpled hands:

"Of course, it was a terrible shock to you when you missed her. She is such a darling! Aren't you, Baby?"

Baby, her long, grey-green eyes melting and gleaming dangerously, her golden head tilted coquettishly, and a gay, provoking laugh on the bold red mouth, makes another snatch, captures the hovering blue butterfly, opens the rosy hand, and with a wry face of disgust, drops the crushed morsel over the edge of the perambulator. The superb, unconscious cruelty of the act gives Lynette a little pang even as she goes on:

"She was not in the least shy. I think we should soon be very great friends. May her nurse bring her to see me sometimes? Most babies love flowers, and there is a garden full of them where I am staying. Do you live here?"

"Live here? Gracious, no!" Red Umbrella opens the round, brown eyes that Baby's are so unlike in shape

and expression, and shrugs her pretty shoulders as high as the big ruby buttons that blaze in her pretty ears. "Me and Baby are only visiting—stopping with her nurse and my two maids for a change at the Herion Arms—me having been recommended sea-air by the doctors for tonsils in the throat. The house is advertised as an up-to-date hotel in the ABC Railway Guide, but diggings more wretched I never struck, and you do fetch up in some queer places on tour in the Provinces, let alone the States," says Red Umbrella, tossing the wistaria-wreathed hat. "Which may be a surprise to people who think it must be nothing but jam for those ladies and gentlemen that have made their mark in the Profession."

"Yes?"

Lynette's golden eyes smile back into the laughing brown ones with pleasant friendliness, combined with an irritating lack of comprehension. And Red Umbrella, who derives a considerable income from percentages upon the sale of her photographs, and is conscious that her celebrated features are figuring upon several of the postcards that hang up for sale in the window of the only stationer in Herion, is a little nettled.

"I refer to the stage, of course." She fingers a long neck-chain of sapphires, and tinkles her innumerable bangles with their load of jingling charms. "But perhaps you're not a Londoner? Or you don't patronise the theatre?"

"Oh yes. We have a house in Harley Street. And I am very fond of the Opera," says Lynette, smiling still, "and of seeing plays too; and I often go to the theatre with Lord and Lady Castleclare, or Major Wrynche and Lady Hannah, when my husband is too much

engaged to take me. One of the last pieces we saw before we left town was 'The Chiffon Girl' at The Variety," she adds.

"Indeed! And how did you like 'The Chiffon Girl'?" asks the lady of the red umbrella, with a gracious and encouraging smile. Unconscious tribute rendered to one's beauty and one's genius is ever well worth the having. And the editor of the *Keyhole*, a certain weekly journal of caterings for the curious, will gladly publish any little anecdote which will serve the dual purpose of amusing his readers and keeping the name of Miss Lessie Lavigne before the public eye. "How did you enjoy the performance of the lady who played the part?"

Lynette ponders, and her fine brows knit. Vexed and indignant, Red Umbrella, scanning the thoughtful face, admits its youth, its high-breeding, its delicate, chiselled beauty, and the slender grace of the supple figure in the grey-blue serge skirt and white silk blouse; nor is she slow to appreciate the value of the diamond keeper on the slight, fine, ungloved hand that rests upon the sun-hot moss between them.

"I think I felt rather sorry for her," says the soft cultured voice with the exquisite, precise inflections. The golden eyes look dreamily out over the undulating sand-dunes beyond the crisp line of foam to the silken shimmer of the smoothing water. The little wind has fallen. It is very still. The nurse, sitting on a hillock of bents in dutiful nearness to the perambulator, has taken out her paper-covered volume, and is deep in a story of blood and woe. And Baby, a sleepy, pink rosebud, dozes among her white embroidered pillows, undisturbed by Red Umbrella's shrill exclamation:

"Sorry for her! Why on earth should you be?"

The shriek startles Lynette. She brings back her grave eyes from the distance, flushing faint coral pink to the red-brown waves at her fair temples.

"She—she had on so few clothes!" she says. And there is a profound silence, broken by Lessie's saying with icy dignity:

"If the Lord Chamberlain opined I'd got enough on, I expect that ought to do for you!"

"I—don't quite understand."

Lynette opens her golden eyes in sincere wonder at the marvellous change that has been wrought in the little lady who sits beside her.

"*I* am Miss Lessie Lavigne," says the little lady, with an angry toss of the pretty head, adorned with the wistaria-trimmed hat. "At least, that is the name I am known by in the profession."

"I beg your pardon," Lynette falters. "I did not recognise you. I am afraid you must think me rather rude!"

"Oh, pray don't mention it!" cries the owner of the red umbrella. "Rude?—not in the least!"

Mere rudeness would be preferable, infinitely, to the outrage the little lady has suffered. She, Lessie Lavigne, the original exponent of the rôle of "The Chiffon Girl," the idol of the pit and gallery, Queen regnant over the hearts beating behind the polished shirt-fronts in the stalls, has lived to hear herself pitied—not envied, but commiserated—for the scantiness of the costume in which it is alike her privilege and her joy to trill and caper seven times in

the week before her patrons and adorers. Small wonder that she feels her carefully-manicured nails elongating with the desire to scratch and rend.

Then she reveals the chief arrow in her quiver. Not for nothing is she the widow of an English nobleman. With all the hereditary dignities of the Foltlebarres she will arm herself, and reduce this presuming stranger to the level of the dust. At the thought of the humiliation it is in her power to inflict she smiles quite pleasantly, displaying a complete double row of beautifully stopped teeth. And she says, as she fumbles in a châtelaine bag of golden links, studded with turquoises, and with elaborately ostentatious dignity produces therefrom a card-case, as precious as regards material, and emblazoned with a monogram and coronet, enriched with diamonds and pearls:

"I think you mentioned that you lived in the neighbourhood? May I know who I have the a—pleasure of being indebted to for finding my daughter to-day?"

"I am Mrs. Owen Saxham. I live at that grey stone house up there on the cliff. 'Plas Bendigaid,' they call it," explains Lynette, a little nervously, as her reluctant eyes scan the face and figure of the woman who owns the legal right to bear Beauvayse's name. The encounter is distasteful to her. She is painfully conscious of an acute sensation of antagonism and dislike. "The house belongs to my husband, and this is my first visit to Herion," she adds hurriedly, "because we—my husband and I—have not been very long married. But I like the place. And the house is charming, and there is a hall that was once the chapel, when it was a Convent. It shall be a

chapel again; that is"—the wild-rose colour deepens on the lovely face—"if my husband agrees? To have it so restored would make the Plas seem more like a home, because I was brought up in a Convent, though not in England."

Her eyes stray back to the sun-kissed beauty of Nantmadoc Bay and the dotted line of white spots that indicate the town of St. Tudwalls at the base of the green promontory beyond the Roads. She forgets that this little overdressed person is Beauvayse's wife. She forgets in the moment that she herself is Saxham's. She is back in the beloved past with the Mother.

"It was in South Africa, my Convent ... more than a thousand miles from Cape Town, in British Baraland, on the Transvaal Border—in a little village-town, dumped down in the middle of the veld."

"What on earth is the veld?" asks the lady of the red umbrella, with acerbity. "I'm sick of seeing the word in the papers, and nobody seems to know what it means."

Lynette's soft voice answers:

"You can never know what it means until you have lived its life, and it has become part of yours. It spreads away farther than your eyes can follow it, for miles and miles. It is jade colour in spring, blue-green in early summer, desolate, scorching yellow-brown in winter, with dreadful black tracts of cinders, where it has been burned to let the young grass grow up. There is hardly a tree; there is scarcely a bird, except a vulture, a black speck high in the hot blue sky. There are flat-topped mountains and cone-shaped kopjes, reddish, or pale pink, or

mauve-coloured, as they are nearer or farther away. And that is all!"

"All?"

"All, except the sunshine, bathing everything, soaking you through and through."

"But there is not always sunshine? It must be sometimes night?" argues Lessie, a little peevishly.

"There are deep violet nights, full of great white stars," Lynette answers. "There are storms of dust and rain, lightning and thunder, such as are only read of here.... There are plots, conspiracies, raids, robberies, murders, slumps and losses, plagues and massacres. There are rebellions of white men, and native risings. There have been wars; there is war to-day, and there will be war again in the days that are yet to come!"

She has almost forgotten the little woman beside her, staring at her with big, brown, rather animal eyes. Now she turns to her with her rare and lovely smile:

"The war that is going on now began at the little village-town where I was a Convent schoolgirl. We were shut for months within the lines. But, of course, you have read the newspaper accounts of the Siege of Gueldersdorp? I am only telling you what you know!"

Lessie laughs, and the laugh has the hard, unpleasant, mirthless little tinkle of a toy dog's collar-bell, or bits of crushed ice rattled in a champagne-glass.

"What I have good reason to know!"

Her podgy, jewelled hands are clenching and unclenching in her heliotrope chiffon lap; there is a

well-defined scowl between the black arched eyebrows, and the murky light of battle gleams in the eyes that no longer languish between their bistred eyelids as she scans the pure pale face under the sweep of her heavily blackened lashes. She would almost give the ruby buttons out of her ears to see it wince and quiver, and crimson into angry blushes. And yet Lessie is rather amiable than otherwise in her attitude towards other women. True, she has never before met one who had the insolence to pity her to her face.

"So quite too interesting!" she says, with an exaggerated affectation of amiability, and in high, fashionable accents, "you having been at Gueldersdorp through the Siege and all. Were you ever—I suppose you must have been sometimes—shot at with a gun?"

The faintest quiver of a smile comes over the lovely face her grudging eyes are trying to find a flaw in.

"Often when I have been crossing the veld between the town and the Hospital, the Mauser bullets have hummed past like bees, or raised little spurts of dust close by my feet where they had hit the ground. And once a shell burst close to us, and a splinter knocked off my hat and tore a corner of her veil——"

"Weren't you in a petrified fright?" demands Lessie.

"I was with her!"

"Who was she?"

A swift change of sudden, quickening, poignant emotion passes over the still face. A sudden swelling of the white throat, a rising mist in the golden eyes, suggests to Lessie that she has been fortunate enough

to touch upon a painful subject, and that possibly this presumptuous young woman who has pitied a Viscountess may be going to cry! But Lynette drives back the tears.

"She was the Reverend Mother, the Mother-Superior of the Convent where I lived at Gueldersdorp."

"Where is she now?"

"She is with God."

"With——"

Lessie is oddly nonplussed by the calm, direct answer. People who talk in that strangely familiar way of—of subjects that properly belong to parsons are rare in her world. She hastens to put her next question.

"Was yours the only Convent in Gueldersdorp where young ladies were taught?"

"It is the only Convent there."

"Did you know—among the pupils—a young person by the name of Mildare?"

There is such concentrated essence of spite in Lessie's utterance of the name, that Lynette winces a little, and the faint, sweet colour rises in her cheeks.

"I—know her, certainly; as far as one can be said to know oneself. My unmarried name was Mildare."

"You—don't say so! Lord, how funny!"

The seagulls fishing in the shallows beyond the foam-line, rise up affrighted by the shrill peal of triumphant laughter with which Lessie makes her discovery.

"Ha, ha, ha! Talk of a situation!... On the boards I've never seen one to touch it!" She jumps from the boulder, with more bounce than dignity, dropping the red umbrella and the jewelled card-case, and, extending in one pudgy ringed hand a highly-glazed and coroneted card, "Permit me to introduce myself," she says through set teeth, smiling rancorously. "My professional name, as I have had the honour and pleasure of explaining to you, is Lessie Lavigne, but in private"—the dignity of the speaker's tone is marred by its extreme huffiness—"in private I am Lady Beauvayse."

As Lynette looks in the painted, angry, piquante face she is more than ever conscious of that feeling of antagonism. Then her eyes, turning from it, encounter the cherub rosily sleeping on embroidered pillows, and a rush of blood colours her to the hair. His child—his child by the dancer—this dimpled creature she has clasped and kissed! The icy, tinkling giggle of the mother breaks in upon the thought.

"Of all the queer situations I ever struck, I do call this the queerest! Me, meeting you like this, and both of us getting quite pally! All over Baby, too!... Lord! isn't it enough to make you die? Don't mind me being a bit hysterical!" Lady Beauvayse dabs her tearful eyes with a cobwebby square of laced cambric. "It'll be over in a sec. And then, Miss Mildare—I beg pardon—Mrs. Saxham—you and me will have it out!"

"I am afraid I must be going." Lynette rises, and stands beside Lessie, looking down in painful hesitation at the blinking, reddened eyelids and the working mouth. "I have guests waiting for me at the Plas. And would it not be wise of you to go home and lie down?"

The words, for some obscure reason or other, convey an intolerable sting. Lessie jumps in her buckled Louis Quinze shoes, wheels, and confronts her newly-discovered enemy with glaring eyes.

"Go home ... lie down!" she shrieks, so shrilly that the sleeping cherub awakens, and adds her frightened roars to the clamour that scares the gulls. "If I *had* lain down and gone to my long home eighteen months ago, when you were cooped up in Gueldersdorp with my husband, it would have suited you both down to the ground!" She turns, with a stamp of her imperious little foot, upon the scared nurse, who is vainly endeavouring to still Baby. "Take her away! Carry her out of hearing! Do what you're told, you silly fool!" she orders. "And you"—she wheels again upon Lynette, her wistarias nodding, her chains and bangles clanking—"why do you stand there, like a white deer in a park—like an image cut out of ivory? Don't you understand that I, the woman you've pitied—my God! pitied, for singing and dancing on the public stage 'with so few clothes on'"—she savagely mimics the manner and tone—"I am the lawful wife of the man you tried to trap—the Right Honourable John Basil Edward Tobart!" The painted lips sneer savagely. "Beautiful Beau, who never went back on a man, or told the truth to a woman!—that's his character, and it pretty well sizes him up!"

Lessie stops, gasping and out of breath, the plump, jewelled hand clutching at her heaving bosom. The theatrical instinct in the daughter of the footlights has led her to work up the scene; but her rage of wounded love and jealousy is genuine enough, though not as real as the innocence in the eyes that meet hers, less poignant than the shame and

indignation that drive the blood from those ivory cheeks.

"He married me on the strict QT at the Registrar's at Cookham," goes on Lessie, her painted mouth twisting, "a fortnight before he was ordered out on the Staff. We'd been friends for over a year. There was a child coming, since we're by way of being plain-spoken," says Lessie, picking up the prostrate red umbrella and the jewelled card-case, possibly to conceal a blush; "and he swore he'd never look at another woman, and write by every mail. And so he did at first, and I used to cry over the blooming piffle he put into his letters, and wish I'd been a straighter woman, for his sake. And then the Siege began, and the letters stopped coming, and I cried enough to spoil my voice, little thinking how my husband was playing the giddy bachelor thousands of miles away. And then came the news of the Relief, and despatches, saying that he"—her pretty face is distorted by the wry grimace of genuine anguish —"*he* was killed! And a month later I got a copy of a rotten Siege newspaper, sent me by I don't know who, and never shall, with a flowery paragraph in it, announcing his lordship's engagement to Miss Something Mildare. Oh! it was merry hell to know how he'd done me—me that worshipped the very ground he trod!... Me that had made a Judy of myself in crape and weepers—widow's weepers for the man that wished me dead!"

Her voice is thick with rage. Her face is convulsed. Her eyes are burning coals. She has never been so nearly a great actress, this meretricious little dancer and comedian, as in this moment when she forgets her art.

"Picture it, you!... Don't you fancy me in 'em? Don't you see me in my bedroom tearing 'em off?" She rends her flimsy cobweb of a handkerchief into tatters and spurns them from her. "So!... so!... that's what I did to 'em!" She snarls with a sudden access of tigerishness. "And if that white face of yours had been within reach of my ten fingers, I'd have ragged it into ribbons like the blooming fallals. Don't dare tell me you'd not have done the same! Perhaps, though, you wouldn't. You're a lady, born and bred," owns Lessie grudgingly, "and I was a jobbing tailor's kid, that worked to keep myself and other folks as a baby imp in Pantomime, while you were being coddled up and kept in cotton-wool!"

She ends with a husky laugh and a shrug of the shoulders. The swollen face with the wet eyes is averted, or Lessie might be roused to fresh resentment by the tenderness of pity that is dawning in Lynette's.

"You have suffered cruelly, Lady Beauvayse; but I was not knowingly or wilfully to blame. Please try to believe it!"

Lessie blows her small nose with a toot of incredulity, and says through an intervening wad of damp lace-edged cambric:

"Go on!"

"I met Lord Beauvayse out at Gueldersdorp." The voice that comes from Lynette's pale lips is singularly level and quiet. "He was very handsome and very brave; he was an officer of the Colonel's Staff. He asked me to marry him, and I—I believed him honourable and true, and I said, 'Yes.' ... That was one Sunday, when we were sitting by the river. On

Thursday he was killed, and later—nearly a year after my marriage to Dr. Saxham—I found out the truth."

Lessie shrugs her pretty shoulders, but the face and voice of the speaker have brought conviction. She realises that if she has been injured, her rival has suffered equal wrong.

"You were pretty quick in taking on another man, it strikes me. But that's not my business. You say you found out?" She shows her admirably preserved teeth in a little grin of sardonic contempt—"nearly a year after your marriage. Don't tell me your husband let you go on burning joss-sticks to Beau's angelic memory when he might have made you spit on it by telling you the truth!"

Lynette's lip curls, and she lifts her little head proudly.

"He never once hinted at the truth. Nor was it through him I learned it!"

"Ought to be kept under glass, then," comments Lessie, "as a model husband. Now, my poor——"

Lynette interrupts, with angry emphasis:

"I will not hear Dr. Saxham mentioned in the same breath with Lord Beauvayse!"

"He's dead—let him be!" Beau's widow snarls, her mouth twisting. Yet in the same breath, with another of the mental pirouettes characteristic of her class and type, she adds: "Do you suppose I don't know my own husband? Take him one way with another, you might have sifted the world for liars, and never found the equal of Beau."

She gathers up the red umbrella and the jewelled card-case with reviving briskness, and shakes out her crumpled chiffons in the bright hot sun.

"Me and Baby are leaving to-morrow. I don't suppose we're likely ever to come across you again. Good-bye! I forgive you for pitying me," she says frankly, holding out the plump, over-jewelled hand. "As for the other grudge.... What, are you going to kiss me?... Give Baby another before you go, dear ... and ... forgive *him* when you can!"

LXXI

Lynette sat still upon the boulder, thinking, long after the red umbrella had departed. While it was yet visible in the white-hot distance, hovering like some gaudy Brobdingnagian butterfly in advance of the white perambulator pushed by the white-clad nurse, the heads of two little shabbyish, youngish people of the unmistakable Cockney tourist type rose over the edge of a pale sand-crest, fringed with wild chamomile and blazing poppies. And the female, a small draggled young woman in a large hat, trimmed with fatigued and dusty peonies, called out excitedly:

"Oh, William, it's 'er—it's 'er!"

"By Cripps, so it is!" came from the male companion of the battered peonies. He advanced with a swagger that was the unconvincing mask of diffidence assumed by an undersized, lean young man, in the chauffeur's doubtful-weather panoply of black

waterproof jacket, breeches merging into knee-boots, the whole crowned with a portentous peaked cap, with absurd brass ventilators, and powdered with many thicknesses and shades of dust. His hair was dusty. The very eyelashes of the honest, ugly light eyes, set wide apart in the thin wedge-shaped, tanned face that the absurd cap shaded, were dusty as a miller's; dust lay thick in all the chinks and creases of his leading features, and a large black smudge of oily grime was upon his wide upper lip, impinging upon his nose. Nor was his companion much less dusty, though the checks of a travelling ulster of green and yellow plaid, adorned with huge steel buttons, would have advertised the Kentish Town Ladies' Drapery Establishment whence they emanated, through the medium of a Fleet Street fog.

"Might we speak to you, ma'am?" The dusty young man respectfully touched the dusty peak of the cap with brass ventilators, and, with a shock of surprise, Lynette recognised Saxham's chauffeur.

"Keyse!... It is Keyse!" She looked at him in surprise.

"Keyse, ma'am." He touched the cap again, and made a not ungraceful gesture, indicating the wearer of the weather-beaten peonies and the green-and-yellow ulster, who clung to his thin elbow with a red, hard-working hand. "Me an' my wife, that is. Bein' on a sort of outin', a kind of Beanfeast for Two, we took the notion, being stryngers to South Wyles, of droppin' in 'ere an' tippin' the 'Ow Do." He breathed hard, and rivulets of perspiration began to trickle down from under the preposterous cap, converting the dust that filled the haggard lines of his thin face into mud. "An' payin' our respects." His eye slewed appealingly at his companion, asking as plainly as an

eye can, "What price that?" And the glance that shot back from the dusty shadow of the exhausted peonies answered, "Not bad by 'arf—for you!"

Lynette smiled at the little Cockney couple. The surprise that had checked the beating of her heart had passed. It was pleasant to see these faces from Harley Street. She answered:

"I understand. My husband has given you a holiday. Is he well?" She flushed, realising that it was pain to have to ask others for the news of him that he had denied her. "I mean because he has not written.... I have been feeling rather anxious. Was he quite well when you left?"

"'Was he——'? Yes, 'm!" W. Keyse shot out the affirmative with such explosive suddenness that the hand upon his arm must have nipped hard.

"I am so glad!" Lynette turned to the young woman in the ulster, whose face betrayed no guilty knowledge of the pinch. She was small, and pale, and gritty, and her blue eyes had red rims to them from the fatigue of the journey, or some other cause. But they were honest and clear, and not unpretty eyes, looking out from a forest of dusty yellowish fringe, deplorably out of curl. Yet a fringe that had associations for Lynette, reaching a long way from Harley Street, and back to the old days at Gueldersdorp before the Siege.

"Surely I know you? I must have known you at Gueldersdorp." She added as Mrs. Keyse's eyes said "Yes": "You used to be a housemaid at the Convent. How strange that I should not have remembered it until now! And your husband.... I do not remember ever having seen him before he came to us at Harley

Street. But his name comes back to me in connection with a letter"—she knitted her brows, chasing the vague, fleeting memory—"a love-letter that was sent to Miss Du Taine inside a chocolate-box, just when school was breaking up. It was you who smuggled the box in!"

"To oblige, bein' begged to by Keyse as a fyvour. 'E didn't know 'is own mind—them d'ys!" explained Mrs. Keyse, sweeping her husband's scorching countenance with a glance of withering scorn.

"Nor did you," retorted W. Keyse, stung to defiance. "Walkin' out with a Dopper you was—if it comes to that." He spun round, mid-ankle deep in sand, to finish. "An' you'd 'ave bin joined by a Dutch dodger and settled down on a Vaal sheep-farm, if the order 'adn't come 'ummin' along the wire from 'Eadquarters that said, 'Jane 'Arris, you're to 'ave this bloke, and no other. Till Death do you part. Everlasting—Amen!'"

There was so strong a flavour of Church about the final sentence that Mrs. Keyse could not keep admiration out of her eyes.

Her own eyes dancing with mirthful amusement, Lynette looked from one to the other of the unexpected visitors, and, tactfully changing the subject of the conversation, hoped that they were enjoying their trip?—a query which so obviously failed to evoke an expression of pleased assent in either of the small, thin, wearied faces that she hastened to add:

"But perhaps this is the very beginning of your holiday? When did you leave London?"

"Yes'dy mornin' at 'arf-past six," said W. Keyse, carefully avoiding her eyes. A spasm contracted the tired face under the dusty peonies. Their wearer put her hand to the collar of the green-and-yellow ulster, and undid a button there.

"'Yesterday morning at half-past six'!" Lynette repeated in wonder.

"An' if the machine I 'ad on 'ire from a pal o' mine—chap what keeps a second-hand shop for 'em in the Portland Road—'adn't 'ad everythink 'appen to 'er wot *can* 'appen to a three-an'-a-'arf 'orse-power Baby Junot wot 'ad seen 'er best d'ys before automobilin' 'ad cut its front teeth," said W. Keyse, with bitterness, "we would 'ave bin 'ere before! As it is, we've left the car at a little 'Temperance Tavern' in S'rewsbury, kep' by a Methodist widder, 'oo thinks such new-fangled inventions sinful—an' only consented to take charge on account o' the Prophet Elijer a-going up to 'Eaven in a fiery chariot—an' come on 'ere by tryne."

Lynette looked at the man in silence. She even repeated after him, rather dully:

"You came on here—by train?"

"Slow Parliamentary—stoppin' at every 'arf-dozen stytions," explained W. Keyse, "for collectors in velveteens and Scotch caps to ask for tickets, plyse? And but that the porter on the 'Erion Down Platform 'ad see you walkin' on the Links, and my wife knoo your dress and the colour of your 'air 'arf a mile 'orf, we'd 'ave lost precious time in finding you, and giving you the—the message what we've come 'ere to bring!"

"From my husband? From Dr. Saxham?"

W. Keyse shifted from one foot to the other, and coughed an embarrassed cough.

"Not exac'ly from Dr. Saxham."

Lynette looked at W. Keyse, and it seemed to her that the little sallow Cockney face had Fate in it. A sudden terror whitened her to the lips. She cried out in a voice that had lost all its sweetness:

"You have deceived me in saying he was well. Something has happened to him! He is very ill, or ——?"

She could not utter the word. Instinctively her eyes went past the stammering man to the woman who hung behind his elbow. And the wearer of the nodding peonies cried out:

"No, no! The Doctor isn't dead—or ill, to call ill!" She turned angrily upon her husband. "See wot a turn you've give 'er," she snapped. "Why couldn't you up and speak out?"

W. Keyse was plainly nonplussed. He took off the giant cap with the brass ventilators, and turned it round and round, looking carefully inside it. But he found no eloquence therein.

"Why did I bring a skirt, I arsk, if I'm to do the patter?" He addressed himself in an audible aside to Mrs. Keyse. "You might as well 'ave stopped at 'ome with the nipper," he added, complainingly, "if I ain't to 'ave no better 'elp than this!"

"You mean kindly, I know." Lynette tried to smile in saying it. "There is trouble that you are here to break to me; I understand that very well. Please tell me without delay, plainly what has happened? I am very

—strong! I shall not faint—if that is what you are afraid of?"

She caught her breath, for the woman broke out into dry sobbing and cried out wildly:

"Oh, come back to 'im! Come back, if you're a woman! Gawd, Who made 'im, knows as 'ow 'e can't bear no more! Oh! if my 'art's so wrung by what I've seen him suffer, think what he's bore these crooil weeks an' months!"

The peonies rocked in the gale of Emigration Jane's emotion. Her hard-worked hands went out, entreating for him; her dowdy little figure seemed to grow tall, so impressive was the earnestness of her appeal.

"Him and you are toffs, and me and Keyse are common folks.... Flesh and blood's the syme, though, only covered wiv different skins. An' Human Nature's Human Nature, 'owever you fake 'er up an' christen 'er! An' Love must 'ave give an' take of Love, or else Love's got to die! Burn a lamp wivout oil, and see wot 'appens. It goes out!—You're left in the dark!"—Her homely gesture, illustrating the homely analogy, seemed to bring down blackness. Lynette hung speechless upon her fateful lips.

"—Then, like as not, you'll overturn the table gropin'. 'Smashed!' you'll say, 'an' nobody but silly me to blyme! It would 'ave lighted up a 'appy 'ome if I 'adn't been a barmy idiot. It would 'ave showed me the face of my 'usband leanin' to kiss me in our blessed marriage-bed, an' my baby smilin' in its cradle-sleep 'ard by.... Oh!—Oh!"—She choked and clutched her bosom, and her voice rose in the throaty screech of incipient hysteria—"An' I've left my own

sweet, unweaned boy to come and say these words to you!... An' the darlin' darlin' fightin' with the bottle they're tryin' to give 'im, and roarin' for 'is mam.... And my breasts as 'ard as stones, an' throbbin'!... Gawd 'elp me!" She panted and fought and choked, striving for speech.

"Keep your hair on!" advised W. Keyse in a hoarse whisper. She turned on him like a tigress, her eyes flaming under her straightened fringe.

"Keep yours! I've come to speak, and speak I mean to —for the sake of the best man Gawd's made for a 'undred years. Bar one, you says, but bar none, says I, an' charnce it! Since the day 'e stood up for you in that Dutch saloon-bar at Gueldersdorp, what is there we don't owe to 'im—you and me, and all the blooming crew of us? And because 'e'll tyke no thanks, 'e gits ingratitude—the dirtiest egg the Devil ever hatched!"

"Cripps!" gasped W. Keyse, awe-stricken by this lofty flight of rhetoric. Ignoring him, she pursued her way.

"You're a beautiful young lydy"—her tone softened from its strenuous pitch—"wot 'ave 'ad a disappyntment, like many of us 'ave at the start. You'd set your 'art on Another One. 'E got killed, an' you married the Doctor—but it's never bin no real marriage. You've ate 'is bread, as the sayin' is, an' give 'im a stone. An' e's beat 'is pore 'art to bloody rags agynst it—d'y after d'y, an' night after night! I seen it, I tell you!" she shrilled—"I seen it wiv me own eyes! You pretty, silly kid! Don't you know wot 'arm you're doing? You crooil byby! do you reckon Gawd gave you the man to torture an' break an' spoil?"

A hand, imperatively clapped over the mouth of Mrs. W. Keyse, stemmed the torrent of her eloquence.

"Dry up! You've said enough," ordered her spouse.

"Do not stop her!" Lynette said, without removing her fascinated eyes from the Pythoness. "Let her tell me everything that she has seen and knows."

"I seen the Doctor—many, many times," the woman went on, as W. Keyse reluctantly ungagged her, "watchin' Keyse and me in our poor 'ome-life together—with the eyes of a starvin' dog lookin' at a bone. You ought to know 'ow starvin' 'urts...." The strenuous voice soared and quivered. "You learned that at Gueldersdorp! Yet you can see your 'usband dyin' of 'unger, an' never put out your 'and! Dyin' for want of a kiss an' a bit o' cuddle—that's the kind o' dyin' I mean—dyin' for what Gawd gives to the very brutes He myde! Seems to you I talk low!... Well, there's nothink lower than Nature, *An' She Goes As 'Igh As 'Eaven*!" said Emigration Jane.

The wide, sweeping gesture with which the shabby little woman took in land and sea and sky was quite noble and inspiring to witness. And now the tears were running down her face, and her voice lost its raucous shrillness, and became plaintive, and even soft.

"I'm to tell you everythink I've seen, an' know about the Doctor.... I've seen 'im age, age, a bit more every d'y. I've seen 'im waste, waste, with loneliness and trouble—never turnin' bitter on accounts of it—never grudgin' 'elp that 'e could give to man or woman or kid. Late on the night you left 'ome I see 'im come up to your bedroom. 'E switched on the light. 'E forgot the blinds was up. 'E looked round, all 'aggard an'

lost an' wild-like, before 'e dropped down cryin' beside the bed."

She sobbed, and dropped on her own knees in the sand among the prickly yellow dwarf roses, weeping quite wildly, and wringing her hands.

"The mornin' found 'im there. Six weeks ago that was; an' every night since then it's bin the syme gyme. Never the blinds left up since that first time, but always light, and his shadow moves about. An' in my bed I wake a-cryin' so, an' don't know which of 'em I'm cryin' for—the lonely shadow or the lonely man——"

She could not go on, and W. Keyse took up the tale.

"She's told you true. Maybe we'd never 'ave come but for the feelin' that things was workin' up to wot the pypers call a Domestic Tragedy. Or at the best the break-up of a 'Ome. That's wot my wife she kep' on stuffin' into me," said W. Keyse. "An'—strewth! when the Doctor sent for me an' pyde me orf ... full wages right on up to the end o' the year, an' the syme to Morris an' the 'ouse'old staff, tellin' us e's goin' on a voyage, I s'ys to 'er, 'It's come!'"

"On a voyage! Where?"

"Oh, carn't you guess?" cried the woman on the ground, desperately looking up with tragic eyes out of a swollen, tear-stained face.

A mist came before Lynette's vision, and a sudden tremor shook her like a reed. She swayed as though the ground had heaved beneath her, but she would not fall. She choked back the cry that had risen in her throat. This was the time to act, not the time to weep for him. She knelt an instant by the woman on

the ground, put her arms round her, kissed her wet cheek, and then rose up, pale and calm and collected, saying to W. Keyse:

"Take her to the Plas. Ask for Mrs. Pugh, the housekeeper. She is to prepare a room for you; you are to breakfast, and rest all day, and return to London by the night mail. Good-bye! God bless you both! I was going to him to-night at latest.... I am going to him now.... Pray that he is alive when I reach him! But he will be. God is good!"

Her face was transfigured by the new light that shone in it. She was strong, salient, resourceful—no longer the shy willowy girl. She was moving from them with her long swift step, when W. Keyse recovered himself.

"'Old 'ard! Beg pardon, ma'am! but 'ave you the spondulics?" He blushed at her puzzled look, and amended: "'Ave you money enough upon you to pay the railway-fare?"

She lifted a little gold-netted purse attached to her neck-chain.

"Five pounds. My maid is to follow. You know Marie? You will let her travel with you?"

"Righto! But you'll want a wrap, coat or shawl, or somethink. Midnight before you gits in—if you catch this next up-Express.... Watto! Give us 'old o' this 'ere, Missus! You can 'ave mine instead."

"Please, no! I need nothing ... nothing!" She stayed his savage attack on the buttons of Mrs. Keyse's

green-and-yellow ulster by holding out her watch. "How much time have I left to catch the up-Express?"

"Eight minutes. By Cripps! you'll 'ave to run for it."

She waved her white hand, and was gone, swiftly as a bird or a deer.

"They've signalled!" W. Keyse announced after a breathless interval, during which the slender flying figure grew smaller upon the straining sight. It vanished, and a thin, nearing screech announced the up-Express. His wife jumped up and clutched him.

"William! Suppose she's lost it!"

"Garn! No fear!" scoffed W. Keyse.

As he scoffed he was full of fear. They heard the clanking stoppage, the shrill whistle of departure. They looked breathlessly towards the green wood that fringed the cliff-base under the Castle head. The iron way ran through the belt of trees. The Express rushed through, broke roaring upon their unimpeded vision, devoured the gleaming line of metals that lay between wood and tunnel, and left them with the taste of cindery steam in their open mouths, and the memory of a white handkerchief waved at a carriage-window by a slender hand.

"It's a'right, old gal!" said W. Keyse, beaming. "Come on up to the 'ouse. I could do wiv a bit o' peck, an' I lay so could you. Lumme!" His triumphant face fell by the fraction of an inch. "What'll she do when she lands in 'ome, wivout a woman to git a cup o' tea for 'er? Or curl 'er 'air, or undo 'er st'yl'yoes an' things?"

"She'll do wot other young wimmen does under sim'lar circumstances," said Mrs. Keyse enigmatically.

She added: "If she 'as luck, she'll 'ave a man for' er maid, an' if she 'as sense, she'll reckon the swop a good one!"

LXXII

Until the actual moment of their parting at Euston, Saxham had never fully realised the anguish of the last moment when Lynette's face should pass for ever out of his thirsting sight.

It was going.... He quickened his long strides to keep up with it. He must have called to her, for she came hurriedly to the corridor-window, her sweet cheeks suffused with lovely glowing colour, her sweet eyes shining, her small gloved hand held frankly out. He gripped it, uttered some incoherency—what, he could not remember—was shouted at by a porter with a greasy lamp-truck, cannoned heavily against a man with a basket of papers, awakened with a great pang to the knowledge that she was gone. And the great, bare, dirty, populous glass-hive of Euston, that has been the forcing-house of so many sorrowful partings, held another breaking heart.

In the days that followed he saw his private patients as usual, and operated upon a regular mid-week morning at St. Stephen's, whose senior surgeon had recently resigned. The rest of the time he spent in making his arrangements.

Sanely, logically, methodically, everything had been thought out. Major Wrynche was to be her guardian,

co-trustee with Lord Castleclare, and executor of the Will. It left her, simply and unconditionally, everything of which Saxham was possessed. She would live with the Wrynches until she married again. His agents were instructed to find a tenant for the house, and privately a purchaser for the practice. They wrote to him of a client already found. Matters were progressing steadily. Very soon now the desired end.

His table-lamp burned through the nights as he made up his ledgers and settled his accounts. In leisure moments he read in the intolerable book of the Past. Of all its sorrows and failures, its frantic follies and its besotted sins. Memory omitted nothing. Not a blot upon those sordid pages was spared him. It was not possible for an instant to turn away his eyes. His mental clarity was unrelieved by weariness. No shadow dimmed the keen crystal of his brain. He was at tension, like a bowstring that is stretched continually. He realised this, thinking: "Presently I will cut the bow-string, and the bow shall have rest! Even if my once-boasted will-power reasserted itself —even if I rose triumphant for the second time, cured of my vile craving, I do not the less owe my debt to the woman I have married. I promised her that I would die rather than fail her. I failed her! There is no excuse!"

LXXII

The West End pavements were shining wet. Belated

cabs spun homewards with sleepy revellers. Neat motor-broughams slid between the kerbs and rounded corners at unrebuked excess-speeds, winking their blazing head-lights at drowsy policemen muffled in oilskin capes. On all these accustomed things the blue-white arc-lights shone.

The most belated of all the hansom cabs in London stopped at the door of the house in Harley Street as the narrow strip of sky between the grim, drab-faced houses began to be dappled with the leaden grey of dawn. A faint moon reeled northwards, hunted by sable shapes of screaming terror, pale Venus clinging to her tattered robe. The house was all black and silent, a dead face with blinded windows. Did Saxham wake behind them? Or did he sleep, not to wake again?

Lynette tried her latchkey. The unchained door swung backwards. She passed into the house silently, a tall, slender shape. A light was shining under the consulting-room door. Her heart leaped to greet it. She kissed her hand to it, and turned, moving noiselessly, and put up the chain of the hall-door. She felt for the switch of the electric light, and snapped it on.

She was jarred and aching and weary with her journey; but it was a very fair woman whom she saw reflected in the hall-mirror as she unpinned her hat and tossed it upon the hall-table, and passed on to the consulting-room door—a woman whose face was strange to herself, with that new fire, and decision, and strength of purpose in it; a woman with glowing roses of colour in her cheeks, and eager, shining eyes.

All through the long hours of the journey she had

pictured him, her husband, bending over his work, sleeping in his chair, or in his bed. Yet behind these pictures was another image that started through their lines and colours dreadfully, persistently, and the image was that of a dead man. She thrust it from her for the hundredth time, as the door-handle yielded to her touch. She went into the room. Saxham was not there.

The lamp shed its circle of light upon the consulting-room writing-table. The armchair stood aside, as though hastily pushed back.... Signs of his recent presence were visible. The fireplace was heaped high with the ashes of burned papers; the acrid smell of their burning hung still on the close air.

She glanced back at the table. All its drawers stood open. Ledgers and case-books stood on it, neatly arrayed. A thick packet, heavily sealed, was addressed in Saxham's small, firm handwriting to Major Bingham Wrynche, Plas Bendigaid, Herion, South Wales. There were other letters in an orderly pile.

She glanced at the uppermost. It bore her own name. She took it and kissed it, and put it in her breast. There was an enclosure, heavy, and of oval shape. She wondered what it might be? As she did so, she looked at the letter hers had covered, and read what was written on the cover in the small, firm hand:

"'To the Coroner.' ... Merciful God!..."

The cry broke from her without her knowledge. The room rang with it as she turned and ran. With the nightmare-feeling of running up dream-stairs, of feeling nothing tangible under her footsteps, with the dreadful certainty that of all those crowding pictures

of him seen through the long hours in the racing Express, only the one that she had not dared to look at was the real, true picture of Saxham now.

Higher, higher, in a series of swift rushes, she mounted like the dream-woman in her dream. From solid cubes of darkness to grey landing-glimmers. To the third-story bedroom that had never been done up. In the company of Little Miss Muffet, the Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds, and Georgy Porgy, would he be lying, cold and ghastly, with a wound across his throat?

But the room was unoccupied; the bed had not been slept in. Pale dawn peeping in at the corners of the scanty blinds assured her of that. Where might she find him? Where seek him?

Fool! said a voice within her; there is but one answer to such a question! Where has he gone night after night? Coward, you knew, and yet avoided!... What threshold has he crossed when the world was sleeping round him? By whose vacant pillow has his broken heart sought vain relief in tears?

She passed downstairs, gliding noiselessly over the thick carpets, and went into the room it had been his pleasure to furnish and decorate as his wife's boudoir. Its seashell pinkness was merged in darkness, faintly striped by the grey dawn-glimmer, but the door of the bedroom that opened from it was ajar. Light edged the heavy fold of the portière curtain and made a pool upon the carpet. She held her breath as she stole to the door, and, trembling, looked in. He was there, kneeling by the bed. His heavily-shouldered black figure made a blotch upon the dainty white and azure draperies; his arms were outflung upon the silken counterpane.

A rush of thanks sprang from her full heart to Heaven as she heard the heavy sighing breaths that proved him living yet.

She would have gone to him and touched him then, but the sound of his voice took courage from her, and drew her strength away. He spoke, lifting his face to the ivory Crucifix that hung upon the wall above the bed-head. It was a voice of groanings rather than the quiet voice with which she was familiar. She comprehended that a soul in mortal anguish was speaking aloud to God.

"I cannot live!" groaned Saxham. "I am weary, body and spirit. What I have borne I have borne in the hope of laying my burden down. Everything is ready! I have cleared the way; my loins are girded for departure. All I asked was to lie down in the earth and wake again no more. All I asked—and what happens? My dead faith quickens again in me. I must bow my neck once more to the yoke of the Inconceivable! I must perforce believe in Thee again! I hear the voice of the pale thorn-crowned Victim, saying, 'I am Thy God who lived and suffered and died for thee! Live on, then, and suffer also, and pass to the Life Eternal when thine hour comes!' O God!—my God! have I not earned deliverance? Have I not borne anguish enough?"

His fierce, upbraiding voice died out in inarticulate mutterings. His head fell forwards upon his arms. Presently he lifted it, and cried out, as if replying to some unseen speaker:

"If a self-sought death entails eternal torment, am I not in hell here upon earth? How else, when to live is to hold her in bondage, knowing that she longs and pines to be free? And yet, to go out into the dark

and leave her! never again to see her! never more to feel the light of her eyes flow into me! Never to hear her voice—to be of my own deed separate from her throughout Eternity—that were of all the Judgments that are Thine to scourge with the most terrible that Thou couldst lay upon my soul!"

A sob tore him. He moaned out brokenly:

"Give me a sign, if Thou art indeed merciful! Show me that there is relenting in Thee! Grant me the hope, at least, that my great renunciation may open a gate by which, after cycles of expiatory suffering, I may at last pass through to where she dwells in Thy Brightness. Give me to see her face with a smile on it—to touch her hand—after all—after all! The lips I have never kissed, may they not be mine, O God—mine one day in Heaven? If Thou art Love, there should be love there."

She glided over the deep carpet, stretched out a timid hand, and touched his shoulder. He lifted his great square head, and slowly looked round. The black hair, mingled with white, clung damp to the broad forehead. His eyes were bloodshot, strained, and haggard, and wild. Sorrow was charted deep upon the haggard features. Amazement struck them into folly as he started up, stammering out her name, and clutching for support at the brass rail that was at the foot of the bed.

"Lynette! You.... It is you?..." He shook, staring at her with dilated eyes.

"Owen, you are ill. You speak and look so strangely. It is me—really me!" she said, trying to speak calmly through the tumult of her heart.

"I am not ill. How is it that you are here?"

He lifted a hand to his strained and smarting eyes and moved it to and fro before them. He was staring at her still, but with pupils that were less dilated, and the veins upon his broad forehead were no longer purple now.

"Have I talked nonsense? I had dozed, and you startled me coming upon me.... Why have you?..." He strove to speak and look as usual. "Has anything happened, that you have come back?"

She pressed her hands together, wrestling for collected thought and clear, explicit utterance, though the room rocked about her, and the floor seemed to rise and fall beneath her feet.

"Something happened. I have come back from Wales to tell you that I ... I cannot live upon your friendship any longer! I—I must have more, or I shall die!"

He knew all. She had met the man whose look and breath and touch had revealed to her her own misery. Chained to her harsh yoke-fellow; denied Love's bread and wine of life! He looked at her, and answered coldly:

"You shall not die. You shall be free! If you had waited until to-morrow——"

"It is already day," she told him, and, as though to confirm her, a neighbouring steeple-clock clanged twice. He moved uneasily as his eyes fell on the disordered coverlet, half dragged from the bed and trailing on the floor. They shunned hers as he said, a dark flush rising through his haggard pallor:

"I beg your pardon for the intrusion here. But you were away.... I could not sleep, and the house was lonely.... Is your maid with you? Surely you are not alone?"

She bent her head with a faint smile.

"Quite alone. I did not wish for a companion."

"It was not wise——" he began, and took a step doorwards. "I will call one of the servants," he added, and was going, when he remembered, and stopped, saying hoarsely:

"I forgot. They are gone. I have sent them all away!"

She looked at him in silence. He continued:

"I have paid and dismissed them. You will think it curious—you will know the reason later—I have written to you to explain."

"I found upon your table a letter addressed to me," she said. He started, knitting his black brows.

"You have not read it?" he asked, breathing quickly.

"Not yet." She touched her bosom, where the letter lay. "I have it here."

"Please do not open it! Give me back the letter!" He stretched out his hand to take it, and breathed more freely when she drew it out and gave it to him. And a sweet wild pang shot through him; the paper was so warm and fragrant from the nest where it had lain so short a time. But he mastered the emotion and tore open the envelope. He took from it the enclosure, wrapped in folds of tissue-paper, and put it in her hand, saying, as he thrust the letter in his coat-pocket:

"There is something that by right is yours."

"Mine?..." She unrolled the tissue-paper, and the brilliants that were set about the miniature sent spurts of white and green and rosy fire between the slender, ivory-hued fingers that turned it about. She gave a little gasping cry of recognition:

"It is—me! How could you have managed——?" Then, as the sweet grey eyes of fair dead Lucy smiled up into her own: "I do not know how I am sure of it," she said, with a catching in her breath, "but this must be my mother!"

Saxham bent his head in answer to her look. His eyes bade her question no further. She faltered:

"May I not know how it came into your hands?"

"Through the death," Saxham answered, "of an evil man. You know his name. He probably robbed your father of that miniature with other things; but I can only surmise this. I cannot positively say."

"You speak of my father." Her face was quivering, her eyes entreated. "Tell me what you know of him, and of"—she kissed the miniature, and held it to her cheek—"of my mother?"

"Your father," said Saxham, "was an officer and a gentleman. The surname that you exchanged for mine, poor child! was really his. His Christian name is engraved there"—he pointed to the inner rim of the band of brilliants —"with that of the lady who was your mother. She was beautiful; she was tender and devoted; she loved your father well enough to give up every social aim and every worldly advantage for his sake. She died loving him. He died —I should not wonder if he died of sorrow for her

loss. For hearts can break, though the Faculty deny it!"

He swung about to leave the room. She was murmuring over her new-found treasure.

"'Lucy to Richard' ... '*Richard*' ..." she repeated. A wave of roseate colour broke over her with the memory of the hand that had touched and the voice that had spoken to her in her Heaven-sent vision of the previous morning, when the Beloved had come back from Paradise to lay a charge upon her child.

"My father knew the Mother?" It was not a question, it was a statement of the fact. Saxham wondered at the assured tone, as he told her:

"It is true. They had been friends—in the world they both gave up afterwards—the man for the love that is of earth, the woman for the love of Heaven."

"She never told me then, but she must have known who I was from the beginning," Lynette ventured. "She gave me the surname of Mildare because it belonged to me! Do not you think so too?"

Saxham made no answer. He swung about to leave the room. She slipped the miniature into her bosom, where his letter had lain, and asked:

"Where are you going?"

He answered, with his eyes avoiding hers:

"You have been travelling all night; you must be tired and hungry. Go to bed and try to rest, while I forage for you downstairs. You shall not suffer for lack of attendance. I am quite a good cook, as you shall find presently. When you have eaten you must sleep, and then we will talk of your returning home

to your friends."

"Are not you my chief friend?" she asked. "Is not this my home?"

He avoided her look, replying awkwardly:

"Hardly, when there are no servants to wait upon you!"

"May I not know why you sent them away?"

He said, his haggard profile turned to her, a muscle of his pale cheek twitching:

"I am going away myself: that is the reason why. All debts are paid. I have completed all the arrangements, entailing the minimum of annoyance upon you."

"May I not come with you upon your voyage?"

His eyes were still averted as his grey lips answered:

"No! I am going where you cannot come!"

"Owen, tell me where you are going?"

Her tone of entreaty knocked at the door of his barred heart. He winced palpably. "Excuse me," he said, and took another step towards the door. She stopped him with:

"You are not excused from answering my question!"

"I am going, first to get you some breakfast," said Saxham curtly, "and then to find a woman to attend upon you here."

"I need no breakfast, thanks! I want no attendant!"

"You must have someone," said Saxham brusquely.

"I must have your answer," she said in a tone quite new to him. "What is your secret purpose? What are you hiding from me in that closed hand?"

He moved his left hand slightly, undoing the fingers and giving a glimpse of the empty palm.

"Not that hand. The other!" She pointed to the clenched right. How tall she had grown, and how womanly! "Love has done this!" was his aching thought. She seemed a princess of faëry, fresh from a bath of magic waters. Her very gait was changed, her every gesture seemed new. Purpose and decision and quiet self-control breathed from her; her voice had tones in it unheard of him before. Her eyes were radiant as he had never yet seen them, golden stars, centred and rimmed with night, shining in a pale glory that was her face....

"All that for the other man! Well, let him have it!" thought Saxham, and involuntarily glanced at his clenched right hand.

"Please open it and show me what you have there!" she begged him.

Her tones were full of pleading music. His face hardened grimly to withstand. His muscular fingers closed in a vice-like grip over what he held. But she moved to him with a whisper of soft trailing garments, and took the shut hand in both her own. She bent her exquisite head and kissed it, and Saxham's fingers of iron were no more than wax. Something clicked in his throat as they opened, that was like the turning of a rusty lock. And the little blue phial, with the yellow poison-label, gave up his deadly intention to her eyes. She cried out and snatched it, and flung it away from her. It fell

soundlessly on the soft carpet, and rolled under a chair.

"Owen! You would have ... done that!..."

Divine reproach was to her face. He snarled:

"It would have been done by now if you had not come back!"

"I thank our Lord I came!... It is His doing! Once He had sent me knowledge, I could not stay away. For, Owen ... I have made a discovery...."

"Yes." He laughed harshly. "As I knew you would one day! Never was I fool enough to doubt what would come!"

She put both her hands to her lips and kissed them, and held them out to him. He cried:

"What is this? What interlude of folly are you playing? It was your freedom you came to demand. You have not told me who the man you love is. I do not ask—I will not even know! He is your choice; that is enough!"

"He is my choice!" Her bosom heaved to the measure of her quickened breathing. The splendid colour rose over the edge of the lace scarf that was loosely knotted about her sweet throat, and surged to the pure temples, and climbed to the line of the rich red-brown hair.

"You will soon be free to tell the world so. Marry him," said Saxham, "and forget the dreary months dragged out beside the sot! For I who promised you I would never fail you; I who told you so confidently that I was cured of the accursed liquor-crave; I—well, I reckoned without my host——"

His laugh jarred her heartstrings. She cried out hotly:

"You did not deceive me wilfully! You believed what you said!"

"I believed ... and the first snare set for me tripped up my heels," said Saxham. "I paid the penalty of being cocksure. And I had not the common decency to die then and release you. True, there were reasons—they are swept away now!... I sent you to Wales that I might be free of the sight of you, that I might end the sordid comedy and have done. You have come too soon! There's no more to be said than that!"

"There is this to be said."

She came towards him, her tender eyes wooing his. Her lips were parted, her breath came in sighs.

"What you have told me is sorrowful, but not hopeless. You were cured once—you will be cured again! And I will help you—comfort you—suffer with you and pray for you. You shall never be alone, my husband, any more!"

He was melting. His hard blue eyes had the softening gleam of tears. He stretched out his hands and took hers, holding them close. He stooped, and let his burning lips rest on the cool, fragrant flesh, and said tenderly:

"Dear saint, sweet would-be martyr, you *shall* not sacrifice your long life's happiness to me. Rather than live on sane and sober, to see you famishing beside me for the want of Love, I would die a thousand deaths, Lynette! Try to believe it. You shall be free! You must be free, my child!"

She winced as though he had stabbed her, and cried

out:

"Why do you harp continually upon your death? I will not listen to you! If I do not desire to be 'free,' as you term it, what barrier is there between us now?"

He said, amazed:

"What barrier? Do you ask what barrier? Your love—for that other man!"

"There is no other man!" She looked him full in the eyes now, with a lovely colour dyeing her sweet cheeks, and an exquisite quivering wistfulness about her mouth. She moved so near that her fragrant breath fanned warm upon his eyelids. "There is no man but you—there will never be any other man!... Dearest"—her hands were on his shoulders; her bosom rose and fell close to his broad breast—"I have been very slow at learning. But—Owen!—I love you as your wife should love!"

"You cannot!" He stepped back sharply, and her hands fell from him. "You shall not! I am not worthy. I thought so once.... I know better now. Do not deceive yourself. Love cannot be compelled at will, and I have ceased to wish—to desire yours! All I want now is rest and silence and forgetfulness—where alone they may be found!" He drew a breath of weariness.

"If you have ceased to wish for love from me, that is my punishment," she said, very pale. "For without yours I cannot live! God hears me speak the truth!"

"Lynette!..."

He swayed like a tree cut through and falling. She caught his hands, and drew them to her heart.

"I have been blind and deaf and senseless. I am changed, I am altered—I am awake at last! I know how great and precious is the love you have given me.... Do not tell me it is mine no longer! Owen, if you do that, it is I who shall die!"

A sob tore its way through him. His great frame quivered. His mask-like immobility broke up ... was gone. Her own tears falling, she stretched her arms to him; yet while his eyes devoured her, his arms hungered for her, he delayed, knitting his brows. She caught a word or two, whispered brokenly. He asked himself: "Can this be Love?"

"It is Love! Owen, I kissed you one night when I found you sleeping! When will you kiss me back again?"

He cried out wildly upon God, and fell down upon his knees before her. He reached out groping, desperate arms, and snatched her close. His deep, shuddering breaths vibrated through her; her own knees were trembling, her bosom in storm. She swayed like a young palm. Nearer—nearer! he felt her hands about his neck, her tears upon his face....

"Dear love, dearest husband, I have a message for you! Owen, shall I tell you what it is?"

"Tell me, my heart's beloved," said Saxham in a whisper.

Their looks united in azure fire and golden. Their breath mingled, their lips were very near. She felt his strength about her; he drank in her sweetness. The kiss, the supreme boon, was as yet withheld.

She whispered....

"I awakened in the light of the early morning—the morning of the day I came to you. She sat beside me —the Mother, Owen! her dear hand on my heart, her dear eyes waiting for mine. She stooped and kissed me ... it was real ... I felt it! She said: 'Love your husband as I loved Richard! Be to a child of his what I have been to you!'"

His arms wrapped round her, gathered her, enfolded her. His scalding tears wetted her white bosom as she drew the square black head to rest there, and drooped her cheek upon the broad brow. Her rich hair, loosed from its coils, fell in a heavy silken rope upon his shoulder ... their lips met in the nuptial, sacramental kiss....

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