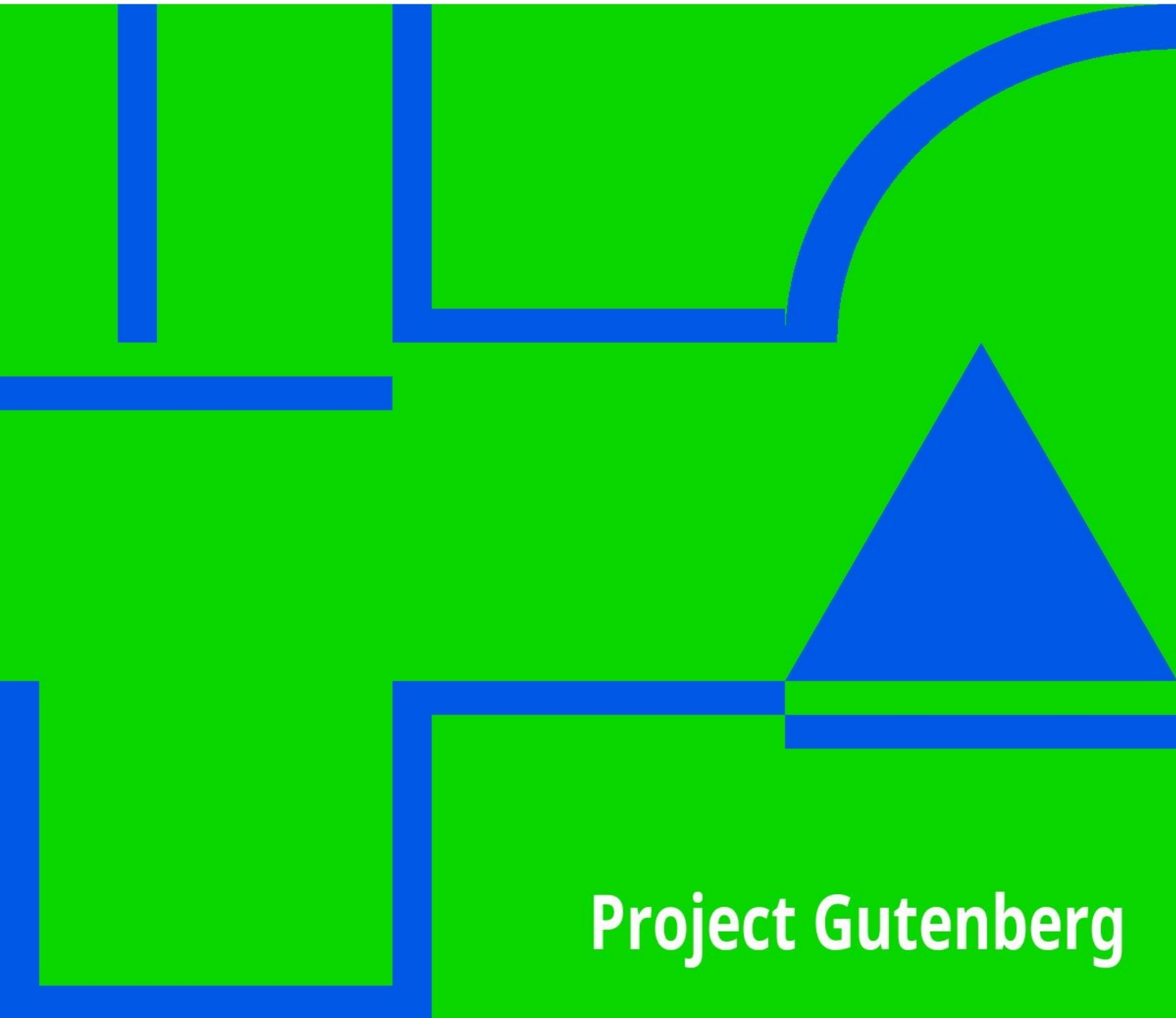
Blue Aloes

Stories of South Africa

Cynthia Stockley



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BLUE ALOES

Stories Of South Africa

by

CYNTHIA STOCKLEY

Author of "Poppy," "Wild Honey," etc.

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CONTENTS

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The Strange Story of a Karoo Farm

PART I

Night, with the sinister, brooding peace of the desert, enwrapped the land, and the inmates of the old Karoo farm had long been at rest; but it was an hour when strange tree-creatures cry with the voices of human beings, and stealthy velvet-footed things prowl through places forbidden by day, and not all who rested at Blue Aloes were sleeping.

Christine Chaine, wakeful and nervous, listening to the night sounds, found them far more distracting than any the day could produce. Above the breathing of the three children sleeping near her in the big room, the buzz of a moth-beetle against the ceiling, and the far-off howling of jackals, she could hear something out in the garden sighing with faint, whistling sighs. More disquieting still was a gentle, intermittent tapping on the closed and heavily barred shutters, inside which the windows stood open, inviting coolness. She had heard that tapping every one of the three nights since she came to the farm.

The window stood to the right of her bed, and, by stretching an arm, she could have unbolted the shutters and looked out, but she would have died rather than do it. Not that she was a coward. But there was some sinister quality in the night noises of this old Karoo farm that weighed on her courage and paralyzed her senses. So, instead of stirring, she lay very still in the darkness, the loud, uncertain beats of her heart adding themselves to all the other disconcerting sounds.

Mrs. van Cannan had laughed her lazy, liquid laugh when Christine spoke, the first morning after her arrival, of the tapping.

"It was probably a stray ostrich pecking on your shutters," said the mistress of Blue Aloes. "You are strange to the Karoo, my dear. When you have been here a month, you'll take no notice of night noises."

There was possibly truth in the prophecy, but Christine doubted it. There were also moments when she doubted being able to last a week out at the farm, to say nothing of a month. That was only in the night watches, however; by day, she found it hard to imagine any circumstances so unpleasant as to induce her to leave the three little van Cannan children, who, even in so short a time, had managed to twine their fingers and their mops of bronze hair round her affections.

The tapping began again, soft and insistent. Christine knew it was not a branch, for she had taken the trouble to ascertain; and that a stray ostrich should choose her window to peck at for three nights running seemed fantastic. Irrelatively, one of the children murmured drowsily in sleep, and the little human sound braced the girl's nerves. The sense of loneliness left her, giving place to courageous resolution. She forgot everything save that she was responsible for the protection of the children, and determined that the tapping must be investigated, once and for all. Just as she was stirring, the soft sighing recommenced close to the shutters, followed by three clear taps. Christine changed her mind about getting out of bed, but she leaned toward the window on her elbow, and said, in a low voice that trembled a little:

"Is any one there?"

A whistling whisper answered her:

"*Take care of the children.*"

With the words, a strangely revolting odour came stealing through the shutters. The girl shrank back, all her fears returning. Yet she forced herself to speak again.

"Who is it? What do you want?"

"*Mind the boy—take care of the boy,*" sobbed the whistling voice, and again the foul odour stole into the room. It seemed to Christine the smell of something dead and rotten and old. She could not bear it. Hatred of it was greater than fear, and, springing from her bed, she wrestled with the bolts of the shutters. But when she threw them open there was—nothing! Darkness stood without like a presence, and seemed to push against the shutters, trying to enter as she hastily rebarred them.

Something was stirring in the room, too. With hands that shook, she lit the candle and, by its gleam, discovered Roderick, the eldest child, sitting up in bed, his red-gold mop all tumbled, his eyes, full of dreams, fixed on her with a wide stare. She crossed the room, and knelt beside him.

"What is it, darling?"

"I thought my nannie was there," he murmured.

"Your nannie?" she echoed, in surprise, knowing that "nannie" was the common name for any black nurse who tended and waited on them. "But she is in bed and asleep long ago."

"I don't mean *that* one. I mean my nannie what's dead—Sophy."

The girl's backbone grew chill. She remembered hearing that the children had been always minded by an educated old Basuto woman called Sophy, who had been a devoted slave to each from birth up, and because of whose death, a few months back, a series of English governesses had come and gone at the farm.

She remembered, too, those fluty whispers that resembled no human voice.

"Lie down, darling, and sleep," she said gently. "I will stay by you."

The boy did not instantly obey. He had a whim to sit up, watching. There was no fear in his wide grey eyes, but it was uncanny to see them searching the shadows

of the room and returning always, with a fixed, somnambulistic stare, to the window. Christine had a fancy that children, with the memories of another world clinging to them, have a vision of unseen things denied to older people; and she wondered painfully what was going on in the mind behind this handsome little face. At last, she prevailed upon him to lie down, but it was long before he slept. Even then, she sat on, holding his hand, keeping vigil over him and the two other small sleepers.

They were lovely children. Each head glowed red-gold upon its pillow, and each little profile was of a regularity almost classical, with the pure colouring peculiar to red-haired people. The boy's face was well sprinkled with freckles, but five-year-old Marguerite and little Coral, of four, who were perfect little imps of mischief, had the dainty snow-pink look of daisies growing in a meadow with their faces turned up to God.

It was difficult to connect such fragrant, well-tended flowers with the whistling horror out in the darkness. More, it was absurd, impossible. The girl decided that the whole thing was a bad nightmare which she must shake off. The explanation of it could only be that, half asleep, she had dreamed she heard the tapping and the whispers, and smelled the evil odour. Why should a *Thing* come and tell her to mind the children? "*Mind the boy.*" He was already minded—they were all happy and well cared for in their own home. The boy Roderick must have been dreaming, too, and talking in his sleep. Thus, Christine's clear English mind rejected the whole thing as an illusion, resulting from weariness and the new, strange conditions of her life. Yet there was an Irish side to her that could not so easily dispose of the matter. She remembered with what uneasiness her nights had been haunted from the first. How always, when the dark fell, she had sensed something uncanny, something unseen and menacing, that she could never track to its source. But tonight the sense of hovering evil had taken definite form and direction. It was at the children that harm was directed; the whistling, sighing words had concerned the children only. The girl shivered again at the horrid recollection.

"Yet anything that cares about children cannot be altogether evil," she thought. That comforted her a little, but the spell of horror the night had laid upon her was not lifted until dawn came. Then she slipped on some clothes and let herself out into the morning air.

The garden that straggled about the farm was composed of a dozen century-old

oaks, a sprinkling of feathery pepper-trees, and many clumps of brilliant-blossomed cacti. The veranda and outbuildings were heavily hung with creepers, and great barrels of begonias and geraniums stood about. Within a few hundred yards of the house, the green and glowing cultivation stopped as abruptly as the edges of an oasis in the desert, and the Karoo began—that sweeping, high table-land, empty of all but brown stones, long white thorns, fantastically shaped clumps of prickly-pear, bare brown hills, and dried-up rivulets, and that yet is one of the healthiest and, from the farmer's point of view, wealthiest plateaux in the world.

Between the farm and the far hills arose a curious line of shroudy blue, seeming to hover round the estate, mystically encircling it, and cutting it off from the rest of the desert. This was the century-old hedge of blue aloes which gave the farm its name. Planted in a huge ring of many miles' circumference, the great spiked cacti, with leaves thick and flat as hide shields, and pointed as steel spears, made a barrier against cattle, ostriches, and human beings that was impassable except by the appointed gaps. No doubt it had a beauty all its own, but beneath its fantastic, isolated blooms and leaves of Madonna blue, the gnarled roots sheltered a hundred varieties of poisonous reptiles and insects. That is why, in Africa, no one likes blue aloes—they always harbour death.

Dawn on the Karoo more than compensates for its fearsome nights and torrid noontides. The dew, jewelling a thousand spider-webs, the sparkling brightness of the air, the exquisite purity of the atmosphere, and grandeur of space and loneliness rimmed about by rose-tipped skies and far forget-me-not hills make a magic to catch the heart in a net from which it never quite escapes.

Christine felt this enchantment as she wandered across the veld, her eyes fixed on the hills from behind which the sun would presently emerge to fill the land with a clear, pitiless heat that turned everything curiously grey. A dam of water reflecting pink cloud-tips lay bright and still as a sheet of steel. The fields of lucerne, under the morning light, were softly turning from black to emerald, and beyond the aloe hedge a native kraal that was scattered on the side of a hill slowly woke to life. A dog barked; a wisp of smoke curled between the thatched huts, and one or two blanketed figures crept from the low doors. The simple yet secret lives of these people intrigued Christine deeply. She knew little of Kafirs, for she had been in Africa only a few months; but the impassive silence of them behind their watching, alert eyes always fascinated her. They said so little before their masters, the whites. Here, for instance, was a little colony of fifty or more

people living in a kraal close to their employers. Some of them were grey-haired and had worked for a quarter of a century on the farm—the men on the land, the women at the house—yet, once their daily tasks were over, none knew what their lives were when they returned to the straggling village of palisades and low-doored huts.

Musing on these things, Christine turned at last and sauntered slowly homeward. Everything was still very quiet, but smoke was rising from the solid farm chimneys, and, rounding the corners of some large outbuildings, she came suddenly upon more life—feathery, fantastic life of spindlelegs and fluttering wings. Scores of baby ostriches, just released from their night shelter, were racing into the morning light, pirouetting round each other like crazy, gleesome sprites. Christine stood laughing at their fandangos and the antics of the Kafirs engaged in herding them. A man standing near, pipe in mouth, and hands in pockets, observing the same scene, was astonished that her sad yet passionate face could so change under the spell of laughter. He had wondered, when he first saw her, why a girl with such ardent eyes should wear such weariness upon her lips and look so disdainfully at life. Now he saw that it was a mask she wore and forgot when she was alone, and he wondered still more what had brought such a girl to be a governess on a Karoo farm.

But in a moment Christine's face changed, resuming, like a veil over its youth and bloom, the look of world-weariness. She bowed slightly to him, with a somewhat cool response to his pleasant morning greeting, and made haste to resume her walk homeward.

She knew him to be Richard Saltire, the government forest and land expert, who was engaged in certain experiments on the farm. He shared a bungalow somewhere on the land with two young Hollanders who were learning ostrich-farming, and came with them to lunch every day at the house. Already, his bold, careless face, with its sunbitten beauty, had separated itself in her memory from the faces of the other men, for it was a face and personality that could not leave a woman undisturbed. Incidentally, it had disturbed her in connection with an impression not altogether agreeable.

One of the first hints Mrs. van Cannan had given the new governess was that the master of Blue Aloes did not care for any kind of intimacy to exist between the womenfolk of the farm and the men occupied about it. Christine had been long enough in South Africa to recognize that this was an odd departure from the

general rule of friendliness and equality; but a hint to the proud has the same efficacy as a word to the wise. Besides, she had no longing for the society of men, but rather a wish to forget that she had ever known any. Life had made a hole in her heart which she meant to fill if she could, but only with inanimate things and the love of children. So that Mr. van Cannan's unsociable restriction, far from being irksome, suited her perfectly.

Mrs. van Cannan apparently did not apply to herself her husband's injunction, for she was charming to everybody, and especially to Mr. Saltire. It was impossible not to notice this, and also that the fact was not lost upon the gloomy, fanatic glance of the master of the house.

If Mr. Saltire showed bad taste in so openly returning Mrs. van Cannan's interest, it had to be admitted that it was the form of bad taste that is a law unto itself and takes no thought of the opinion of others. Although Africa had spoiled Saltire's complexion, it was evident that she had never bowed his neck or put humility into his eye or made him desist from looking over his boldly cut nose as though he had bought the world and did not want it.

But to Christine Chaine it seemed that to cause pain to a man racked with neuritis and jealousy for the sake of a mild flirtation with a pretty woman was a cruel as well as a dangerous game. That was one of the reasons why the friendliness of his morning greeting had been met with such coldness. She had known heartlessness before in her life, and wished no further acquaintance with it. That was the resolution with which she hurried back through the straggling garden, the whitewashed porch, and massive front door to the nursery.

The children, full of high spirits and wilfulness, were engaged in their morning romp of trying to evade Meekie, the colored "nannie," whose business it was to bathe them.

They were extraordinarily lovable children, in spite of a certain elf-like disobedience which possessed them like a disease. It was quite enough to tell them not to do a thing for them to be eaten up with a desire to do it forthwith. Christine had discovered this, and had learned to manage them in other ways than by direct command.

"Take Roddy—no; take Coral, she is the dirtiest—no, no—Rita! Rita is the pig!" they shrieked, as they pranced from bed to bed. "Bathe yourself, old Meekie—

you are the blackest of all."

Christine had her work cut out with them for the next half-hour, but at last they were marshalled, sweet and shining, to breakfast, where she presided, for their father always took an early breakfast, and Mrs. van Cannan never rose until eleven. Afterward, according to custom, they paid a visit to the latter's room, to wish her good-morning.

Isabel van Cannan was a big, lazy, laughing woman, with sleepy, golden eyes. She spent hours in bed, lying, as she did now, amid quantities of pillows, doing absolutely nothing. She had told Christine that she was of Spanish extraction, yet she was blond as a Swede. Her hair, which had a sort of lamb's-wool fluffiness, lay upon her pillows in two great ropes, yellow as the pollen of a lily. She took the children one by one into a sleepy embrace, kissed and patted their cheeks, admonishing them to be good and obey Miss Chaine in everything.

"Be sure not to go in the sun without your hats," she adjured the two small girls. "Roddy doesn't matter so much, but little girls' complexions are very important."

Rita and Coral stuck out their rose-pink chins and exchanged a sparkling glance. Christine knew that she would have trouble with them and their hats all day.

"Good-bye," said Mrs. van Cannan, and sank back among her pillows. As the children scampered out of the room, she called sharply, "Don't go near the dam, Roddy!"

Christine had heard her say that before, and always with that sharp inflection.

"I never let them go near the dam without me," she said reassuringly. Mrs. van Cannan did not answer, but a quiver, as if of pain, passed over her closed eyelids.

Outside in the passage, Roderick pressed close to Christine and murmured, with a sort of elfin sadness:

"Carol was drowned in the dam."

The girl was startled.

"Carol?" she echoed. "Who was Carol?"

"My big brother—a year older than me," he whispered. "He is buried out in the graveyard. I'll take you to see the place if you like. Let us go now."

Christine collected herself.

"We must go to lessons now, dear. Later on, you shall show me anything you like."

But from time to time during the morning, sitting in the creeper-trimmed summer-house they used for a school-room, with her charges busy round her, Christine's thoughts returned to the strange little revelation. Roddy, with his red-gold brush of hair, bent over his slate, was not the first-born, then! *He* had been drowned in the dam—that peaceful sheet of walled-in water that reflected the pink tips of dawn and wherein, at eventide, the cattle waded happily to drink. This old Karoo farmhouse had known tragedy, even as she had sensed. Small wonder Bernard van Cannan's eyes wore a haunted look! Yet his wife, with her full happy laugh and golden locks, lying among her pillows, seemed curiously untouched by sorrow. Except for that quiver of the eyelids, Christine had never seen her show anything but a contented face to life.

Well—the history of Blue Aloes was a sealed book when the girl came to it, knowing nothing of its inmates beyond their excellent references as an old Huguenot family. Now the book, slowly opening page by page, was revealing strange things.

The luncheon-hour always provided fresh material for a reflective mind. The dining-room was large and lofty, and the table must have dated back to the early days at the Cape, when every great family had its scores of retainers and slaves. It was composed of time-stained teak, and could have seated dozens, being curiously shaped like a capital E with the middle branch of the letter missing. Only one of the branches was now in use, and at this Christine presided over her small charges, fortunately somewhat aloof from the rest, for they had many odd habits which it was her business to correct without drawing attention. Coral did not like pumpkin, and would keep dropping it on the floor. Rita loved to kill flies with a spoon. Roddy's specialty was sliding bits of meat into the open jaws of a pointer—there were always several under the table—then briskly passing his plate for more. Once or twice, looking up from correcting these idiosyncrasies, the girl found the blue eyes of Richard Saltire fixed upon her as if in ironic inquiry, and though she felt the slow colour creep into her face, she returned the

glance coldly. How dare he be curious about her, she thought rather angrily. Let him confine himself to making the lids of his hostess droop and her cheeks dimple. Not that Christine believed there to be any harm in their open flirtation —Mrs. van Cannan was plainly devoted to her husband; perhaps it was natural that she should enjoy admiration. She possessed the kind of beauty only to be achieved by the woman who makes the care of her appearance an art, and spends hours in absolute repose of mind and body. Her face had not a line in it of strain or sorrow. Faint pink tinted her cheeks. Her pink-linen gown, open in a low V, showed the perfect contour and creaminess of her breast. The restless, adoring eyes of her husband came back to her always with that glance, vigilant and sombre, that was peculiar to them.

With some assumption of state, he always sat in the centre of the body of the table, with his wife beside him. Saltire sat at her right, and Saxby, the overseer, was placed beside his host. Opposite them, on the other side of the table, were the two young Hollanders and a cheerful Scotch colonial called McNeil.

These six men were expected to take both luncheon and dinner at the farm, but only the Hollanders turned up in the evening, perhaps because the excellence of the fare was outbalanced by the long prayers and hymns with which the meal was prefaced and ended. Even at lunch-time, there was a Bible at the host's elbow, from which he read a number of texts before pronouncing a long grace, while the visitors listened with expressions that varied from embarrassment to impatience. Richard Saltire always looked frankly bored, but sometimes he and Mrs. van Cannan exchanged a smile of sympathy at having to listen to the maledictions of Job while the roast was getting cold. Hymns for lunch were mercifully omitted. Bernard van Cannan, though plainly a religious fanatic, was also the owner of one of the wealthiest farms in the colony, and no doubt he realized that the working-hours of his employees might be more profitably engaged than by chanting hymns.

Saxby, the overseer, a dark, burly man of unusual height, was marked by the thick lips and general fulness of countenance that suggests to those who have lived long enough in Africa "a touch of colour." He had the soft voice, too, and full, deep laugh of those who have a dash of native blood in their veins. His manner was melancholy, though charming, and he imposed his society upon no man, but attended strictly to his business. He was the best manager the farm had ever known. After being there for less than a year, he had so improved the stock and the land that Bernard van Cannan looked upon him as a little god, and his

word was law on the farm. His private history, a rather sad one, Christine had already heard from Mrs. van Cannan. It appeared that his wife had been terribly disfigured in a fire and was not only a semi-invalid but a victim of melancholia. She lived with him in an isolated bungalow some way off, and he did everything for her with his own hands as she shrank from being seen by any one, and particularly detested natives. While her husband was away at his duties, she remained locked in the bungalow, inaccessible to any one save Mrs. van Cannan, who sometimes went to sit with her.

"But I can't bear to go often," Isabel van Cannan told Miss Chaine.
"She depresses me so terribly, and what good can I do her, poor soul?"

Unnecessary for her to add that she hated being depressed. It was bad for the complexion, she laughed. Laughter was never far from her lips. But, at the moment, there really seemed some trace of the morning's pain on her as she looked at her husband.

"Bernard's shoulder is giving him so much trouble," she said appealingly to Saltire. "He wants to go to East London to see his old specialist, but I don't believe in that man. I think rest in bed is the cure for all ills. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Saltire?"

"Bed has its uses no doubt," laughed Saltire, with the cheerful carelessness of the thoroughly healthy man, "but a change of scene is better sometimes, for some people."

Van Cannan, his shoulder and left eye twitching perpetually, turned a searching gaze upon the deeply tanned face of the forestry expert, as though suspecting some double meaning in the words. Saltire bore the scrutiny undisturbed. Immaculate in white linens, his handsome fairish head wearing a perpetually well-groomed look, perhaps by reason of a bullet which, during the Boer War, had skimmed straight through his hair, leaving a perfect parting in the centre, he was a striking contrast to the haggard master of the house, who muttered morosely:

"There is some Latin saying—isn't there?—about people 'changing their skies but not their dispositions.'"

"_In_disposition is a different matter," remarked Saxby sagely, "and with neuritis it is a mistake to let the pain get too near the heart. I think you ought to see a

doctor, Mr. van Cannan, but East London is a long way off. Why not call in the district man?"

"He would prescribe a bottle of pink water and charge me a couple of pounds for it. I need better treatment than that. I could not even ride this morning—had to leave my horse and walk home. The pain was vile."

Saxby looked at him sympathetically.

"Well, try a couple of weeks' rest in bed, as Mrs. van Cannan suggests.
You know that I can keep things going all right."

"And Mr. Saltire will continue to turn the prickly-pears into ogres and hags," said his wife, with her childlike smile. "When you get up again, he will have a whole army of shrivelled monsters ready for you."

It is true that this was Richard Saltire's business on the farm—to rid the land of that bane and pest of the Karoo, the prickly-pear cactus. The new governmental experiment was the only one, so far, that had shown any good results in getting rid of the pest. It consisted in inoculating each bush with certain poisons, which, when they entered the sap of the plant, shrivelled and withered it to the core, making its large, pale, flapping hands drop off as though smitten by leprosy, and causing the whole bush to assume a staggering, menacing attitude that was immensely startling and grotesque. Many of the natives were now afraid to go about on the farm after dusk. They said the prickly-pears threatened them, even ran after them, intent on revenge.

Christine had heard Mr. van Cannan say that his father knew the man whose grandfather was the first Dutchman to introduce the prickly-pear into the Karoo. It was a great treasure then, being looked upon as good fodder for beast and ostrich in time of drought, and the boy used to be beaten if he did not properly water the leaves which were being laboriously preserved on the great trek into the desert. Unfortunately, the preservation had been so complete that it was now the ruin of many a fine Karoo estate, springing up everywhere, smothering other growths and destroying, with its tiny multitudinous thorns, the stomachs of the cattle, who love too much its watery leaves. Mr. van Cannan was one of the farmers rich enough to take drastic steps to save his farm. Saltire was doing it for him very thoroughly and efficiently.

"How much longer do you expect to be?" asked van Cannan.

"Oh, another three weeks ought to finish the job," said Saltire. "But, as you know, they are most persistent things. When you think they are done for, you find them sprouting green again below the wound, and have to give them another dose."

"Three weeks!" muttered van Cannan, with moody eyes. He looked to Christine like a man suffering with sickness of the soul. Everyone supposed the rest-cure definitely settled on, but, with the contrariness of an ailing child, he suddenly announced determinedly, "I shall leave for East London this afternoon."

The children were called to kiss him good-bye, and they clustered round him.

"Take care of them for me," he said, with a piercing wistfulness, to Christine. "Take care of my boy."

Then he turned brusquely to Saxby, making arrangements for a mule-cart to be ready at two o'clock to drive him into Cradock, the nearest large town, where he would have to spend the night before proceeding farther by rail.

Christine could not but be struck by the words he had used, and mused over them wonderingly while she tucked Rita and Coral under their mosquito-curtains. It was her habit to spend this hour with Roddy and a story-book. But today he hovered restlessly, showing no inclination to settle down, and seeming full of some suppressed excitement. At last, he whispered in her ear:

"Don't forget where you said you would come with me—to see Carol and the others." Christine wondered if old Sophy was one of the others, and, even in the noontide heat, she felt a chill.

"All right, Roddy," she agreed slowly. "Wait till I get a sunshade, though. It is dreadfully hot."

She shaded him as much as herself while they threaded their way through the shrubs that seemed to simmer in the grey-brown heat.

Almost every South African farm has its private cemetery. It is the custom to bury the dead where they have lived, and often the graveyard is in the shadiest corner of the garden, where the women sit to sew, the men bring their pipes, and children spread their playthings upon the flat, roughly hewn tombstones.

At Blue Aloes, the place of the dead was hidden far from the haunts of the living, but the narrow, uncertain path led to it at last—a bare, sun-bleached spot, secluded but unshaded by a gaudy-blossomed hedge of cactus. A straight, single line of graves, less than a dozen in number, lay blistering in the sunshine. Some were marked with slabs of lime-worn [Transcriber's note: time-worn?] stone, upon whose faded lettering little green rock-lizards were disporting themselves. The last two in the line had white marble crosses at their heads, each bearing a name in black letters, and a date. The preceding one, too, was fairly new, with the earth heaped in still unbroken lumps upon it, but it bore no distinguishing mark of any kind. Death appeared to have been fairly busy in recent times at Blue Aloes. The date on the end grave was no older than six months.

Little Bernard Quentin van Cannan lay there, sleeping too soon at the age of three and a half. Roddy pronounced his brief but sufficiently eloquent epitaph.

"He was Coral's twin. A tarantula bit him—one of the awful big poisonous ones out of the aloe hedge."

The next cross registered the resting-place of Carol Quentin van Cannan—drowned a year back, at the age of nine. Christine's sad gaze travelled to the third and unmarked mound.

"Is that Sophy's grave?" she asked softly, for shrivelling on the lumps of earth lay a bunch of poppies that she had seen Roddy gathering the day before, and now remembered wondering where he had disappeared to afterward. Roddy did not answer. He was staring before him with manful eyes that winked rapidly but shed no tears. His lips were pursed up as if to whistle, yet made no sound. At the sight of him and the withered poppies in the place where never a flower of memory blossomed, hot tears surged to the girl's eyes. It was wistful to think of a child remembering when all others forgot.

"No one ever comes here but me," he said, at last.

Christine got rid of her tears by turning her back on him and pressing them away with her fingers, for she knew that emotion embarrasses and pains children, and she wanted to help this small, brave man, not hurt him.

"You and I will come here often, Roddy. We will turn it into a garden, and make it blossom like the rose—shall we?"

"Yes, yes!" he cried eagerly. "'Blossom like the rose'—that comes out of the Bible! I have heard daddy read it. But we must not talk about it to mamma. It makes her too sad to come here, or even talk about it. Mamma doesn't like sad things."

Suddenly, the strange quietude of the place was invaded by the sound of voices. They were far-off voices, but both the girl and the child started as though caught in some forbidden act, and instinctively took hands. A moment later they were hurrying away from the lonely spot, back by the way they had come. Half-way home they came upon Richard Saltire and the squad of Kafirs who carried his implements and liquids. Theirs were the voices that had been heard. Work had begun on the territory so thickly sewn with prickly-pears that lay between farm and cemetery.

Saltire, with sleeves rolled up, was operating with a syringe upon the trunk of a giant bush, but he turned round to throw a smile to Roddy.

"Hello, Rod!"

"Hello, Dick!" was the blithe response. "Gr-r-r! You giving it to that old bush?"

"Rather! He's getting it where the chicken got the ax. Like to have a go at him?"

"Oh—oh—yes!"

Roddy delightedly grasped the syringe, and was instructed how to fill and plunge it into the green, dropsical flesh of the plant. The Kafirs stood looking on with grave, imperturbable faces. Christine sat down on a rock and, from the rosy shadow of her parasol, observed the pair. She was astonished at this revelation of intimacy. Saltire's satirical blue eyes were full of warm affection as he looked at the boy, and Roddy's manner toward him contained a loving familiarity and trust she had never seen him exhibit to any one. It was interesting, too, to watch the man's fine, capable hands manipulating his instruments and his quick eye searching each bush to select a vulnerable spot for the virus of death. His movements had the grace and energy of one whose every muscle is trained by service and in perfect condition. Only men who hail from cold climates retain this characteristic in Africa. Those born in its disintegrating heats are usually overtaken in the early thirties by physical weariness or, as some choose to call it, "slackness" that only fine moral training can overcome.

He was good to look at, too, this man in spotless white clothes, the blueness of his eyes throwing up the clear tan of his face, his burnished hair lying close to his head. Christine thought rather sadly that the presence on the farm of any one so sane and fearless-looking would have been a great comfort to her, if only he had not been one of the people whose ways troubled her most.

It was with difficulty that she at last got Roddy away, he was so evidently under the forestry man's spell. Almost she felt that spell herself when he began talking to her, looking deep into her eyes while he explained his work; but suddenly it seemed to her that those blue eyes were explaining something quite different, and, flushing furiously, she made haste to take Roddy's hand and end the interview by walking away.

There was considerable trouble during the afternoon with Rita and Coral. If Christine turned her back for a moment, they flew out into the sunshine, hatless, disporting themselves like baby ostriches. Reproaches were received with trills of laughter, warnings of punishment with trusting, happy eyes.

When, at last, Christine had them safely absorbed in a table-game, it was to realize that Roddy had suddenly disappeared. Calling Meekie to take charge of the little girls, she hastened, with beating heart, in search of the boy. Instinct took her in the direction of the dam, and she caught him up just as he had reached its brink. He looked at her brightly, no sign of shamefacedness or sulkiness on him, but would give no further explanation than that he "only wanted to peep in."

"But, Roddy, how could you be so disobedient, dear? And you remember what your mother said this morning?"

"Yes, I remember; but I did not promise. If I had promised, I would not have gone."

"Well, will you promise me, darling?"

But at that he broke away from her and ran toward the house, singing,
"Just a little peep-in—just a little peep-in."

She felt more than slightly dispirited. There were three bad nights behind her, and the day had been particularly tiring. Though young and energetic, and with an extraordinary sense of love and responsibility toward these naughty, attractive children, she wondered, for a weary moment, whether she could stand the racket.

The work of governessing was new to her. Any work was new to her, and governessing in Africa is as different to governessing in England (which is bad enough) as plowing cultivated land is to opening up virgin soil. But life had unexpectedly laid the burden of work upon Christine Chaine, and having put her hand to the plow, she did not mean to turn back. Only, for once, she was glad when nightfall brought the hour when she could leave her charges for a while in someone else's care.

Once the children were safely in bed, it was Meekie's task to sit beside them until Christine had dined and rested, and chose to come to bed. Meekie belonged to the kraal people, but she had white blood in her, like so many natives, and spoke very good English.

That all the men on the farm should turn up to dinner that evening did not seem to Christine so much a cause for surprise as for contempt. In her short but not too happy experience of life, she had, like a certain great American philosopher, discovered that the game of life is not always "played square" when there is a woman in it. Of course, it was comprehensible that all men liked a good dinner, especially when it was not marred by hymns and long prayers, fervent to the point of fanaticism. Equally, of course, the pretty hostess, with a charming word of welcome for everyone, was an attraction in herself. But, somehow, it sickened the clear heart of Christine Chaine to see this jubilant gathering round a dinner table that was usually deserted, and from which the host had just departed, a sick and broken man. She thought the proceedings more worthy of a lot of heartless schoolboys delighting in a master's absence than of decent, honest men.

And whatever she thought of the Hollanders and colonials, whose traditions were unknown to her, it was certain that her scorn was redoubled for the one man she knew to be of her own class and land.

Yet there he sat at the elbow of his hostess, calm and smiling, no whit removed from his usual self-contained and arrogant self. Christine gave him one long look that seemed to turn her violet eyes black; then she looked no more his way. She could not have told why she hated this action in him so bitterly. Perhaps she felt that he was worthy of higher things, but, if questioned, she would probably have laid it at the door of caste and country. All that she knew, for a poignant moment, was an intense longing to strike the smile from his lips with anything to hand—a wine-glass, a bowl, a knife.

Mercifully, the moment passed, and all that most of them saw was a young girl who had come late to dinner—a girl with a rather radiant skin, purply black hair that branched away from her face as though with a life of its own, and violet eyes that, after one swordlike glance all round, were hidden under a line of heavy lashes. The black-velvet dinner gown she wore, simple to austerity, had just a faint rim of tulle at the edges against her skin. Only an artist or connoisseur would have observed the milkiness of that skin and the perfect lines under the sombre velvet. Small wonder that most eyes turned to the lady who tonight took the place of ceremony at the table, and who, as always, was arrayed in the delicate laces and pinkish tints that seemed to call to notice the gold of the hair, the rose of her cheek, and the golden-brown shadows of her eyes.

The little cloud of sadness and loss that hovered over her, yet never descended, was like the rain-cloud that sometimes threatens a June day. It seemed everyone's business to drive that cloud away, and everyone but Christine applied themselves nobly to the task. At the end of the long dinner, all were so properly employed in this manner that apparently no one noticed the departure of the silent, scornful-lipped governess, and she was able to make her exit without notice or remonstrance.

For a little while she walked up and down in the garden under the rays of a new and early-retiring slip of moon. Then, with a pain at her heart that she had hoped it was for ever out of the power of life to deal her, she retired to the nursery, relieved the coloured nurse from her watch, and went quietly to bed.

For fully an hour afterward she heard the echo of laughter and voices in the front veranda—sometimes the chink of glasses. Later, Mrs. van Cannan sang and played waltz-music to them in the drawing-room. At last the men departed, one by one. Mrs. van Cannan was heard calling sharply for her night lemonade and someone to unlace her frock. Next, the servants shuffled softly homeward through the dusk. The old Cape cook, who had quarters somewhere near the kitchen, went the rounds, locking up. The clang of the iron bar falling into its bracket across the great front door echoed through the house. Then all was still.

In the sinister, brooding peace of the desert that ensued, the night noises presently began to make themselves heard.

A cricket somewhere in the house set up a sprightly cheeping. Far, far away, an animal wailed, and a jackal distressfully called to its mate. Then something

laughed terribly—rocking, hollow laughter—it might have been a hyena.

Christine Chaine was a Catholic. She crossed herself in the darkness and softly repeated some of the prayers whose cadences and noble phrases seem to hold power to hush the soul into peace. She hoped at this time they would hush her mind into sleep, but for a long while many impressions of the day haunted her. Sometimes she saw the twitching shoulders and tormented gaze of a sick man, then the smiling blond-and-pink beauty of a woman. Sometimes a pair of blue eyes, with riddles in them that she would not read, held her; then graves—graves in a long arid line. At last she slept, the sleep of weariness that mercifully falls upon the strong and healthy like a weight, blotting out consciousness.

Then—taps on the shutter, and words:

"*Mind the boy—take care of the boy!*"

They were soft taps and whispered words, but, like the torment of dropping water, they had their effect at last. The girl sat up in bed again, her fingers pressed to her temples, her eyes staring, listening, listening. Yes—they were the same eternal taps and words. With the dull desperation of fatigue, she got out of bed and approached the window.

"Who are you? What are you? Tell me what to do," she said quietly.

In the long silence that followed, there was only one answer—the subtle odour of rottenness stole into the room.

She never knew afterward what possessed her to take the course she did. Probably if she had not gone to sleep in the strength and peace of prayers, and awakened with the protection of them woven about her, she would have taken no course at all. As it was, she knew she had got to do something to solve the mystery of this warning. It did not occur to her to get out of the window. The right thing seemed to be to make her way very quietly through the house, let herself out by the front door, and come round to the window where the warning thing waited. It would not hurt her, she knew. It was a hateful Thing, but that its intentions were benevolent was a conclusion that had forced itself upon her soul.

Groping for her dressing-gown, she found it and put it on without striking a light. And though she carried a box of matches in her hand, she believed she would not need them, for the way was perfectly simple and well known to her—

a long passage that led to the dining-room, at one end of which was the great, iron-barred front door.

Her feet and hands found the way quietly, and she reached the front door without incident, but when she felt for the great bar whose strident clanging in its bracket had been a last signal of night within the house, her hand encountered nothing. Wonderingly she slid her fingers up and down the polished oak. At last she realized that the bar hung loose; the door was merely on the latch. Someone beside herself who dwelt within the house had business without its portals that night and was still abroad!

For the first time, the girl's purpose faltered. A slow fear pierced her, and her feet refused to take her farther. The thought flashed into her mind that, if she passed the door, she might find herself locked out, with the night—and she knew not what beside.

Even as she stood there hesitating, trying to collect her courage, a sound—the soft tread of a foot on gravel—told her that some other being was close by. There came the same stealthy tread in the porch. Swiftly she shrank back into the embrasure of one of the long windows, thankful for the green blinds against which her dark dressing-gown would give no sign. With one full sleeve, she shrouded her face. She had suddenly become terribly aware of being nothing but a slight girl in a nightgown and wrap, with bare feet thrust into straw slippers. She remembered stories she had heard of struggles in the darkness with powerful natives, and her heart turned to water.

It seemed to her the most horrible moment of her life while she stood shrinking there in the shadow, listening to the door open and close, the bar being replaced, the quiet, regular breathing of that other person. Whoever it was, his movements were calm and undisturbed, but Christine could see nothing, only a large, dim outline that moved sure-footedly across the room, opened another door on the far side, closed it, and was gone.

There were so many other doors, so many other passages. All Christine could be certain of and thankful for was that it was not her door and her passage that had swallowed up the mysterious night-walker. It was some little time before she collected sufficient fortitude to creep back whence she had come, her plan unfulfilled, her courage melted. She was bitterly ashamed, yet felt as if she had escaped from some great evil. Once in the nursery, she locked the door, lighted a

candle, and, after she had looked to ascertain that the children were sleeping soundly, she opened her dressing-case and took out a little box of cachets that had been prescribed for her a year before when bitter trouble had stolen sleep for many a night. She felt, and with some reason, that this was an occasion when it would not be too cowardly to resort to artificial means of restoring her nerves by sleep. For though fright and surprise had bereft her, for the time being, of her nerve, her firm spirit was neither beaten nor cowed. She meant to see this thing through, and her last waking thought was a murmured prayer for help to steel her heart against terrors that walked by night, and to resist to the utmost any menace of evil that should approach the little children in her charge.

PART II

There followed some tranquil days of which nothing broke the peaceful monotony. The children were extraordinarily tractable, perhaps because Mrs. van Cannan seemed too preoccupied to lay any injunctions upon them. True, Roddy made one of his mysterious disappearances, but it was not long before Christine, hard on his heels, discovered him emerging from an outhouse, where she later assured herself that he could have come to no great harm, for it was merely a big barn stacked with grain and forage, and a number of old packing cases. Nothing there to account for the expression he wore—that same suggestion of tears fiercely restrained which she had noticed when they were looking at the unmarked grave in the cemetery. It wrung her heart to see his young mouth pursed up to whistle a tune that would not come, the look of longing in eyes where only happiness and the divine contentment of childhood should dwell; but the boy volunteered no information, and she did not press him. She wanted his confidence, not to have him regard her as a sort of jailer.

Every day, in the cool of the early morning, while the others were still sleeping, he and she visited the graveyard, starting the good work of making it blossom like the rose, as Christine had promised. They planted lilies and geraniums over the little brothers, and edged the lonely, unmarked grave with a species of curly-leaved box common to that part of the country and which grew rapidly. It was Roddy's fancy, too, to cover this grave with portulaca—a little plant bearing starry flowers of vivid hues that live for a day only. He chose plants that bore only scarlet and golden blossoms.

"She liked those two colours," he told Christine, smiling. "She said that when we were babies we were all like that—very red, with yellowy golden hair."

Christine, looking at the bright head and the fresh cheeks so rare in a South African child, readily understood. But she could not help wondering, as before, at the loyal little heart that remembered so well the words and fancies of a dead

woman—when all others forgot!

Nearly always on returning from these morning excursions they met Saltire, rapidly wreaking destruction upon the district. Already, scores of the prickly-pears through which they must wend their way were assuming the staggering attitude characteristic of them as the sap dried and they died of their wounds. Sometimes, one side of a bush would shrivel first, causing it to double up like a creature agonizing. Some crouched like strange beasts watching to spring. Others thrust themselves ominously forward with projected arms, as if ready to grapple. Some brandished their flat leaves as the painter Wiertz, in his famous picture of *Napoleon in Hell*, made wives and mothers brandish their menacing fists at the man who had robbed them of their loved ones. All wore a look that suggested both agony and revenge. Christine understood, at last, why the Kafirs hated to go about the land after dark, averring that the afflicted bushes threatened and chased them. She began herself to experience an inexplicable feeling of relief, as though at the overcoming of an enemy, when a great spire of smoke betokened the final uprooting and burning of a clump of bush. For fire was the ultimate element used to transform the pest from a malignant into a beneficent factor, and, as aromatic ash, it became of service to the land it had ruined so long. Almost, the process seemed an exposition of Job's words: "When thou hast tried me with fire, I shall come forth as gold."

It was a curious thing how the "personality" of the bushes appeared to affect them all. Saltire at his work gave the impression of a fighter concentrating on the defeat of an enemy. Roddy would dance for joy before each staggering bush. The impassivity of the natives departed from them when they stood about the funeral pyres, and clapping of hands and warlike chanting went heavenward with the smoke. Christine and Roddy often lingered to watch these rejoicings; indeed, it was impossible at any time to get the boy past Saltire and his gang without a halt. The English girl, while standing somewhat aloof, would nevertheless not conceal from herself the interest she felt in the forestry man's remarks, not only on the common enemy, but his work in general.

"They have a great will to live, Roddy—much stronger than you and I, because we dissipate our will in so many directions. I've met this determination before in growing things, though. There are plants in the African jungle that you have to track and trail like wild beasts and do murder upon before they will die. And this old prickly-pear is of the same family. If a bit of leaf can break off and fly past you, it hides itself behind a stone, hastily puts roots into the ground, and grows

into a bush before you can say 'Jack Robinson.' Your farm will be a splendid place when we've got rid of all these and replaced them with the spineless plant. Prickly-pear without spines is a perfect food for cattle and ostriches in this climate."

Thus he talked to Roddy, as if the latter were already a man and in possession of his heritage—the wide lands of Blue Aloes; but always while he talked, he looked at and considered the girl who stood aloof, wearing her air of world-weariness like a veil over the youth and bloom of her.

And she, on her side, was considering and reading him, too. She liked him better, because, since that first night of Mr. van Cannan's departure, he had absented himself from the dinner-table. That showed some glimmer of grace in him. Still, there was far too much arrogance in his manner, she thought, and decided that he had probably been spoiled by too facile women. Nothing blunts the fine spiritual side of a man's character so rapidly as association with women of low ideals. The romance of her own life had been split upon that rock. She had known what it was to stand by and see the man she loved with all the pure idealism of youth wrecked by the cheap wiles of a high-born woman with a second-rate soul. Perhaps her misfortune had sharpened her vision for this defect in men. Certainly, it had tainted her outlook with disdain. She sometimes felt, as Pater wrote of *Mona Lisa*, that "she had looked upon all the world, and her eyelids were a little weary." At any rate, when she found Dick Saltire's blue eyes looking into hers so straightly and significantly that it almost seemed as if an arrow came glancing from him to her, she merely told herself, with an inward-smiling bitterness, that no doubt the same phenomenon occurred when he spoke to Mrs. van Cannan.

Some days after the departure of the master of the farm for the coast, the post-bag arrived from Cradock, and, as Mrs. van Cannan was still sleeping, it fell to Christine, as it had sometimes done before, to distribute the mail. Among her own large batch of home letters it was so unusual to find a South African one that she opened it immediately, and was astonished to discover it to be from Bernard van Cannan. It had been written from Cradock on the evening of the day he left the farm.

"DEAR MISS CHAINE:

"I want once more to commend to you the very special care of my children while I am away. My wife, not being very strong, is unable to see as much of them as she would wish, and I do not like her to be worried. But there are many dangers on a farm, and I have already, by most unhappy chance, lost two young sons. Both deaths occurred during absences of mine and were the result of accident, though, at the time, they were surrounded by every loving care and security. Perhaps, therefore, you will understand the kind of superstitious apprehension I feel about Roderick, who is the last and only one left to come after me in the old place. He has always needed special looking-after, being extremely curious and impulsive while, at the same time, nervous and reticent.

"Perhaps it is only my illness that makes me full of fears, but *I can assure you that had it not been for the great confidence you have inspired in me from the first*, I should not have left the farm, so anxious do I continually feel about the welfare of my third and last son. However, I trust in God I shall be back soon, better in health, to find that all is well.

"Do not worry my dear wife with this matter. She is of a disposition that cannot cope with sorrow and trouble, and I would not for the world cloud her happy outlook with my morbid fancies. Keep my confidence, and remember that I rely on you with all my heart to guard my little ones.

"Sincerely yours,

"BERNARD VAN CANNAN.

"P. S.—I append my last London address, and if I am detained for any time, I shall be glad to hear from you."

A vision of the gloomy-eyed man, twitching with pain and nerves, rose up before her eyes as she folded the letter, and she resolved to write to him at once, allaying his fears as much as possible by an assurance of her devotion. She was sitting in the summer-house at the time, the children beside her, bent over their morning lessons. Through the creeper-framed doorway, she could see the walls and veranda of the old farm, glaring white in the fierce sunlight, but with every line expressing such harmony as only the old Dutch architects seem to have had the secret of putting into the building of South African homesteads. Before the front door stood three gnarled oaks, which yet bore the marks of chains used by

the early van Cannans to fasten up the cattle at night, for fear of the hostile Kafirs who at set of sun came creeping over the kopjes. Scores of fierce, man-eating dogs were kept to deal with the marauders, and there were still loopholes in the white walls from which those within had watched and defended.

But those days were long past. Nothing now in the gracious building, with its shady stoeps and high, red roof, toned melodiously by age, to betoken battle, murder, and sudden death. It seemed strange that sinister forebodings should attach themselves in any mind to such harmony of form and colour. Yet Christine held in her hand the very proof of such thoughts, and, what was more, knew herself to be obsessed by them when darkness took the land. For a moment even now, looking out at the brilliant sunshine, she was conscious of a falter in her soul, a moment of horrible loneliness, a groping-out for some human being stronger than herself of whom to take counsel. A thought of Saltire flashed across her. He looked strong and sane, kind and chivalrous. But could he be trusted? Had she not already learned in the bitter school of life that "Ye have no friend but resolution!"

A shadow fell across the doorway. It was Saxby, the manager. He gave her his pleasant, melancholy smile.

"I wonder if Mrs. van Cannan is up yet," he said, in his full, rich voice. "There are one or two farm matters I want to consult her about."

Christine looked at the watch on her wrist and saw that it was past eleven.

"Oh, I should think so, Mr. Saxby. The closing of all the shutters is usually a sign that she is up and about."

It is, in fact, a practice in all Karoo houses to close every window and shutter at about ten o'clock each morning, not throwing them open again until sunset. This keeps the interiors extraordinarily cool, and, as the walls are usually whitewashed, there is plenty of light.

"I expect I shall find her in the drawing-room," Saxby remarked, and passed on. Christine saw him leave again about half an hour later. Then the sound of waltz-music within the closed house told that Mrs. van Cannan was beguiling away the rest of the long, hot morning in a favourite fashion. At noon, the heat, as usual, made the summer-house untenable, and its occupants were driven indoors.

Lunch introduced the only excitement the quiet monotony of the day ever offered, when the men came filing into the soft gloom of the dining-room, bringing with them a suggestion of a world of work that still went on its way, come rain, come shine. All of them took advantage of the custom of the climate to appear coatless. Indeed, the fashion of shirts was sometimes so *décolletée* as to be slightly embarrassing to English eyes. Only Saltire paid the company the compliment of unrolling his sleeves, buttoning the top button of his shirt, and assuming a tie for the occasion.

Everyone seemed of opinion that the summer rains were brewing and that was the reason of the insufferable heat.

"We'll have a couple of days of this," prophesied Andrew McNeil, "then down it will come with a vengeance."

"The land wants it, of course, but it will be a confounded nuisance to me," remarked the forestry expert.

"Oh, Mr. Saltire, you are insatiable in your work of murder," smiled his hostess. "Are you as merciless in all your dealings?" She looked at him with provoking eyes. Christine hardened herself to hear an answer in the same vein, but was as agreeably relieved as surprised.

"I want to get the work done," said Saltire briefly.

"I never knew any one so anxious to leave us before," grumbled Mrs. van Cannan prettily. "You must be terribly bored with us all."

"Never less in my life."

The answer was so impersonal as to be almost a sign of boredom in itself, and Mrs. van Cannan, little accustomed to have her charming advances met in such fashion, turned away with a pucker on her brow to a more grateful audience. At the same moment, an irresistible impulse drew Christine's glance to Saltire in time to receive one of those straight, significant looks that indescribably disturbed her. Nothing there of the impersonality his words had betrayed! It was a clear message from a man to a woman—one of those messages that only very strong-willed people who know what they want have the frankness, perhaps the boldness, to send. Even an indifferent woman would have been stirred to a knowledge of dangerous sweetness, and she knew that she had never been quite

indifferent to the personal magnetism of Dick Saltire. As it was, she was shaken to the very soul of her. For a moment, she had the curious illusion that she had never lived before, never had been happy or unhappy, was safe at last in some sure, lovely harbour from all the hurts of the world. It was strange in the midst of everyday happenings, with the talk and clatter of a meal going on, to be swept overwhelmingly away like that to a far place where only two people dwelt—she and the man who looked at her. And before the illusion was past, she had returned a message to him. She did not know what was in her look, but she knew what was in her heart.

Almost immediately it was time to take the children and go. Mrs. van Cannan delayed them for a moment, giving some directions for the afternoon. If Christine could have seen herself with the children clinging to her, she would have been surprised that she could appear so beautiful. Her grace of carriage and well-bred face had always been remarkable, but gone were disdain and weariness from her. She passed out of the room without looking again at Dick Saltire, though he rose, as always, to open the door for her.

An afternoon of such brazen heat followed that it was well to be within the shelter of the shuttered house. But outside, in the turmoil of dust and glare, the work of the farm went on as usual. Christine pictured Saltire at his implacable task, serene in spite of dust and blaze, with the quality of resolution in his every movement that characterized him, the quality he had power to put into his eyes and throw across a room to her. The remembrance of his glance sent her pale, even now in the quiet house. Only a strong man, sure of himself and with the courage of his wishes, would dare put such a message into his eyes, would dare call boldly and silently to a woman that *she* was his *raison d'être*, that, because of her, the dulness and monotony of life had never bored him less, that he had found her, that she must take of and give to him. She knew now that he had been telling her these things ever since they had met, but that she had turned from the knowledge, until, at last, in an unguarded moment, it had reached and overwhelmed her, flooding her soul with passionate joy, yet filling her with a peace and security she had never known, either in the old farmhouse or since the long-ago day when all her brave castles of youth and love had crashed down into the dust. Gone now was unbelief, and disdain, and fear of terror that stalked by night; a rock was at her back, there was a hand to hold in the blackest darkness. Never any more need she feel fear and spiritual loneliness. Withal, there was the passionate joy of adventure, of exploration in sweet, unknown lands of the heart, the launching of a boat upon a sea of dreams. Life sang to Christine Chaine like

a nightingale under the stars.

How tenderly and patiently she beguiled the heat-weary children throughout that long afternoon! There was no feeling of haste upon her. She knew that sweetness was travelling her way, that "what is for thee, gravitates toward thee," and is vain to seek before the appointed hour. It might come as even-song to a seemingly endless day, or dawn following a fearsome night. But it was coming. That was all that mattered!

The directions Mrs. van Cannan had given, as they left the luncheon, were to the effect that, when the siesta hour was over, the children were to have possession of the drawing-room until it was cool enough for them to go for their accustomed walk. This plan was to continue as long as the hot weather lasted.

"I think it is not very healthy for any of you," she said amiably, "to stick all day in a room you have to sleep in at night."

Christine could not help being surprised at her giving up the coolest and quietest room in the house, and one that had hitherto been forbidden ground to the children. However, here they were, installed among gaily cretonned furniture, the little girls dashing about like squirrels in a strange cage, Roddy, apparently more at home, prowling softly around, examining things with a reverent yet familiar air.

"I remember when we used to come here every day," said Rita suddenly, and stood stock-still with concentrated eyes, like one trying to catch the memory of a dream. "When was it, Roddy?"

He looked at her steadily.

"When our old nannie was here."

Rita fixed her blue eyes on his.

"There was someone else here, too," she insisted.

"Sophy always brought us here," he repeated mechanically.

"I remember old Sophy," murmured Rita thoughtfully. "She cried dreadfully when she went away. She was not allowed to kiss us because she had turned all

silver colour." She trilled into gay laughter. "Mamma told me that it might have turned us all silver, too."

"I kissed her before she went, anyway!" burst from Roddy fiercely.
"And I would not have cared if it had turned me to silver."

Christine glanced wonderingly at him, astonished at this new theme of silver.

"But if she went away, how is it that she is buried here, Roddy?"

"She isn't."

"But the grave we covered with portulaca—" She stopped abruptly, for the boy's face had assumed the look she could not bear—the look of enduring that only those hardened to life should know. "Come and listen to this story of a magic carpet on which two children were carried over strange lands and cities," she said gently, and drew them all round her, with an arm through Roddy's.

The windows and shutters were thrown open at sunset, and the children had their tea in the dining-room. Afterward, they went for a long walk across the sands toward the kopjes, which had receded into distance again and in the west were turning purple with mauve tops. But the rest of the sky was coloured a threatening greenish bronze, with monstrous-shaped clouds sprawled across it; and the air, though sunless, was still sand-laden and suffocating, with the promise of storm.

It would have been easy for Christine to take the children toward the vicinity in which Saltire was occupied and where he would now be putting up his instruments and dismissing his workers for the night, but some instinct half modest, half self-sacrificing made her postpone the happiness of seeing him again, and guided her feet in an opposite direction. She was certain that, though he had refrained from dining at the farm except for the one night of Mr. van Cannan's departure, she would see him there that evening, and she dressed with special care and joy in the beauty of her hair, her tinted, curving face, and the subtle glamour that she knew she wore as the gift of happiness.

"How sweet it is to be young and desirable—and desired by the one man in the world!" was the half-formed thought in her mind as she combed her soft, cloudy black hair high above her face and fixed it with a tall amber comb. But she would not converse too clearly with her heart. Enough that she had heard it

singing in her breast as she had never thought to hear it sing again. She was glad of the excuse of the heavy heat to discard her usual black gown and be seen in a colour that she knew belonged to her by right of her black hair and violet eyes—a deep primrose-yellow of soft, transparent muslin.

Saltire was late for dinner, but he came, as she had known he would, taking his usual place next to Mrs. van Cannan and almost opposite Christine, who, for the evening meal, was always expected to sit at the main body of the table. She was busy at the moment hearing from Mr. McNeil all about the process of ostrich-feather plucking which was to begin next day, but she did not miss a word of the late comer's apologies or the merry raillery with which they were met by his hostess. The latter, as usual, gathered unto herself every remark uttered at the table, and the attentions of every man, though she never bothered much about old Andrew McNeil. But if she had the lip-service, Christine was very well aware to whom was accorded, that night, the service of the eyes.

Every man there had become aware of the youth and beauty which, till that day, she had worn as if veiled, and they were paying the tribute that men will proffer until the end of time to those two gifts of the gods. She knew it without vanity, but also without embarrassment, for she had tasted triumph before in a world more difficult to please than this, surrounded by opponents worthier of her steel than Isabel van Cannan. The little triumph only pleased her in that she could offer it as a gift to the man she loved. For here is another eternal truth, that all men are one in pride of possession of that which excites envy and admiration in other men. All women know this with a gladness that is salted by sorrow.

Saltire's eyes were the only ones she could not meet with serenity. She felt his glance on her often, but always when she tried to lift hers to meet it, her lids seemed weighted by little heavy pebbles.

She meant to overcome this weakness, though, and look at him even as she had answered at noon; but, in the middle of dinner, while she yet strove against the physical inability, her resolution was disturbed by a strange occurrence. A wild scream of fear and horror came ringing from the nursery. Without a thought for anything but that it was Roddy's voice, Christine sprang from the table. Down the long passage and into the nursery she ran, and, almost bursting into the room, caught the boy in her arms. He was not screaming now, but white as death and staring with fearful eyes at the bed, on which the bedclothes were pulled back, with Meekie peering over it. The two little girls, round-eyed and frightened, were sitting up in their cots. For a moment, Roddy stayed rigid in her arms; then he hid his face against her arm and broke into convulsive sobs.

"It's a big spider—all red and black—like the one that bit Bernard!"

And, in fact, from where she stood, Christine could see the monstrous thing, with its black, furry claws, protruding eyes, and red-blotched body, still crouching there in a little hollow at the end of the bed. Only, the person leaning over examining it now was not Meekie but Saltire, who had reached the nursery almost on her heels.

"I put my foot against it and touched its beastly fur!" cried Roddy, and suddenly began to scream again.

"Roddy! How dare you make that abominable noise?"

Mrs. van Cannan's voice fell like a jet of ice-cold water into the room. Behind her in the doorway loomed the tall figure of Saxby, the manager, with McNeil and the others. Christine's warm heart would never have suggested such a method of quieting the boy, but it had its points. Roddy, though still shaking and ashen, stood up straight and looked at his mother.

"All about a silly spider!" continued the latter, with cutting scorn.
"I am ashamed of you! I thought you were brave, like your father."

That flushed Roddy to his brows.

"It has fur—red fur," he stammered.

"You deserve a whipping for your cowardice," said Mrs. van Cannan curtly, and walked over to the bed. "The thing is half dead, and quite harmless," she said.

"Half dead or half drunk," McNeil jocosely suggested. "I never saw a tarantula so quiet as that before."

"The question is how long would it have stayed in that condition?" said Saltire significantly. "For you are mistaken about its harmlessness, Mrs. van Cannan. It is one of the most poisonous and ferocious of its tribe."

They had got the strangely sluggish beast off the bed by knocking it with a stick into an old shoe, and were removing it. Christine only vaguely heard the remarks, for Roddy hid his eyes while it was being carried out, and was trembling violently against her. It seemed amazing to her that Mrs. van Cannan did not realize that there was more than mere cowardice in his behaviour. The trouble was so plainly psychological—the memory of the loss of a loved little brother subtly interwoven with horror of that particular species of venomous insect. Christine herself had a greater hatred of spiders than of any creeping things, and well understood the child's panic of disgust and fear. It filled her with indignation to hear Mrs. van Cannan turn once more and lash the boy with a phrase before she swept from the room.

"Miserable little coward!"

In a moment, the girl was kneeling on the floor beside the unhappy child, holding him tight, whispering words of love and comfort.

"No, no, darling; it is only that she does not understand! We will explain to her —I will tell her later why you hated it so. Wait till your daddy comes back. I am sure he will understand."

So she strove to comfort him, while Meekie coaxed the little girls back to the horizontal attitude under their sheets.

"Don't make me go back into that bed," whispered Roddy fearfully.

"No; of course not. Don't worry; just trust me, darling!" She turned to Meekie. "I will stay with them now, Meekie. You may go."

"But has the missy had her dinner?" asked the Cape woman politely.

"I have had all I want, thank you, Meekie."

The thought of going back to the dinner-table—to eat and join in the talk and laughter while this small boy whom she loved stayed alone with his wretchedness revolted her. Perhaps later, when he slept, she might slip out into the garden for a while. In the meantime, she beguiled him over to her own bed, and having taken off the coverlet to show him that it held no lurking horrors, she made him get in and curl up, and she knelt beside him, whispering softly so as not to disturb the others, reassuring him of her belief in his courage whilst understanding his horror, confessing her own hatred of spiders, but urging him to try and fight against his fear of them. She told him stories of her own childhood, crooned little poems to him, and sang old songs softly, hoping and praying that he would presently fall asleep. But time slipped by, and he remained wide-eyed, gripping her hand tightly, and only by the slightest degrees relaxing the nervous rigour of his body under the coverlet. Suddenly, he startled her by a strange remark:

"If I could only get into the pink palace with Carol, I'd be all right."

The girl looked down into the distended pupils gazing so wistfully at her, and wondering what new psychological problem she had to deal with. She knew she must go very warily, or defeat her own longing to help him. At last, she said very tenderly,

"The world is full of pink palaces, Roddy, but we do not always find them until we are grown up."

He looked at her intently.

"Carol found one at the bottom of the dam," he whispered slowly. "He is there now; it's only his body that is buried in the graveyard."

She smoothed his hair gently with her hand.

"Carol is in a more beautiful palace than any we find here on earth, darling."

The secret, elfin expression crossed his face, but he said nothing.

"And you must not believe that about the dam," she warned him gravely. "There is nothing at the bottom of it but black mud, and deep water that would drown you, too, if you went in."

"I *know* the palace is there," he repeated doggedly. "I have seen it. The best time to see it is in the early morning or in the evening. All the towers of it are pink then, and you can see the golden wings of the angels shining through the windows."

"That is the reflection of the pink-and-gold clouds in the sky at dawn and sunset that you see, dear silly one. Will you not believe me?"

He squeezed her hand lovingly.

"Mamma has seen it, too," he whispered. "You know she was with Carol when he fell in, and she saw him go into the door of the palace and be met by all the golden angels. She tried to get him back, but she cannot swim, and then she came running home for help. Afterward, they took Carol's body out and buried him, but, you know, he is really there still. Mamma has seen him looking through the windows—she told me—but you must not tell any one. It is very secret, and once I thought I saw him, too, beckoning to me."

Christine was staggered. That so dangerous an illusion had been fostered by a mother was too bewildering, and she hardly knew how to meet and loyally fight it. It did not take her long to decide. With all the strength at her command, she set to work to clear away from his mind the whole fantastical construction. He clung to it firmly at first, and, in the end, almost pleaded to be left with the belief that he had but to step down the dam wall and join his brother in the fair pink palace. She realized now what tragedy had been lurking at her elbow all these

days. Remembering the day when she had caught him up at the brink of the dam, she turned cold as ice in the heat-heavy room. A moment later, she returned to her theme, her explanations, her prayers for a promise from him that never, never would he go looking again for a vision that did not exist. At last he promised, and almost immediately fell asleep.

As for Christine Chaine, she stayed where she was on the floor, her head resting on the bed in sheer exhaustion, her limbs limp. All thought of going into the garden had left her. Sitting there, stiff-kneed and weary, she thought of Saltire's eyes, and realized that there had come and gone an evening which she must count for ever among the lost treasures of her life. Yet she did not regret it as she rose at last and looked down by the dim light on the pale, beautiful, but composed little face on the pillow.

She lay long awake. Roddy's bed was too short for her, and there was no ease in it, even had her mind and heart been at rest. All the fantasies she had beguiled from the boy's brain had come to roost in her own, with a hundred other vivid and painful impressions. The night, too, was fuller than usual of disquietude. The wind, which had been rising steadily, now tore at the shutters and rushed shrieking through the trees. There was a savage rumble of thunder among the hills, and, intermittently, lightning came through the shutter-slats.

When, above it all, she heard a gentle tapping, and sensed the whispering presence without, her cup of dreadful unease was full. But she was not afraid. She rose, as she had done one night before, and put on her dressing-gown. For a while, standing close to the shutters, she strained her ears to catch the message whose import she knew so well. The idea of speaking to someone or something as anxious as herself over Roddy had banished all horror. She longed for an interview with the strange being without. There was nothing to do but attempt, as before, to leave the house by the front door.

Down the long passage and through the dining-room she felt her way, moving noiselessly. When she came to the door, she found it once again with the bar hanging loose. More, it was ajar, and stirring (sluggishly, by reason of its great weight) to the wind. But her hand fell back when she would have opened it wide, for there were two people in the blackness of the porch, bidding each other good-night with kisses and wild words. Clear on a gust of wind came Isabel van Cannan's voice, fiercely passionate.

"I hate the place. Oh, to be gone from it, Dick! To be gone with you, my darling! When—when?"

He crushed the question on her lips with kisses and whisperings.

Christine Chaine stole back from whence she came, with the strange and terrible sensation that her heart was being crushed between iron fingers and was bleeding slowly, drop by drop, to death. Once more, life had played her false. Love had mocked her and passed by on the other side.

Some of the men wondered, next day, how they could have had the illusion that Miss Chaine was a beautiful girl. The two Hollanders, who were great friends, discussed the matter after lunch while they were clipping feathers from the ostriches. One thing was quite clear to them both: she was just one of those cold Englishwomen without a drop in her veins of the warmth and sparkle that a man likes in a woman. Mrs. van Cannan now—she was the one! Still, it was a funny thing how they should have been taken in over Miss Chaine. Someone else had been taken in, too, however, and with a vengeance—that fellow Saltire, with his "sidey" manners. *He* had got a cold douche, if you like, at the hands of the proud one. They had all witnessed it. Thus and thus went the Dutchmen's remarks and speculations, and they chuckled with the malice of schoolboys over the discomfiture of Saltire. For it was well known to them and to the other men that the Englishman had ridden off, in the cool hours of the dawn, to Farnie Marais' place about ten miles away, to get her some flowers. He wanted to borrow an instrument, he said, but it was funny he should choose to go to Marais', who was more famous for the lovely roses he grew for the market than for any knowledge of scientific instruments. Funny, too, that all he had been seen to bring back was a bunch of yellow roses that must have cost him a stiff penny, for old Farnie did not grow roses for fun.

No one had seen Saltire present the roses (that must have happened in the dining-room before the others came in); but all had marked the careless indifference with which they were scattered on the table and spilled on the floor beside the governess's chair. She looked on calmly, too, while the little girls, treating them like daisies, pulled several to pieces, petal by petal. Only the boy Roderick had appeared to attach any worth to them. He rescued some from under the table, and was overheard to ask ardently if he might have three for his own. The answer that he might have them all if he liked was not missed by any one in

the room, though spoken in Miss Chaine's usual quiet tones. It might have been an accident that she walked over some of the spilled roses as she left the room, but certainly she could not have shown her mind more plainly than by leaving every single one behind her. Roddy only, with a pleased and secret look upon his face, carried three of them away in a treasured manner.

Whatever Saltire's feelings were at the affront put upon him, he gave no sign. He was not one who wore his emotions where they could be read by all who ran, or even by those who sat and openly studied him with malice and amusement. His face was as serene as usual, and his envied gift of turning events of the monotonous everyday veld life into interesting topics of conversation remained unimpaired. He had even risen, as always, with his air of careless courtesy, to open the door for the woman who walked over his flowers.

The fact remained, as the manager said to the foreman after lunch, that he had certainly "caught it in the neck," and must have felt it somewhere. Perhaps he did. Perhaps he merely congratulated himself that the little scene when he had given the roses to Miss Chaine had been lost by everyone except the children, who were too young and self-engrossed to value its subtlety.

Either by accident or design, he had come to lunch a little earlier than usual, and as Miss Chaine and the children were always in their seats a good ten minutes before the rest of the party, it was quite simple for him, entering quietly and before she even knew of his presence, to lay the bunch of fragrant roses across her hands. A sweep of heavy delicious perfume rose to her face, and she gave a little rapturous "Oh!"

"I thought you might like them," said Saltire, with a sort of boyish diffidence that was odd in him. "They are just the colour of the dress you wore last night."

In an instant, her face froze. She looked at him, with eyes from which every vestige of friendliness or liking had completely disappeared, and said politely, but with the utmost disdain:

"Thank you, I do not care for them. Pray give them where they will be appreciated."

She pulled her hands from under the lovely blooms and pushed them away as if there were something contaminating in their touch. Some fell on the table, some on the floor. For a moment, Saltire seemed utterly taken aback, then he said

carelessly:

"Throw them away if you like. They were meant for you and no one else."

She gave him a curiously cutting glance, but spoke nothing. As the sound of voices told of the approach of the other men, he walked to his place without further remark, and had already taken his seat when Mrs. van Cannan, followed by Saxby, entered. They were talking about Saxby's wife, and Mrs. van Cannan looked infinitely distressed.

"I am so sorry. I will go and sit with her this afternoon and see if I can cheer her up," she said.

"It will be very kind of you," said Saxby gratefully. "I have never known her so low."

"It must be the weather. We are all feeling the heat terribly. If only the rains would break."

"They are not far off," said Andrew McNeil cheerfully. "I prophesy that tonight every kloof will be roaring full, and tomorrow will see the river in flood."

"In that case, the mail had better go off this evening at six," said Mrs. van Cannan. "It may be held up for days otherwise. I hope everyone has their letters ready? Have you, Miss Chaine?"

"I have one or two still to write, but I can get through them quickly this afternoon."

Christine avoided looking directly at her. She felt that the woman must see the contempt in her eyes. It was hard to say which she detested more of the two sitting there so serenely cheerful—the faithless wife and mother, or the man who ate another man's salt and betrayed him in his absence. It made her feel sick and soiled to be in such company, to come into contact with such creeping, soft-footed, whispering treachery. She ached to get away from it all and wipe the whole episode from her mind. Yet how could she leave the children, leave Roddy, desert the father's trust? She knew she could not. But very urgently she wrote after lunch to Mr. van Cannan, begging him to return to the farm as soon as his health permitted and release her from her engagement. She expressed it as diplomatically as she was able, making private affairs her reason for the change;

but she could not and would not conceal the fervency of her request.

There was a brooding silence in the room where she sat writing and thinking. Roddy, for once, tired out from the night before, slept under his mosquito-net, side by side with the little girls, and Christine, looking at his beautiful, classical face and sensitive mouth, wondered how she would ever be able to carry out her plan to leave the farm. Who would understand him as she did, and protect him? Even the father who loved him had not known of the secret, fantastic danger of the dam. And the woman who should have destroyed the fantasy had encouraged it! But God knew what was in the heart of that strange woman; Christine Chaine did not—nor wished to. All she wished was that she might never see her again. As for Saltire, her proud resolve was to blot him from her memory, to forget that he had ever occupied her heart for a moment. But—O God, how it hurt, that empty, desecrated heart! How it haunted her, the face she had thought so beautiful, with its air of strength and chivalry, that now she knew to be a mockery and a lie!

She sat in the shuttered gloom, with her hands pressed to her temples, and bitter tears that could no longer be held back sped down her cheeks. In all the dark hours since she had stolen back to the nursery, overwhelmed by the discovery of a hateful secret, she had not wept. Her spirit had lain like a stricken thing in the ashes of humiliation, and her heart had stayed crushed and dead. "Cold as a stone in a valley lone." Now it was wakened to pain once more by the scent of three yellow roses carefully placed by Roddy in a jug on the table. The scent of those flowers told her that she must go wounded all her life. She could "never again be friends with roses." He had even spoiled those for her. How dared he? Oh, how dared he come to her with gifts of flowers in his hands straight from a guilty intrigue with another man's wife?

The children stirred and began to chirrup drowsily, and she hastily collected herself, forcing back her tears and assuming the expressionless mask which life so often makes women wear. She was only just in time. A moment later, Isabel van Cannan came into the room with a packet of letters in her hands.

"Oh, Miss Chaine," she said, with her pretty, child-like air, "would it be too much to ask you to take down these letters to the store presently? The mail is to leave about four o'clock. I have to go out myself by and by, but the Saxbys' house is in the opposite direction, as you know, and I am really not able to knock about too much in this heat."

"Certainly I will take them," said Christine. "But the children?"

"They must not go, of course. Indeed, I would not ask you to go out in this blaze, but I don't like to trust letters with servants. There is no hurry, however. Finish your own letters first, then bring the children to my room. They will amuse themselves there all right."

By the time Christine had donned a shady hat and gloves, Mrs. van Cannan had made out a long list of articles she required at the store. The household things were to be sent in the ordinary way, but she begged Christine to choose some coloured cottons that she required for new pinafores for the little girls and bring them along, also to look through the stock of note-paper for anything decently suitable, as her own stock had given out. It was the type of errand Christine was unaccustomed to perform and plainly foreign to her recognized duties; but it was difficult to be unobliging and refuse, so she took the letters and the list and departed.

The store was a good half-mile off and the going (in hot weather) not very fast. Then, when she got there, the storekeeper was busy with his own mail, and she was kept waiting until various goods had been packed into the cart before the door and driven away with the mail behind four prancing mules. Looking out cottons and writing-paper occupied some further time. Stores on farms are poky places, and the things always hidden away in inaccessible spots. At any rate, the best part of an hour had passed before Christine was again on her way home, and she had an uneasy feeling that she had been too long away from the children, especially from Roddy. Suddenly, her haste was arrested by an unexpected sight. A tiny spot of colour lay right in her pathway on the ground. It was only a yellow rose-leaf, but it brought a catch in Christine's breath and her feet to an abrupt halt. How had it come there? If it had fallen from one of Roddy's roses, it meant that he had been out of doors since she left! That set her hurrying on again, but, as she walked, she reflected that of the many roses left in the dining-room, some might easily have been carried off by the servants and leaves dropped from them. Still, she was breathless and rather pale when she reached the house, wasting not a moment in finding her way to Mrs. van Cannan's room.

Rita and Coral were amusing themselves happily, winding up a tangle of bright-coloured silks. But Roddy was gone! Neither was Mrs. van Cannan there.

Christine sat down rather suddenly, but her voice gave no sign of the alarm she

felt.

"Where is Roddy?"

"He went out," answered Rita, perching herself upon Christine. "Mamma is going to give us each a new dolly if we get this silk untangled for her."

"How long ago did Roddy go?"

"Just after you went. But you mustn't be cross with him; Mamma gave him permission."

"Mamma is gone, too, to see poor Mrs. Saxby," prattled Coral.

Christine put them gently away from her.

"Well, hurry up and earn your new dollies," she counselled, smiling;
"I'll be back very soon to help you."

In the dining-room, she looked for the discarded roses and found them gathered in a dying heap on a small side-table. In the nursery, she found two of Roddy's roses in the jug. The third was missing!

Of one thing she felt as certain as she could feel of anything in the shifting quicksands of that house, and that was that Roddy had not gone to the dam, for he had promised her earnestly, the night before, that never again would he go there without her. Could he, then, have gone to the cemetery? Even that seemed unlikely, for he loved her to go with him on his excursions thither. Where else, then? The rose-leaf she had passed on the road stuck obstinately in her memory, and now she suddenly remembered that the place she had seen it was near the barn from whence she had once found Roddy emerging. Perhaps he had gone there to amuse himself in his own mysterious fashion. He might even have been there when she passed. Oh, why had she not looked in? But the omission was easily rectified. In two minutes she was out of doors again, walking rapidly the way she had come.

Roddy was not in the barn, however, and it seemed at a glance as harmless a place as she had thought it before. An end of it was full of forage, and one side piled high with old farm-implements and empty cases. Rather to the fore of the pile stood one large packing case, sacking and straw sticking from under its

loose lid. Christine had just decided there was nothing here to warrant her scrutiny when, lying in front of this case, she saw something that drew her gaze like a magnet. It was another yellow rose-leaf.

"Roddy!" she cried, and was astonished at the sharp relief in her voice, for she had suddenly made up her mind that the boy was there hiding from her. There was no answer to her call. Very slowly then she went over and lifted the lid of the case. It was quite loose, and edged with a fringe of strong nails that had once fastened it to the box, but which now were red with rust. A quantity of sacking, of the kind used for winding about fragile goods, lay heaped at the top and came away easily to her hand, exposing that which lay firmly wedged at the bottom. What she had expected to find she did not know. What she did find astonished her beyond all things. It was a beautifully chiselled white marble tombstone in the shape of a cross. The whole of the inscription was clear of dust or any covering save one fading yellow rose. Awed, deeply touched, and feeling herself upon the verge of a mysterious revelation, Christine lifted Roddy's yellow rose and read the simple gold-lettered inscription:

TO THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED WIFE, CLARICE VAN CANNAN (BORN QUENTIN), WHO DIED AT EAST LONDON, JUNE 7, 19—, AND WAS BROUGHT BACK TO REST NEAR HER SORROWING HUSBAND AND CHILDREN. (AGED 27)

The date of death was two years old.

Much that had been dark became clear to Christine. She understood at last. The woman whose sad fate was here recorded, cut off at twenty-seven—that fairest period in a happy woman's life—was Roddy's mother, the mother of all the little van Cannan children, living and dead. The woman who had ousted her memory from all hearts save loving, loyal Roddy's was the second wife and stepmother.

Much in the attitude of the big, blond, laughing woman who reigned now at Blue Aloes, false to her husband, careless of the fate of his children, was accounted for, too. The sorrows of the van Cannans had never touched her. How should they? Had not Christine heard from her own lips, the night before, the confession of her love for another, and her hatred of Bernard van Cannan's home. How, then, should she love Bernard van Cannan's children?

The cruel taunt of cowardice she had flung at Roddy was explained. The boy's sensitive, loyal nature was a book too deep for her reading, the memory of his loved ones too sweet and tenacious for her to tamper with. Nevertheless, she had understood him well enough to set a bond on his honour never to speak of the dead woman who slept in the unmarked grave while her tombstone lay in the rubble of an outhouse. The spell by which she had won the man to forgetfulness and neglect was not the same as that by which she had induced silence in the boy. A promise had been wrung from him—perhaps even under duress! Suddenly, terror swept over Christine Chaine. It was revealed to her, as in a vision, that the pink-and-white woman who laughed with such childlike innocence by day and whispered so passionately to her lover by night could be capable of many things not good for those who stood in the way of her wishes.

Why had two of the van Cannan sons died sudden deaths? Why was the lure of a pink palace at the bottom of the dam fostered in the third? How had the tarantula come into his bed, and why had someone said that it acted like a thing drugged or intoxicated, and that, when it woke up, it would have been a bad lookout for Roddy?

"God forgive me!" cried the distracted girl to herself. "Perhaps I am more wicked than she, to harbour such thoughts!"

Then, as if at a call that her heart heard rather than her ears, she found herself running out of the barn and across the veld in the hot, stormy sunshine, in the direction of the Saxbys' bungalow.

She had never been there before, though often, in their walks, she and the children had passed within a stone's throw of the little wood-and-iron building. The door was always shut, and the windows hidden by the heavy creeper that covered in the stoep. She had often thought what a drab and dreary life it must be for a woman to live hidden away there, and even the children never passed without a compassionate allusion to "poor Mrs. Saxby, always shut up there alone."

A dread of seeing the sad, disfigured creature seized her now, as she reached the darkened stoep, and held her back for a moment. She stood wondering why she had come and how she could expect to find Roddy there where the children had never been allowed to penetrate. But, in the very act of hesitation, she heard the boy's voice ring out.

"No, mamma; *please don't make me do it!*"

In a couple of swift steps she was in the stoep and her hand on the knob of the door. But the door would not open. There were two narrow windows that gave onto the stoep, and, without pause, she flew to the one that she judged to be in the direction of the child's voice and laid hands upon it. It was closed and curtained with thick blue muslin, but there were no shutters, and to her forceful push the lower part jerked up, and the curtains divided. She found herself standing there, the silent spectator of a scene in which all the actors were silent, too amazed or paralyzed by her unexpected appearance.

PART III

The room was a common little sitting-room with a table in the centre, at either end of which sat Mrs. van Cannan and Mr. Saxby. Roddy was between the table and the wall, and Christine's first glance showed him white-faced and staring with fascinated, fearful eyes at a large cardboard box, with a flat-iron on its lid, which stood on the table. The two elder people were each holding small knobkerries, that is, stout sticks with wired handles and heavy heads made by the natives. A revolver lay at Saxby's elbow.

The little tableau remained stationary just long enough for Christine to observe all details; then everyone acted at once. Roddy flew round the table and reached her at the window, sobbing:

"Oh, Miss Chaine! Miss Chaine!"

Saxby laid his knobkerrie on the table and lit a cigarette, and Mrs. van Cannan, rising from her seat with an air of dignity outraged beyond all bounds, addressed Christine.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion, Miss Chaine? How dare you come bursting into Mr. Saxby's house like this?"

"I heard Roddy call out," was the firm answer, "and I consider it my duty to protect him." She had the boy well within her reach now, and could easily have lifted him out of the low window, but it seemed an undignified thing to do unless it became absolutely necessary.

"Protect him! From what, may I ask?" The woman's voice was like a knife.

"I don't know from what. I only know that he was in grave fear of something you were about to do."

Saxby interposed with a soft laugh.

"You surely cannot suppose Roddy was in any danger from his mother, Miss Chaine—or that I would harm him?"

He certainly did not look very harmful with his full, handsome features and melancholy smile.

"Your action is both ridiculous and impertinent," continued Mrs. van Cannan furiously. "And I can tell you that I will not stand that sort of thing from any one in my house," she added, with the air of one dismissing a servant: "You may go. Roddy, come here!"

Roddy gave a wild cry.

"Don't leave me, Miss Chaine. They've got a snake in that box, and they want me to let it out."

There was blank silence for a moment; then Christine spoke with deliberation.

"If this is true, it is the most infamous thing I have ever heard."

Even Isabel van Cannan was silenced, and Saxby's deprecating smile passed. He said gravely:

"Mrs. van Cannan has a right to use what methods she thinks best to cure her boy of cowardice."

"Cowardice!" Christine answered him scornfully. "The word would be better applied to those who deliberately terrify a child. I am astonished at a man taking part in such a vile business."

She was pale with indignation and pity for the boy who trembled in her arms, and in no mood to choose her words.

Saxby shrugged his shoulders with a sort of helpless gesture toward his companion as if to say he had only done as he was told. Mrs. van Cannan gave him a furious glance before returning to Christine.

"Can't you see," she said violently, "that we have sticks here ready to kill the

thing, and a revolver if necessary? Not that it is poisonous—if it had bitten that miserable little worm!" She cast a withering glance at Roddy. He shrank closer to Christine, who judged it time to pull him safely from the room to her side on to the veranda.

"There is nothing miserable about Roddy," she said fiercely, "except his misfortune in having a step-mother who neither loves nor understands him."

That blenched the woman at the table. She turned a curious yellow colour, and her golden-brown eyes appeared to perform an evolution in her head that, for a moment, showed nothing of them but the eyeball.

"That will do," she hissed, advancing menacingly upon Christine. "I always felt you were a spy. But you shall not stay prying here another day. Pack your things and go at once."

"Come, come, Mrs. van Cannan," interposed Saxby soothingly; "I am sure you are unjust to Miss Chaine. Besides, how can she go at once? There is nothing for her to travel by until the cart returns from Cradock."

But the woman he addressed had lost all control of herself.

"She goes tomorrow, cart or no cart!" she shouted, and struck one clenched fist on the other. "We will see who is mistress at Blue Aloes!"

Christine cast at her the look of a well-bred woman insulted by a brawling fishwife, and with Roddy's hand tightly in hers, walked out of the veranda without deigning to answer.

But though her mien was haughty as she walked away from Saxby's bungalow holding Roddy's hand, her spirits were at zero. She had burned her boats with a vengeance, and come out into the open to face an enemy who would stick at nothing, and who, apparently, had everyone at the farm at her side, including the big, good-natured-seeming Saxby.

It would be difficult to stay on at Blue Aloes and protect Roddy if his stepmother insisted on her departure, and she did not see how she was going to do it. She only knew that nothing and no one should budge her from the place. Something dogged in her upheld her from dismay and determined her to take a stand against the whole array of them. She was in the right, and it was her plain duty to do as

Bernard van Cannan had besought, and not go until she could place Roddy in his father's hands with the full story of his persecutions.

"Tell me about it, Roddy," she said quietly, as they walked away. "Don't hide anything. You know that I love you and that your father has trusted you to my care."

"Yes," he assented eagerly; "but how did you know about my real mammie being dead?" His natural resilience had already helped him to surmount the terror just past, and he was almost himself again. "I wanted to tell you, but I had promised mamma not to tell any one."

It was as Christine had supposed. She explained her finding of the tombstone and the yellow rose, but not the rest of her terrible conclusions.

"I put it there," he said shyly. "She always loved yellow and red flowers. I was keeping the other two for her and Carol in the graveyard."

Christine squeezed the warm little hand, but continued her questions steadily.

"What happened after you had been to the outhouse?"

"Mamma was waiting for me on the stoep. She said she wanted me to come with her to see Mrs. Saxby." He added, with the sudden memory of surprise: "But we *didn't* see Mrs. Saxby. I wonder where she was."

The same wonder seized Christine. Where could the unhappy, distraught creature have been hiding while the trial of Roddy was in process?

"What happened then?"

"We just went into the sitting-room, and Mr. Saxby got the box and the knobkerries and his revolver, and mamma said, 'Now, Roddy, there is a snake in that box, and I want you to prove you are not a coward like last night by taking off the lid.'" He shuddered violently. "But I couldn't. Oh, Miss Chaine, am I a coward?" he pleaded.

"No, darling; you are *not*," she said emphatically. "Nobody in their senses would touch a box with a snake in it. It was very wrong to ask you to."

He looked at her gratefully.

"Then you opened the window. Oh, how glad I felt! It was just like as if God had sent you, for my heart felt as if it was calling out to you all the time. Perhaps you heard it and that made you come?"

"I did, Roddy," she said earnestly, "I ran all the way from the outhouse, because I felt you were in need of me."

They were nearly home when they saw Saltire and his boys close beside their path. Roddy was urgent to stop and talk, but Christine made the fact that heavy rain-drops were beginning to fall an excuse for hurrying on, and indeed in Saltire's face there was no invitation to linger, for, though he smiled at Roddy, Christine had never seen him so cold and forbidding-looking.

"He knows that I know," she thought, "and, base as he is, that disturbs him." The bitter thought brought her no consolation. She felt desolate and alone, like one lost in a desert, with a great task to accomplish and no friend in sight or sign in the skies. In the house, she collected the little girls, and they spent the rest of the afternoon together. The storm had broke suddenly, and the long-threatened rain came at last, lashing up the earth and battering on the window-panes amid deafening claps of thunder and a furious gale of wind.

When bath-time came for the children, Christine stayed with them until the last moment, superintending Meekie. She would have given worlds to avoid going in to dinner that night. No one could have desired food less, or the society of those with whom she must partake of it. Yet she felt that it would be a sign of weakness and a concession to the enemy if she stayed away, so she dressed as usual and went in to face the dreary performance of sitting an hour or so with people whom she held in fear as well as contempt, for she knew not from moment to moment what new offence she might have to meet. Only great firmness of spirit and her natural good breeding sustained her through that trying meal.

Saltire did not put in an appearance, for which small mercy she was fain to thank God. Deeply as he had wounded and offended her, she hated to see his face as she had seen it that afternoon. Mrs. van Cannan, oddly pallid but with burning eyes, absolutely ignored the presence of the governess, and her lead was followed by all save Andrew McNeil, who was no man's man but his own, and

always treated the girl with genial friendliness. As a matter of fact, there was but little conversation, for the sound of the rain, swishing down on the roof and windows and tearing through the trees without, deadened the sound of voices, and everyone seemed distrait.

Christine was not the only one who finished her meal hurriedly. As she rose, asking to be excused, Mrs. van Cannan, rising too, detained her.

"I wish to make arrangements with you about your departure tomorrow, Miss Chaine," she said, loudly enough for everyone's hearing. "Kindly come to my room."

There was nothing to be gained by not complying. Christine did not mean to leave the next day, and this seemed a good opportunity for stating her reasons and intentions; she buckled on her moral armour as she followed the trailing pink-and-white draperies down the long passage, preparing for an encounter of steel on steel.

"Close the door," said Isabel van Cannan, and went straight to a table drawer, taking out a small bag full of money.

"I shall give you a month's salary instead of notice," she announced, counting out sovereigns, "though, as a matter of fact, I believe you are not entitled to it, considering the scandalous way you have behaved, plotting and spying and setting the children against me."

Christine disdained to answer this lying charge. She only said quietly:

"It is useless to offer me money, Mrs. van Cannan. I have no intention of leaving the farm until Mr. van Cannan returns."

"What do you mean? How dare you?" began the other, with a return of her loud and insolent manner.

"Don't shout," said Christine coldly. "You only degrade yourself and do not alarm me. I mean what I have said. Mr. van Cannan engaged me, and entrusted his children to my care, not only when I came but by letter since his departure. I do not mean to desert that trust or relegate it to any hands but his own."

"He never wrote to you. I don't believe a word of it."

"You are at liberty to believe what you choose. I have the proof, and shall produce it if necessary. In the meantime, please understand plainly that I do not intend to be parted from Roddy."

A baffled look passed over the other's features, but she laughed contemptuously.

"We shall see," she sneered. "Wait till tomorrow, and we shall see how much your proofs and protests avail you."

"As we both know each other's minds and intentions, there is no use in prolonging this very disagreeable interview," answered Christine calmly, and walked out.

The dining-room was silent and dim. The men had evidently braved the rain for the sake of getting early to their own quarters, and no one was about. In the nursery, the lamp by which she sometimes read or wrote at her own table had not been lighted. Only a sheltered candle on the wash-hand stand cast a dim shadow toward the three little white beds under their mosquito-nets. Meekie had gone, but the quiet breathing of the children came faintly to the girl as she sat down by her table, thankful for a little space of silence and solitude in which to collect her forces. She saw violent and vulgar scenes ahead. Mrs. van Cannan, now that her true colours were unmasked, and it was no longer worth while to play the soft, sleepy rôle behind which she hid her fierce nature, would stick at nothing to get rid of Christine and set the whole world against her. Though the girl's resolution held firm, a dull despair filled her. How vile and cruel life could be! Friendship was a mockery; love, disillusion and ashes; nothing held sweet and true but the hearts of little children. An arid conclusion for a girl from whom the gods had not withdrawn those two surpassing and swiftly passing gifts—youth and beauty.

"To be a cynic at twenty-two!" she thought bitterly, and looked at her white, ringless hands. "I must have loved my kind even better than Chamfort, who said that no one who had loved his kind well could fail to be a misanthrope at forty. And I thought I had left it all behind in civilized England! Cruelty, falseness, treachery! But they are everywhere. Even here, on a South African farm in the heart of a desert, I find them in full bloom."

She bowed her head in her hands and strove for peace and forgetfulness, if for that night only. In the end, she found calmness at least, by reciting softly to herself the beautiful Latin words of her creed. Then she arose and took the

candle in her hand for a final look at the children before she retired. The day had been terrible and full of surprises, but fate had reserved a last and staggering one for this hour. Roddy's bed was empty!

The shock of the discovery dazed her for a moment. It was too horrible to think that she had been sitting there all this time, wasting precious moments, while Roddy was—where? O God, where, and in what cruel hands on this night of fierce storm and stress? When was it that he had gone? Why had not Meekie been at her post as usual? She caught up the light and ran from the nursery into one room after another of the house.

All was silent. The servants were gone, the rooms empty. No sound but the pitiless battering of the rain without. At last she came to Isabel van Cannan's room and rapped sharply. There was no answer, and she made no bones about turning the door-handle, for this was no time for ceremony. But the bedroom, though brightly lighted, was empty. She did not enter, but stood in the doorway, searching with her eyes every corner and place that could conceivably hide a small boy. But there was no likely place. Even the bed stood high on tall brass legs, and its short white quilt showed that nothing could be hidden there. One object, however, that Christine Chaine had not sought forced itself upon her notice—an object that, even in her distress of mind, she had time to find extraordinary and unaccountable in this house of extraordinary and unaccountable things. On the dressing-table was a wig-stand of the kind to be seen in the window of a fashionable *coiffeur*. It had a stupid, waxen face, and on its head was arranged a wig of blond curly hair with long golden plaits hanging down on each side, even as the plaits of Isabel van Cannan hung about her shoulders as she lay among her pillows every morning. The thing gave Christine a thrill such as all the horrors of that day had not caused her. So innocent, yet so sinister, perched there above the foolish, waxen features, it seemed symbolical of the woman who hid cruel and terrible things behind her babylike airs and sleepy laughter.

Atop of these thoughts came the woman herself, emerging *en déshabillé* from her adjoining bathroom. The moment she saw Christine, she flung a towel across her head, but too late for her purpose. The girl had seen the short, crisp, almost snowy curls that were hidden by day under the golden wig, and realized in an instant that she was in the presence of a woman of a breed she had never known —mulatto, albino, or some strange admixture of native and European blood. The golden hair, assisted by artificial aids to the complexion, and her large golden-

brown eyes had lent an extraordinary blondness to the skin. But the moment the wig was off, the mischief was out. The thickness of eyelids and nostril, and a certain cruel, sensuous fulness of the lips and jaw told the dark tale, and Christine wondered how she could ever have been taken in, except that the woman before her was as clever as she was cruel and unscrupulous. A tingling horror stole through her veins as she stood there, sustaining a malignant glance and listening dumfounded to an insolent inquiry as to what further spying she had come to do.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered. "I knocked, and, getting no answer, opened the door, hardly knowing what I did in my distress. Roddy is missing from his bed, and I don't know where to look for him."

The other had turned away for a moment, adjusting the covering on her head before a mirror. She may still have believed that her secret remained unrevealed.

"I haven't the faintest notion of Roddy's whereabouts," she said, "and if he is lost out in this storm, perhaps drowned in one of the kloofs, yours will be the blame, and I will see you are brought to book for it." She spoke with the utmost malice and satisfaction. "Now, get out of my room!"

Christine went. Indeed, she was convinced that for once the woman spoke truth and that Roddy was not there or anywhere in the house. It was out-of-doors that she must seek him. So back to her room on winged feet to get a waterproof and make her way from the house. For once, the front door was barred! Outside, the rain had ceased as suddenly as it had burst from the heavens. Only the wind swished and howled wildly among the trees, tearing up handfuls of gravel to fling against the doors and windows. Afar off was a roaring sound new to her, that, later, she discovered to be the rushing waters in the kloofs that were tearing tumultuously to swell the river a few miles off. Clouds had blotted out moon and stars. All the light there was came intermittently from whip-like lightning flashes across the sky. It helped Christine a little as she stumbled through the darkness, crying out Roddy's name, but she found herself often colliding with trees, and prickly-pear bushes seemed to be rushing hither and thither, waving fantastic arms and clutching for her as she passed. The idea had come to her suddenly to seek Andrew McNeil and ask for his help. He was the only friendly soul of all those on the farm that she could turn to. True, another face presented itself to her mind for one moment, but she banished it with scorn, despising herself for even thinking of Dick Saltire.

She fancied that McNeil lodged at the storekeeper's place, and set herself to find the route she had taken that afternoon—no easy task in the darkness that surrounded her. But at last she saw a twinkle of light, and, approaching closer, found that, by great good luck, she had indeed happened on the store. The door stood open, and she could see the man behind the counter talking to McNeil, who, seated on an upturned case, was smoking peacefully. Someone else was there too—someone whose straight back and gallant air was very familiar to her. Saltire was buying tobacco from the storekeeper. But Christine had no word for him. She went straight to McNeil with her story.

"Roddy is lost!" she cried. "You must please come and help me find him."

The men stared, electrified at her appearance. White as a bone, her beautiful violet eyes full of haunting fear; her hair, torn down by the wind and flickering in long black strands about her face, far below her waist, she looked like a wraith of the storm.

"Roddy lost!" McNeil and the storekeeper turned mechanically as one man to Saltire. It was only the girl who would not turn to him.

"Come quickly!" she urged. "He may be drowning somewhere, even now, in one of the swollen streams." She imagined the tragedy to herself as she spoke, and her voice was full of wistful despair.

"Get her a hot drink." Saltire, flinging the command to the storekeeper, spoke for the first time. "I'll round up the boys and get lanterns for a search." In a few moments there was a flicker of lanterns without, and the murmur of voices.

"Come along, Niekerk!" commanded Saltire, and the storekeeper began to put his lights out. "McNeil, you take Miss Chaine back to the farm."

"No, no; I must come, too!" she cried.

"Impossible," he said curtly. "You will only be a hindrance."

"Then I will go home alone," she said quietly, "and free Mr. McNeil to accompany you."

"Very well—if you think you can find your way. Here is a lantern."

She took it and went her way while they went theirs. Long before she reached the garden round the house, the lantern in her unskilful hands had gone out and she was groping by instinct.

All the weariness and strain of the day had suddenly descended upon her in a cloud. She knew she was near the end of her tether. This life at Blue Aloes was too much for her, after all; she must give it best at last; it was dominating her, driving her like a leaf before the wind. These were her thoughts as she crept wearily through the garden, but suddenly she heard voices and was galvanized into hope, tinged with fear. Perhaps Roddy was found! Perhaps her terror and suffering had been unnecessary. She listened for a moment, then located the speakers close to her in the stoep.

"Dick," a voice she knew was saying, "I am sick of it. Bernard *may* die down in East London, but we shall never get rid of the boy while that English Jezebel is here. And she knows too much now. We had better go. Blue Aloes will never be ours to sell and go back to our own dear island. Everything has gone wrong."

"Nonsense, Issa. You are too impatient. Van Cannan will never come back. He is too full of antimony. As for Roddy, poor kid, he is probably drowned in one of the kloofs and speeding for the river by now—just the sort of adventure his queer little mind would embark on. No one can blame us for *that*, at least. You are far too easily discouraged, my darling. Wait till the morning." The voice was the soft, sonorous voice of Saxby, and a lightning flash revealed to the girl cowering among the trees that it was he who held Isabel van Cannan in his arms.

There were two "Dicks" at Blue Aloes, and Christine, not knowing it, had been guilty of a grave injustice to Richard Saltire! Aghast as she was by the revelation, all her love and faith came tingling back in a sweet, overwhelming flood. For a moment or two she forgot Roddy, forgot where she was, forgot all the world but Saltire, and her attention was withdrawn from the pair in the stoep —indeed, she had no desire to hear their words, now that she was sure they knew no more of the boy's whereabouts than she herself. But the muffled clang of the bar across the front door broke through her thoughts, and she became aware that Saxby had left and Mrs. van Cannan gone in. She was alone in the gaunt darkness, barred out, and with no means of getting into the house; all other doors were locked, as well she knew, and all shutters firmly bolted, including those of the nursery. However, the fact did not worry her greatly, for the thought of being snug and safe while poor Roddy roamed somewhere in the blackness

had no appeal for her. Out here, she seemed, somehow, nearer to him, and to the man whom she now knew she had deeply wronged. Lanterns, twinkling like will-o'-the-wisps in every direction, told of the search going forward, and she determined to stay in the summer-house and wait for what news might come. It was very obscure there, and she knew not what loathly insects might be crawling on the seats and table, but, at any rate, it was shelter from the rain, which now again began to fall heavily.

It seemed to her hours that she sat there while the storm swept round her and the rushing of many waters filled her ears. As a matter of fact, it was less than half an hour before she determined that inactivity was something not to be borne another moment and that she must return and join in the search for Roddy. So out she stumbled across the veld again, in the direction of the lanterns, evading as best she could the prickly-pear bushes, stubbing her feet against rocks and boschies, drenched and driven by the storm. It was old Andrew McNeil whom she found first, and he seemed an angel from heaven after the vile and menacing loneliness, although he was but ill pleased to see her.

"You should be in your bed, lassie," he muttered. "The poor bairn will never be found this night. We've searched everywhere. There's nothing left but the water."

"Oh, don't say that!" she cried woefully, and peered, fascinated, at the boiling torrent rushing down a kloof that but yesterday was an innocent gully they had crossed in their walks, in some places so narrow as to allow a jump from bank to bank. Now it was a turbulent flood of yellow water, spreading far beyond its banks and roaring with a rage unappeasable. While they stood there, staring, Saltire came up.

"You, Miss Chaine! I thought I asked you to return to the farm." His tones, were frigid, but his eyes compassionate. No one with any humanity could have failed to be touched by the forlorn girl, pale and lovely in the dim light.

"I had to come. I could not stay inert any longer."

"We have searched every inch of the land inside the aloes," he said. "He has either fallen into one of the streams or got out beyond the hedge into the open veld—which seems impossible, somehow. At any rate, we can do no more until it is light." He dismissed the natives with a brief: "Get home, boys. *Hamba lalla!*" then turned to McNeil. "Take Miss Chaine's other arm, Mac; we must see

for ourselves that she goes indoors."

She made some sound of remonstrance, but he paid no attention, simply taking her arm, half leading, half supporting her. There was a long way to go. They walked awhile in a silence that had hopelessness in it; then Christine asked:

"Did you search every outhouse and barn?"

"Every one, and the cemetery, too," answered Saltire. "There's not a place inside or out of the farm-buildings we haven't been over—except Saxby's bungalow, and he's hardly likely to be there."

"He was there this afternoon," said Christine slowly. It seemed to her time to let them into the truth.

"What!"

Both men halted in amazement. Such a thing as any one but Mrs. van Cannan going to Saxby's was unknown. Briefly she recounted the incidents of the afternoon. The men's verdict was the same as hers had been.

"Atrocious!"

"Infamous! After that, we will certainly visit Saxby's," decided Saltire. "But, first, Miss Chaine must go home."

"No, no; let me come," she begged. "It is not far. I *must* know."

So, in the end, she got her way, and they all approached the bungalow together. It was in utter darkness, and the men had to rap loud and long before any response came from within. At last Saxby's voice was heard inquiring who the deuce, and what the deuce, etc., etc., at that time of the night—followed by his appearance in the doorway with a candle.

"We want to come in and look for Roddy," said Saltire briefly, and, without further ado, pushed the burly man aside and entered, followed by McNeil. Christine, too, entered, and sat down inside the door. She was very exhausted. Saxby appeared too flabbergasted to move for a moment. Then he remonstrated with considerable heat.

"What do you mean by this? You don't seem to know that you are in my house!"

But the other two had already passed through the empty sitting-room to the one beyond, and were casting lantern-gleams from side to side, examining everything.

"You must be crazy to think the boy is here," Saxby blustered, as they re-emerged. They paid not the slightest attention to him, but continued their search into the kitchen, the only other room of the house.

"No," said Saltire, very quietly, as he came back into the room and set the light on the table; "the boy is not here. But where is Mrs. Saxby?"

Saxby's face had grown rather pallid, but his jaw was set in a dogged fashion.

"That is *my* business," he said harshly.

It was Saltire whose face and manner had become subtly agreeable.

"Oh, no, Saxby; it is all of our business at present. What I find so strange is that nowhere in the house is there any sign or token that a woman lives here, or has ever lived here. It seems to me that needs a little explaining."

"You'll get no explanation from me," was the curt answer.

"I think you had better tell us something about it," said Saltire pleasantly. He held the lantern high, and it lighted up a shelf upon which stood some curious glass jars with perforated stoppers. "I see you have a fine collection of live tarantulas and scorpions. I remember now I have often seen you groping among the aloes. Curious hobby!"

"Get out of my house!" said Saxby, with sudden rage.

"And is the snake still in the box?" asked Saltire, approaching the table where the cardboard box still occupied its central position, with the heavy iron on top of it.

"Don't touch it, for God's sake!" shouted Saxby, lunging forward to stop him, but the deed was already done, though Saltire himself was unprepared for what followed on his lifting the iron. The lid flew up, and, with a soft hiss, something

slim and swift as a black arrow darted across the air, seemed to kiss Saxby in passing, and was gone through the open door into the night.

The big man made a strange sound and put his hand to his throat. He swayed a little, and then sank upon a long cane lounge. Christine noticed that his eyes rolled with the same curious evolution as the eyes of Mrs. van Cannan had performed that afternoon. It was as though they turned in his head for a moment, showing nothing but the white eyeball. She wondered why the other men rushed to the sideboard and opened a brandy-bottle, and while she stayed, wondering, Saxby spoke softly, looking at her with his beautiful, melancholy brown eyes.

"I shall be dead in half an hour. Fetch Isabel. Let me see her face before I die."

She knew him for a bad man, false friend, one who could be cruel to a little child; yet it seemed he could love well. That was something. She found herself running through the darkness as she had never run in her life, to do the last behest of Richard Saxby.

When she and Isabel van Cannan returned, they found him almost gone. Saltire and McNeil had worked over him until the sweat dripped from their faces, but he who has been kissed by the black mamba, deadliest of snakes, is lost beyond all human effort. The light was fast fading from his face, but, for a moment, a spurt of life leaped in his eyes. He held out his aims to the woman, and she fell weeping into them. Christine turned away and stared out at the darkness. Saltire had been writing; a sheet of paper upon which the ink was still wet lay upon the table, and in his hand he held a packet of letters.

"I have told everything, Issa," muttered the dying man. "I had to clean my soul of it."

She recoiled fiercely from him.

'"Told everything?"' she repeated, and her face blanched with fury and despair. It seemed as if she would have struck him across the lips, but McNeil intervened.

"Have reverence for a passing soul, woman," said he sternly. "Black as his crimes are, yours are blacker, I'm thinking. He was only the tool of the woman he loved—his lawful wife."

"You said that?" she raved. But Saxby was beyond recriminations. That dark

soul had passed to its own place. She turned again to the others, foaming like a creature trapped.

"It is all lies, lies!"—then fell silent, her eyes sealed to the newly written paper on the table under Saltire's hand. At last, she said quietly: "I must, however, insist upon knowing what he has said about me. What is written on that paper, Mr. Saltire?"

"If you insist, I will read it," he answered. "Though it is scarcely in my province to do so."

"It is only fair that I should hear," she said, with great calmness.
And Saltire read out the terse phrases that bore upon them the stamp of Death's hurrying hand.

"I am a native of the island Z—— in the West Indies. Isabel Saxby, known as van Cannan, is my wife. While travelling to the Cape Colony on some business of mine, she met van Cannan and his wife and stayed with them at East London. When she did not return to Z——, I came to look for her and found that, Mrs. van Cannan having died, she had bigamously married the widower and come to live at Blue Aloes. I loved her, and could not bear to be parted from her, so, through her instrumentality, I came here as manager. The eldest boy was drowned before my arrival. The youngest died six months later of a bite from one of my specimen tarantulas. The third boy is, I expect, drowned tonight. I take the blame of all these deaths and of Bernard van Cannan's, if he does not return. It was only when all male van Cannans were dead that Blue Aloes could be sold for a large sum enabling us to return to Z——. We would have taken the little girls with us.

"With my dying breath, I take full blame for all on my shoulders. No one is guilty but I.

"[Signed.] RICHARD SAXBY."

"Poor fellow!" said the listening woman gently. "Poor fellow to have died with such terrible delusions torturing him!" She passed her hands over her eyes, wiping away her tears and with them every last trace of violence and anger. Subtly her face had changed back to the babylike, laughing, sleepy face they all

knew so well—the face that had held the dead man in thrall and made Bernard van Cannan forget the mother of his children.

"You will please give me that paper, Mr. Saltire," she pleaded, "and you will please all of you forget the ravings of poor Dick Saxby. It is true that I knew him in the past, and that he followed me here, but the rest, as you must realize, are simply hallucinations of a poisoned brain."

Andrew McNeil's dour face had grown bewildered, but softened. Christine—if she had not seen a little too much, if she had not known that lovely golden hair hanging in rich plaits about the woman's shoulders covered the crisped head of a white negress, if she had not overheard impassioned words at midnight, if she had not loved Roddy so well—might have been beguiled. But there was one person upon whom the artist's wiles were wasted.

"I'm afraid it can't be done, Mrs. Saxby," said Saltire gravely. "The testimony of a dying man is sacred—and Saxby's mind was perfectly clear."

"How could it have been? And do not call me 'Mrs. Saxby,' please." She still spoke patiently, but a smouldering fire began to kindle in her eyes.

"You see," he continued, exhibiting the packet of letters to which he now added the testimony, "I have here the certificate of your marriage to Saxby six years ago in the West Indies—and also proof of the possession by you of a large amount of antimony. You may, of course, be able to explain away these things, as well as Saxby's testimony, but you will understand that I cannot oblige you by handing them over." A silence fell, in which only her rapid breathing could be heard. "There is one thing, however, you can do, that will perhaps help a little. Tell us where Roddy is—if you know."

The smouldering fires leaped to flame. She glared at him like a tigress.

"Oh, you, and your Roddys!" she cried savagely. "If I knew where he was, I would kill him! I would kill any one I could who stood in my way—do you understand? That is how we are made in my land. Oh, that I ever left it, to come to this vile and barren desert!"

She gave one swift, terrible look at the dead man and swept from the house. That was the last time any one of them ever saw her.

When, a little later, Saltire, McNeil, and Christine came out of the dead man's house and left him to his long silence, the black wings of night were lifted, the storm was past, and a rose-red dawn veiled in silver bedecked the sky. The hills were tender with pearl and azure. The earth smelled sweet and freshly washed. A flock of wild duck rose from the dam and went streaking across the horizon like in a Japanese etching. All the land was full of dew and dreams. It was almost impossible to despair in such an hour. Christine felt the wings of hope beating in her breast, and an unaccountable trust in the goodness of God filled her.

"Joy cometh in the morning," she said, half to herself, half to the men who walked, sombre and silent, beside her, and the shadow of a smile hovered on her lips. They looked at her wonderingly. The night of terror had taken toll of her, and she was pale as the last star before dawn. Yet her white beauty framed in hanging hair shone like some rare thing that had passed through fire and come out unscathed and purified in the passing. "*Il faut souffrir pour être belle*" is a frivolous French saying, but, like many frivolous phrases, has its basic roots in the truth. It was true enough of Christine Chaine in that hour. She had suffered and was beautiful. Dour old Andrew McNeil gave a sigh for the years of life that lay behind him, and a glance at the face of the other man; then, like a wise being, he said,

"Well, I'll be going on down."

So Christine and Dick Saltire walked alone.

"Let us hurry," she said suddenly, quickening her pace. "I feel as though something may have happened."

But all was silent at the farm. It was still too early even for the servants to be astir, and the big front door stood open as she and the other woman had left it an hour or so agone.

She left Saltire in the stoep and went within. The little girls slept peacefully, ignorant of the absence of their brother.

All seemed unchanged, yet Christine's searching eye found one thing that was unusual—a twist of paper stuck through the slats of the shutter. In a moment, she had it untwisted and was reading the words printed in ungainly letters upon it.

"Do not worry. Roddy quite safe. Will come back when his father returns."

"I knew," she whispered to herself, "I knew that joy cometh." She looked in the mirror and was ashamed of the disarray she saw there, yet thought that, even so, a man who loved her might perhaps find her fair. As a last thought, she took Roddy's two yellow roses and stuck them in the bosom of her gown. Then she went back to the stoep and, showing Saltire the paper, told him the story of the whispering thing that had sighed so often for Roddy's safety outside her window.

"I feel sure, somehow, that, after all, he is safe, and with that friend who knew more than we did, who knew all the tragedy of the mother and the other two little sons, and feared for Roddy from the first."

Saltire made no answer, for he was looking at the roses and then into her eyes; and when she tried to return the look, the weight of the little stones was on her lids again, and her lips a-quiver. But he held her against his heart close, close—crushing the yellow roses, kissing the little stones from her lids and the quiver from her lips. Then he left her swiftly; for it is a sweet and terrible thing to kiss the lips and crush the roses and go, and a better thing to hasten the hour when one may kiss the lips and crush the roses—and stay.

So she did not see him again for three days. But from the faithful McNeil she heard that the flooded river had been forded and a telegram sent recalling Bernard van Cannan, that a search had been instituted for the mistress of Blue Aloes, who was missing, that a party of farmers had been collected to "sit" upon the body of Richard Saxby, and had pronounced him most regrettably dead from the bite of a black mamba. Whereafter he was buried in a quiet spot near the hedge of blue aloes, from which he had collected so many rare specimens of poisonous reptiles and insects.

On the third day, one of the kloofs on the farm gave up a wig of golden hair, all muddy and weed-entangled. The natives hung it on a bush to dry, and there was much gossip among them that day, hastily hushed when any European person came by.

At nine o'clock the same evening, Roddy was found peacefully sleeping in the bed with Meekie carefully adjusting the mosquito-curtains over him as though he had never been missing. In the morning, he told Christine he had had an awfully funny dream.

"I dreamed I was with my old 'nannie' again—you know—Sophy. She was all covered up, and I could only see her eyes looking through holes in a white thing. She was living all by herself in a hut. I didn't stay with her, but with another old woman, but she used to come and see me every day, and sometimes Meekie used to come, too, and Klaas and Jacoop and all the farm-boys to talk to me. The old woman kept giving me some tea made of herbs that made me feel very quiet and happy, and Sophy told me I should come back soon to the farm when daddy was home again. She was always covered up with white clothes, and I could only see

her eyes, and I love Sophy very much, Miss Chaine, but I can't say she smelled very nice in my dream. It was a very funny dream, though, and lasted an awful long time."

It had indeed lasted three days, but Roddy would never know that, during those three days, he had been incarcerated in the Kafir kraal on the hillside, outside the aloe hedge. It was only when the golden wig was washed up from the river that the mysterious kraal people, silent and impassive, seemingly ignorant of all but their duties, yet knowing every single thing that passed at the farm, even down to the use of the false hair (though Bernard van Cannan himself had never suspected this), gave him back to those who awaited.

If Dick Saltire had not so thoroughly understood the native mind and inspired the confidence of his boys, the truth might never have been known. As it was, it lay in his power to relate to those whom it concerned that a certain woman named Sophy Bronjon, formerly nurse to the van Cannans, and sent away by them to be conveyed to Robin Island because she had developed leprosy, had never left the precincts of the farm, but stayed there, brooding over the little ones she loved. The kraal people to whom (though a mission-educated woman) she belonged had hidden and sheltered her. Through Meekie's instrumentality, she undoubtedly knew all that passed on the farm, and as surely as she had noted the fate of the van Cannan heirs, she recognized Christine as an ally and friend, and had warned her as best she could of the dangers that beset Roddy. It was she who had sighed and whispered through the closed shutters, frightening Christine at first, but in the end engendering trust, and it was she who, on hearing of the narrow escape of Roddy from the tarantula, had made up her mind to spirit him, with the aid of Meekie and the storm, from the farm and its dangers until the return of his father.

With the disappearance of Mrs. van Cannan and the death of Saxby, the menace was removed and the child brought back as silently as he had been taken away. Even he knew no more than that he had dreamed a strange dream.

Saltire went to meet Bernard van Cannan at Cradock, taking with him the papers left in his care by Richard Saxby. There was not so much to explain to the owner of Blue Aloes, as might have been expected. The doctor who treated him for neuritis and found him dying of slow poisoning by antimony had lifted the scales from his eyes, and a little clear thought, away from the spell of the woman known as Isabel van Cannan, had done much to show him that the sequence of

tragedies in his home was due to something more than the callousness of fate. Thus he was, in some measure, prepared for Saxby's confession, though not for the fact that the woman he had adored to fanaticism had never been his wife, or more to him than might have been an adder gathered from his own aloe hedge, with all the traits and attributes peculiar to adders who are gathered to the bosom and warmed there.

He came back to a home from which the spell of the golden, laughing woman was lifted. The evil menace that had hung for so long over the old farm was lifted for ever. Part was buried by the blue-aloe hedge; part of it, plucked from the dregs of an ebbing river, lay in a far grave with no mark on it but the plain words, "Isabel Saxby." While the sad watcher in the kraal had no more need to walk and whisper warnings by night.

It was the children who laughed now at Blue Aloes, merry and free as elves in a wood. There was a glow came out of Christine Chaine that communicated itself to all. She and Saltire were to be married as soon as a Quentin aunt, who was on her way, had settled down comfortably with the children. Afterward, Roddy would live with them at the Cape until his schooldays were over. In the meantime, they walked in a garden of Eden, for the rains had made the desert bloom, and life offered them its fairest blossoms with both hands.

The Leopard

PART I

It was nine o'clock, and time for the first waltz to strike up. The wide, empty floor of the Falcon Hotel lounge gleamed with a waxen glaze under the brilliant lights, and the dancers' feet were tingling to begin. Michael Walsh, who always played at the Wankelo dances, sat down at the piano and struck two loud arresting bars, then gently caressed from the keys the crooning melody of the *Wisteria Waltz*. Two by two, the dancers drew into the maze of music and movement, and became part of a weaving rhythmic, kaleidoscopic picture.

There was not an ill-looking person in the room. The men were of a tanned, hard-bitten, adventurous brand; the women were nearly all pretty or attractive or both, and mostly young. These are the usual attributes of women in a new

country like Rhodesia; for men do not take ugly, unattractive women to share life with them in the wilds, and girls born in such places have a gift all their own of beauty and charm.

Many of them were badly dressed, however, for that, too, is an attribute of the wilds, where women mostly make their own clothes, unless they are rich enough to get frequent parcels from England. There was this to be noted about the gowns: When they were new, they were patchy affairs, made up at home from materials bought in Rhodesian shops; but when well cut, they were battered and worn. Take, for instance, Mrs. Lisle's gown of pale-green satin and sequins. She had been an actress before she married Barton Lisle and came out to the ups and downs of a mining speculator's life, and all her clothes were *réchauffées* of the toilettes in which she had once dazzled provincial audiences. Gay Liscannon's frock of pale rose-leaf silk, with a skirt that was a flurry of delicious little frills and a bodice of lace, sewn with little paste dew drops that folded around her fresh young form like the filmy wings of a butterfly, had Bond Street stamped all over it, as they who ran might read; but it had not been paid for, although it was already tumbling into little tears and tatters. For Gay was no Penelope to sit patiently at home and ply the nimble needle. She had worn it to six dances already, and would probably wear it another six before she summoned up the nerve to present her father with the bill.

Berlie Hallett possessed a London godmother in the shape of an aunt who sent her an occasional frock, and her white-tulle-and-forget-me-nots was all that it should have been except that it had turned to an ashen creamy hue, possessed a long tear down the back (unskilfully concealed by a ribbon sash), lacked about six yards of lace (accidentally ripped off the flounces), and was minus a few dozen posies of forget-me-nots (now in the possession of various amorous young men). Berlie no more than her friend Gay was a sit-by-the-fire-and-mend creature. They were real, live, out-of-door, golfing, hard-riding girls, full of spirits and gaiety and *joie de vivre*.

Berlie, at that moment, was dancing with all her soul as well as her feet, melted in the arms of Johnny Doran, a rich rancher who had proposed to her eight times and whom she intended should propose another ten before she finally refused him. But Gay, the best dancer in Rhodesia, was not dancing. Her feet were tingling, and the music was in her brain like wine, and her heart was burning, and her eyes, though not turned that way, were watching, with impatient wrath, the door across the room. But with her lips she smiled at the little group of

clamouring, protesting men about her, and gave out one brief statement.

"My shoe hurts me."

"Which one?" they clamoured, like a lot of school-boys. "And why? It's the same pair you danced to the dawn in last week—why should it hurt you now? And why does one hurt you? Why not two? Who will bet that it won't stop hurting after this dance?" they inquired of one another, "and who is the man it is hurting for?"

Gay surveyed them dispassionately with her misty, violet eyes.

"Don't be silly," said she serenely; "my shoe hurts."

They gave her up as hopeless and faded away, one by one, bent on finding someone to finish the waltz with. Men out-numbered girls by about four to one in Wankelo. Only Tryon stayed, lounging against the wall, smiling subtly to himself.

"There's Molly Tring just coming in," said Gay to him. "You'd better go and get a dance from her, Dick."

"By and by," said Tryon, with his cryptic smile. "I'm waiting for something."

Even as he spoke, Gay saw across the room the face she had been watching for. A tall man had come into the doorway and stood casting a casual but comprehensive eye about him. He was not in evening dress, but wore a loose grey lounge suit of rather careless aspect, and his short, fairish, curly hair was ruffled as though he had been running his fingers through it. Accompanying him was a small black dog with a large stone in its mouth, which came into the ballroom and sat down. Gay gave one look at the pair of them, and the colour went out of her face. There was more than a glint of passion in the eyes she turned to Tyron, who was smiling no longer.

"I'll finish this dance with you, if you like, Dick."

"My shoe hurts," said Tryon.

She flung away from him in a rage and a moment later, was lost among the rest of the dancers in the arms of one Claude Hayes, a man not too proud to take the

goods the gods offered, even if they were short ratio. Tryon sauntered over to the doorway tenanted by the man in grey, who appeared to be delightfully impervious to the fact that he was the only person on the scene not in evening dress.

"Hello, Tryon!" said he.

"Hello, Lundi! Thought you meant to turn up and dance tonight?"

"Yes, so I did," said Lundi Druro, looking at Tryon with the blithe and friendly smile that made all men like him. "But I forgot."

"I won't ask what you were doing, then," was Tryon's dry comment. To which Druro responded nothing. He was one of those who did before the sun and moon that which seemed good unto him to do, with a sublime indifference to comments. Everyone knew what he was doing when he "forgot," and he didn't care if they did.

"Lundi meant to get married, but he forgot," was a household jest in Rhodesia, founded on a legend from home that, at a certain supper-party, a beautiful actress had inveigled him into making her an offer of marriage, and the ceremony had been fixed for the following day. But, though bride and wedding-party turned up at the appointed hour, the bridegroom never materialized. He had gone straight from the supper-party at the Savoy to the Green Room Club and fallen into a game of poker that lasted throughout the night and all the next day, with the result that all memory of the proposed wedding had faded from his mind. The lady, very much injured in her tenderest feeling (professional and personal vanity), had sued him for a large sum of money, which he had paid without blinking and returned to South Africa, heart-free, to make some more.

"Did you pull in the pot?" asked Tryon, who was a poker player himself.

"No," said Druro regretfully; "hadn't time. I left the game and came away as soon as I remembered this blessed dance."

Just then the waltz came to an end, its last notes trailing off into nothingness and blowing away like a handful of leaves on a breeze. The kaleidoscopic patterns sorted themselves and turned into a circle of perambulating couples, and Gay and her partner passed the two men in the doorway.

"Hi! I want to speak to you," said Druro, whose manners were unique, making an imperious sign at Gay. She looked at him with eyes like frozen violets and walked on. Druro, looking after her, observed that she and her partner passed out of a door leading to the east veranda.

"H'm!" said he, reflective but unperturbed. Then he turned to Tryon.
"Go and get Hayes away from her, Tryon."

"That's a nice job!" commented Tryon.

"Go on, old man!" said Druro, kindly but firmly. "Tell him there's a man in the bar wants to see him on a matter of life and death. He'll thank you for it afterward."

Tryon went grumbling through the ballroom, and Druro stepped back out of the front hall into the street and made a circuit of the hotel. By the time he had reached the east veranda, Tryon was gently leading away the unresisting Hayes, and a rose-leaf shoe, visible between two pots of giant croton, guided the stalker to his prey. He sat down on a seat beside her.

"Did you mean it when you cut me in that brutal manner just now—or was it an accident?" he asked reproachfully.

Gay did not answer or stir. His manner changed.

"Gay, I am most awfully sorry and ashamed of myself. Will you forgive me?"

The girl sat up straight in her chair at that, and looked at him. She was too generous to ignore a frank appeal for pardon, but she had that within which demanded propitiation.

"Have you any explanation to offer?" she asked, and he answered:

"I clean forgot all about it."

She stared at him in exasperation and scorn, her eyes sparkling with anger, and he returned her gaze with his frank and fearless smile. "*M'Schlega*," the natives called him—"the man who always laughs whether good or bad comes to him."

Gay at last withdrew her face into the shadows where he could no longer see it

clearly.

"I suppose you think that disappointing a girl and making her lose a dance is nothing," she said quietly.

"You misjudge me. If I had thought about it at all, it would never have happened. But the whole thing went clean out of my mind until it was too late to dress and get down here in time. Do you think I would *purposely* miss such a keen pleasure as it is to dance with you—and the honour of having your first waltz given me?"

She did not answer, but slowly her anger began to fade.

"I came down here as hard as I could belt, as soon as I remembered."

More anger melted away.

"I haven't even had my dinner yet."

Gay sprang up like a whirlwind.

"Oh, how detestable you are," she said, in a low, furious voice, "with your dinner and your wretched excuses! Do you think I don't know what you were doing that you forgot? Everyone knows what you are doing when you forget your engagements—playing poker and drinking with a lot of low gambling men, wasting your money and your time and all that is fine in you!"

Druro had stood up, too, and faced her with the first bolt she flung. They were quite alone, for the trilling notes of a two-step had swiftly emptied the veranda. He still wore a smile on his lips, but its singularly heart-warming quality had gone from it. His red-brown face had grown a shade less red-brown, and his grey, whimsical, good-natured eyes looked suddenly hard as rock. He addressed her as if she were someone he had never met before.

"You are very plain-spoken!"

"You need a little plain-speaking," she said passionately.

"It is a pity to waste wit and wisdom on an object so unworthy. Obviously, I am past reforming"—his smile had a mocking turn to it now—"even if I wanted to

be reformed."

"*Of course* you don't want to be reformed," said Gay. "No drunkard and gambler ever does."

Her voice was hard, but there was a pain in her heart like the twist of a knife there. She pressed her hand among the laces of her dress, and all the little paste jewels twinkled. Druro noticed them. They engaged his attention, even while he was swallowing down her words like a bitter dose of poison. He was deeply offended. She spoke to him as if he were some kind of a pariah, and it was unpardonable. If she had been a man, he would have known what to do, and have done it quick. But what could be done with a slip of a girl who stood there with a folded lace butterfly around her and looked like a passionate tea-rose twinkling with dewdrops? Nothing, except just smile. But only the self-control gained in many a hard-won and ably bluffed game of life (and poker) enabled him to do it, and to say, with great gentleness:

"I'm afraid that I am as I am. You must take me or leave me at that."

"I'll leave you, then," she said burningly, and slipped past him. At the door of the ballroom she looked back and flung him a last word, "Until you are a different man from the present Lundi Druro."

Druro, entirely taken aback by her decisive retort and action, stood staring long after she had disappeared.

"Well, by the living something or other!" he muttered at last, and walked away from the hotel, filled with wholesale rage and indignation. "The little shrew! Who asked her to take me, I wonder? Or for her opinions on my ways of living? Of all the cheeky monkeys! Pitching into me like that—just because she missed her blessed waltz! *Certainly* it was rotten of me—I don't say it wasn't. *But I forgot*. I *told* her I forgot. Didn't I come straight down here and tell her? Left those fellows—left a jack-pot! O my aunt! And that's all I get for it—a decent and reasonable fellow like me to be called such names just because I distract myself with the only one or two things that can delude one into believing that life is worth living in this rotten country! Drunkard and gambler—fine words to fling at a man like bomb-shells!"

Thus it was with Druro, whom all men hailed as "well-met," and all women liked, and all Rhodesia called "Lundi," though his Christian names were really

Francis Everard. No one had ever called him anything but Lundi since the day he jumped into the Lundi River to save his dog's life. He was on a shoot with half a dozen other men, and they had heavily dynamited a portion of the river to bring up some fresh fish for dinner. Druro's dog, thinking it was a game he knew, jumped in after one of the sticks of dynamite to bring it out to his master, and Druro, like a flash, was in after him and out again, just in time to save himself and the dog from being blown to smithereens. "The bravest action he had ever seen in his life," one of the witnesses described it—and he had been through several native wars and knew what he was talking about, just as Druro, who was a mining expert, knew the risk he was taking when he jumped in among the dynamite.

This was the man who was filled with rage and desolation of heart at the words of "a little monkey of eighteen or nineteen—old dissipated Derek Liscannon's daughter, I thank you! Nice school to come to for temperance lectures! Not that she can help being Derry's daughter, and not that old Derry is a bad sort—far from it—but as hard a drinker as you could find in a day's march. And young Derry hits it up a bit, too, though one of the nicest boys in the world. I've always said that Gay was the sweetest, prettiest little kid in Rhodesia—in Africa, if it comes to that—and now she turns on me like this—blow her buttons!"

He strode along the soft, dusty roads that still had a feel of the veld in them, neither looking nor listing whither he went. It was a soft, plaintive voice that brought him to a standstill, and the realization that he was close to the Wankelo railway station.

"Oh, *can* you tell whether the Falcon Hotel is far from here?"

"The Falcon Hotel, madam?" His hand went instinctively to his head, but there was no hat upon it. "There is surely a bus here that will take you to it," he said, looking about him.

She gave a little laugh.

"Yes; but I don't want my poor bones rattled to pieces in a bus if it is not too far to walk."

Dimly he could see a slight figure swathed in velvety darkness of furs and veils that gave out a faint perfume of violets, and the suggestion of a pale, oval face. Her voice was low and sweet.

"It is not very far," said Druro. "I will gladly show you the way, if you will allow me."

"That is so very kind of you," she answered softly, and fell into step by his side.

As they walked, she told him, with the simple aplomb of a well-bred woman of the world, that she had just arrived by the train from Buluwayo and was going on to a place called Selukine for a week or two. It was not necessary for her to tell him that she was recently from home, for he knew it by her air, her voice, her accent, her rustly garments, the soft perfume of fur and violets, and a dozen little intangible signs and symbols that all had an appeal for him. For Druro was one of those Englishmen who love England from afar a great deal better than they do when at home. He had lived in Rhodesia, off and on, for ten years, and the veld life was in the very blood and bones of him. Yet he always spoke of it as a rotten country, and gravely affirmed that it was bad luck to have to live away from England.

"Give me London lamp-posts," he was in the habit of saying, "and you can have all the veld you want for keeps." And he went home every year, declaring that he was finished with Africa and would never come back. Yet he came back. Also, he had built himself a lovely little ranch-house in the midst of five thousand acres of Sombwelo Forest, where there were no lampposts at all, only trees and a silent, deep river full of crocodiles. It is true that he had never lived there. He only went there and mooned by himself sometimes, when he was "out" with the world. It had occurred to him, since his *rencontre* with Gay, that he would go there very shortly. But now this rustling, softly perfumed lady made him remember his beloved lampposts. It was a year since he had been home, and she meant home.

She was London; she was Torment; she was Town.

Curiosity to see her face consumed him. He felt certain that she was beautiful. No plain woman could be so self-possessed and sure of herself, could give out such subtle charm and fascination. After the brutal and unexpected treatment he had received at the hands of Gay Liscannon, he felt himself under some sweet, healing spell.

They reached the hotel all too soon. The bus, with her luggage on it, had passed

them by the way, and host and porters were awaiting her at the front door. In the light she turned to thank him with a charming smile, and he saw, as he expected, that her face was subtly beautiful.

"I hope we shall meet again, Mr.——" She paused smiling.

"Druro," he supplied, smiling too, "and this is Rhodesia. I'm afraid you can't miss meeting me again—if you try."

He, too, as she very well observed, was good to behold, standing there with the light on his handsome head. She did not miss the potency of his smile. Nor, being a woman who dealt in lights and shades herself, was the flattering significance of his words wasted upon her.

"*Tant meiux!*" she said, and, in case he was no French scholar, repeated it in English, as she held out her slim gloved hand—"All the better!"

Gay and a man she had been dancing with came out and passed them as they stood there smiling and touching hands—a handsome, debonair man and a subtly beautiful woman. Gay took the picture of them home with her, and stayed long thinking of it when she should have been sleeping. Long she leaned from her bedroom window, gazing at the great grey spaces of veld that she loved so much, but seeing them not. All she could see was Druro's face turned cold, the rocklike expression of his eyes when he stared at her as though she had been some stranger—she, who had loved him for years, ever since, as a girl of sixteen, straight from England and from school, she first saw him and found in his clear, careless face and fearless ways the crystallization of all her girlish dreams. Lovely and spirited, decked in the bloom of youth, she had more, perhaps, than her fair share of admirers and adorers. Every man who met her fell, to some extent, in love with her. "Gay fever" it was called; and they all went through it, and some recovered and some did not. But Gay's fever was for Lundi Druro, though she hid it well behind locked lips and a sweet, serene gaze. She could not see him riding down the street, or standing among a group of his fellows (for other men always clustered about Druro), or even catch a glimpse of his big red Argyle car standing outside a building, without a tingling of all the life in her veins.

But she was neither blind nor a fool. Her spirit brooded over Druro with the half-mystical and half-maternal love that all true women accord to the beloved; but

she knew very well that he had never looked her way and that the chances were he never might. He was a man's man. He liked women, and his eyes always lit up when he saw one, but he forgot all about them when they were not there, forgot them easily in cards and conviviality and the society of other men. Once, when someone had attacked him about his indifference to women, he had answered:

"Why, I adore women! But I prefer the society of men—there are fewer regrets afterward."

There was no doubt that he exercised a tremendous personal magnetism upon other men—attracted them, amused them, and influenced them, even obsessed them. The way he could make them do things just out of sheer liking for him almost amounted to mesmerism. It must be added that, though they were often unpractical, crazy, unwise, even dangerous things he influenced others to do, they were never shameful or in any way shady. There wasn't a shameful instinct or thought in the whole of Lundi Druro's composition. Gay, however, divined in him that his power of obsessing the minds of other men had become, or was on the way of becoming, a temptation and obsession to himself. She was wise enough to realize that hardly any man in the world can stand too much popularity, also to see the rocks ahead for Druro in a country where men drink and gamble far too much, and are fast in the clutches of these vices before they realize them as bad habits. It was not for nothing that she was Derek Liscannon's daughter and Derry Liscannon's sister.

She had her worries and anxieties, poor Gay, though she carried them with a stiff lip and never let the world guess how often her heart was aching behind her smile. But, of late, the worst of them had come to be in the fear that Lundi Druro was going the way so many good men go in Rhodesia—full-tilt for the rocks of moral and physical ruin.

This was the reason for her attack on him. She had long meditated something of the kind, though quite certain that he would take it badly. But she had thought that his friendship with her family and herself warranted (she knew that her love did) her doing a thing from which her soul shrank but did not retreat—hurting another human soul so as to help it to its own healing. And it had all ended in disappointment and despair. Nothing to show for it but the picture of him standing happy and gay, his eyes admiringly fixed on another woman! Perhaps the beautiful stranger would solace him for the wound Gay's hand had dealt?

Who could she be? the girl wondered miserably.

But, by the next afternoon, everyone in Wankelo knew that Mrs. Hading, beautiful, unattached, and travelling for her pleasure, was staying at the "Falcon"; and Beryl Hallett, who was also staying there, had already met her and prepared a complete synopsis of her character, clothes, and manners (not to mention features, complexion, and hair) for the benefit of her friend, Gay Liscannon.

"My dear, she has lovely, weary manners and lovely, weary eyes, with an expression as if she doesn't take any interest in anything; but you bet she does!" said Beryl, whose language always contained a somewhat sporting flavour. "You bet she takes an interest in clothes and men and everything that's going! Nothing much gets past those weary eyes. And she is as *chic* as the deuce. Never have we seen such clothes up here. She smells so delicious, too—not scented, you know, but just little faint puffs of fragrance. I wish I knew how to do it. But I don't think you *can* do it without sachets in your corsets and a maid to sew them into all your clothes, and salts and perfumes for your bath, and plenty of tin to keep it all going! Blow! How can poverty-stricken wretches like us contend with that kind of thing, I'd like to know?"

"We don't have to contend with it," said Gay indifferently.

The two girls were sitting in Berlie's mother's private sitting-room upstairs. Gay was in riding-kit and had come to beguile Berlie to go for a canter.

"Oh, don't we?" said the latter emphatically. "You should just see the pile of men that came in to lunch here today—just to have a look at her. The story of her glory has gone forth. She came over to our table and asked if we minded if she sat with us, and then she wound her lovely manners all around mother so that mum thinks she's a dream and an angel. But *I* don't cotton to her much, Gay—and I can feel she doesn't like me, either, though she was as sweet as honey. My dear, she will nobble all our men—I feel it in my bones."

"Let her," said Gay listlessly.

"She even has old Lundi Druro crumpled up—what do you think of *that*?" Gay's charming face turned to a mask. "That gives you an idea of her power," continued Beryl dolorously, "if she can keep Lundi Druro amused. She is sitting in the lounge with him now. They've been there ever since lunch, and he was to

have gone out to his mine early this morning."

Gay jumped up from her chair.

"Are you coming for that ride or not, Berlie? I'm sick of scorching indoors." There were, indeed, two spots of flame in her cheeks.

"Oh, Gay, I can't; I am too G. I. for anything." "G. I." is Rhodesian for "gone in," a common condition for both men and women and things in that sprightly land of nicknames and nick-phrases.

"I'm off, then," said Gay hurriedly.

"Wait a minute—I'll come down with you!" said Beryl, and, rushing to the mirror over the mantel, began to pat her pretty *cendré* hair flat to her head, in unconscious imitation of Mrs. Hading's coiffure.

The two girls went downstairs together. Beryl's arm thrust through her friend's. Gay's horse stood at the side entrance, facing the staircase. She instinctively quickened her pace as they reached the lounge door, but, before she could pass, it opened, and Mrs. Hallett came out.

"Oh, I was just coming to look for you girls. Mrs. Scott is in from Umvuma, Gay, and dying to see you."

Gay gave an inward groan. Mrs. Scott was an old friend of her dead mother's, and about the only woman in the world for whom the girl would have entered the lounge at that moment. As it was, she followed Beryl's mother swiftfoot through the swing door, very upright and smart in her glossy tan riding-boots, knee-breeches, and graceful long coat of soft tan linen. In the matter of riding-kit, Gay always went nap. A ball or day gown she might wear until it fell off her back, but when it came to habits, she considered nothing too good or too recent for her.

For a moment, Marice Hading looked away from the man who sat opposite, amusing her with apt and cynical reflections on life in Rhodesia, and shot a soft, dark glance at the straight back of the girl in riding-kit. Her cleverly appraising eye took in, with the instantaneousness of photography, every detail of Gay's get-up, and her brain acknowledged that she had seldom seen a better one either in Central Park or Rotten Row. But no expression of any such opinion showed in

her weary, disdainful eyes or found its way to her lips, for in the art of using language to conceal her thoughts, Marice Hading had few rivals. What she said to Druro, whose glance had also wandered that way, was:

"One cannot help noticing what a hard-riding, healthy-looking crowd the women of this country are."

The words sounded like a simple, frank statement; but somehow they robbed Gay of some of the perfection of her young and charming ensemble, and made her one of a crowd in which her distinction was lost. Druro felt this vaguely without being able to tell exactly how it happened. He knew nothing of the subtleties of a woman's mind. He had thought that Gay looked rather splendidly young and sweet, and, because of it, a fresh pang shot through him at the remembrance of her scornful dismissal of him the night before. But, with Mrs. Hading's words, the impression passed, and he got a quick vision of Gay as just an ordinary girl who had been extremely rude to him. This helped him to meet with equanimity the calm, clear glance she sent through him.

"Don't you know the little riding girl?" asked Mrs. Hading softly, but something in Druro's surprised expression made her cover the question with a faintly admiring remark: "She's quite good-looking, I think. Who is she?"

"The daughter of an old friend of mine—a Colonel Liscannon," said Druro, speaking in a low voice and rapidly. He would have preferred not to discuss Gay at all, but his natural generosity impelled him to accord her such dignity and place as belonged to her and not to leave her where Mrs. Hading's words seemed to place her—just the other side of some fine, invisible line.

"Ah, one of the early pioneers? They were all by way of being captains and colonels, weren't they?" murmured Marice Hading, still weaving fine, invisible threads.

Druro frowned slightly. "Colonel Liscannon is an old service-man——"

"May I beg for one of those delicious cigarettes you were smoking after lunch?" she said languidly. "And do tell where to get some like them. I find it so difficult to get anything at all smokable up here, except from your clubs."

Thus, Colonel Liscannon and his daughter were gracefully consigned to the limbo of subjects not sufficiently interesting to hold the attention of Mrs.

Hading. If she could not, by reason of Druro's natural chivalry, put Gay just over the wrong side of some subtle social line she had drawn, she could, at least, thrust her out of the conversation altogether and out of Druro's mind. This was always a pastime she found fascinating—pushing someone out of a man's mind and taking the empty place herself—and one at which long practice had made her nearly perfect. So it is not astonishing that she succeeded so well with Druro that, when Gay left her friends and slipped out to her waiting horse, he did not even notice her going. He was busy trying to persuade Mrs. Hading to come for a spin around the Wankelo kopje in his car, and he was not unsuccessful. Only, they went further than the kopje. About six miles out they got a glimpse of a solitary rider ahead, going like the wind. A cloud of soft, ashen dust rising from under the horse's heels floated back and settled like the gentle dew from heaven upon the car and its occupants. Druro was on the point of slackening speed, but Mrs. Hading's pencilled brows met in a line above her eyes, and one of her little white teeth showed in her underlip.

"Get past her, please," she said coldly. "I object to other people's dust."

Druro was about to object in his turn, though, for a moment, he philandered with the delightful thought of getting even with Gay by covering her with dust and petrol fumes. Unfortunately, his gallant resistance to this pleasant temptation would never be known, for Gay suddenly and unexpectedly wheeled to the left and put her horse's head to the veld. The swift wheeling movement, with its attendant extra scuffling of dust, sent a further graceful contribution of fine dirt on to the occupants of the car. It would have been difficult to accuse Gay of doing it on purpose, however, for she appeared blandly unconscious of the neighbourhood of fellow beings. She gave a little flick of her whip, and away she went over a great burnt-out patch of veld, leaving the long, white, dusty road to those who had no choice but to take it.

Mrs. Hading did not love Gay Liscannon any better for her score, but she would have disliked her in any case. Because she was no longer young herself, youth drove at her heart like a poisoned dagger. One of the few keen pleasures she had left in life was to bare her foils to the attack of some inexperienced girl, to match her wit and art and beauty against a fresh cheek and ingenuous heart, and prove to the world that victory was still to her. But when she had done it, victory was dust in her palm and bitter in her mouth as dead-sea apples. For she knew that the wolf of middle age was at her door.

Marice Hading was one of those unhappy women who have drained to the dregs every cup of pleasure they can wrench from life and fled from the healing cup of pain. Now, with the chilly and uncompromising hand of forty clutching at her, pain was always with her—not ennobling, chastening pain, but the pain of those who, having been overfull, must henceforth go empty.

Small wonder that, weary-eyed and dry-souled, she roamed the earth in feverish search of solace and refreshment. Her husband, a generous, affectionate man, condemned by her selfishness to a waste of arid years empty of wife-love or children, had died of overwork, dyspepsia, and general dissatisfaction some eight years before, leaving his widow with an income of two thousand pounds a year, a sum she found all too small for her requirements.

In her fashion, she had been in love several times during her widowhood, but never sufficiently so to surrender her liberty. Horror of child-bearing and a passion for the care and cultivation of her own beauty were further reasons for not succumbing to the temptation to take another man slave in marriage. She had contented herself with holding the hearts of the men who loved her in her hands and squeezing them dry of every drop of devotion and self-sacrifice they could generate.

But the harvest of hearts was giving out, and the wolf was at the door. She had had very bad luck in the last year or two. The hearts that had come her way were as selfish as her own, and knew how to slip elusively from greedy little hands, without yielding too much. For a long time it had seemed to her that the world had become bankrupt of big, generous-giving hearts, and that there were no more little games of life worth playing. Now, suddenly and unexpectedly, she happened upon Wankelo, a green spot in the desert. Here were girls to act as counters in the game she loved to play, and here, too, unless she were grievously mistaken, was a man who had the best of sport to offer. With the hunter's sure instinct for the prey, she recognized unerringly the big, generous qualities of Druro's nature. Here was a heart that could be made to suffer and to give. Besides, he was extremely good-looking. She felt a kind of hopeful certainty that he could offer her jaded heart something new in the way of emotions.

In consideration of these things, she decided to pitch her tent for a while in Wankelo. Selukine could wait. Her projected visit there was, in any case, only one of speculation and curiosity. She had heard of the place as being thick with small gold mines closed down for want of capital, and it had occurred to her that

the possibility of finding a gold mine cheaply, and a capitalist for nothing at all, was quite on the cards. Besides, discreet inquiry, or, rather, discreet listening to the frank discussion of other people's affairs, which is one of the features of Rhodesian life, had elicited the happy information that Druro was on the way to becoming a very wealthy man. The Leopard reef, report said, was making bigger and richer at every blast, and the expectation was that it would be the richest thing in the way of mines that Rhodesia had yet known. Luck, like nature, has her darlings.

The Leopard mine was Druro's own property and the darling of his heart, next to his dog Toby. He had taken forty thousand pounds sterling from it in one year and spent it in another. That was the time he stayed away a whole year among the lamp-posts, "forgot" to get married, and came back without a bean. He declared there were plenty more forty thousands to be got out of the Leopard, and perhaps there were, but, unfortunately, during his absence the reef had been lost. As he was the only man who believed it would ever be found again, he had encountered some difficulty in getting together sufficient capital to restart the mine, for, of course, it had been shut down on the loss of the reef. But, on the strength of his personality, he had succeeded where most men would have failed. After many months, operations were in full swing. It was said that the mine was panning three ounces over a width of four-six, and a strike of a thousand feet proved, with the reef at the bottom of the shaft, richer and stronger than ever. But Druro himself gave away little information on the subject, beyond admitting sometimes in the bitters-time before dinner at the club, that the mine was looking all right. Rumour did the rest.

For a few days after Mrs. Hading's arrival, Lundi Druro disappeared from every-day life in Wankelo. It was a way he had of doing, and everyone who sought him at such times would find him at the Leopard in pants embroidered with great holes burned into them by cyanide and acids, a disreputable shirt without any buttons or collar, and face and hands blackened beyond recognition with the machine-oil and grime inseparable from a large mining plant. He always did his own assaying, taking both time and trouble over it. It must certainly be admitted that, if he knew how to play when he played, he also worked some when he worked.

During this time, Mrs. Hading was busy in many ways, but chiefly in winding her lovely manners about people whom she decided would be useful to her, and prosecuting a further acquaintance with Beryl Hallett and Gay Liscannon. It was

quite unavoidable that she and Gay should meet, however averse they might be to one another, and each accepted the fact with an outward calm that gave no indication of inward fires. Mrs. Hading was charming to Gay, as was her invariable practice while searching for chinks in the opponent's armour. Her hands blessed, even while her fingers were busy feeling for the soft spots in the victim's skull. Gay, on her side, was pleasant, polite, and interested, while guarding her heart behind a barrier as fine as a shirt of steel mail. For, though of a frank and generous disposition, she was not a fool, and life had taught her a few things about the attitude of mind of most pretty unattached women toward young girls in the same case.

At eleven o'clock one morning, they were all gathered round Mrs. Hallett's tea-table—Gay, Berlie, Mrs. Hading, and several men, for 11 A.M. is the "off" hour in Rhodesia, when everyone leaves his business, if he has any, to take tea in the pleasantest society he can find. At Wankelo, most people sallied forth to the lounge of the "Falcon," the club-room of the town, where morning tea was a ceremony, almost a rite.

Someone had just remarked on the prolonged absence of Lundi Druro when his car rolled up to the door, and, a moment later he strolled in and came over to the circle of tea-drinkers, cool and peaceful in their white clothes and shady hats. Unfortunately, his dog, Toby, chose this as a suitable occasion for saying a few pleasant words to Gay's dog, Weary. In a moment chairs were being pushed out of the way; teacups and scones and buttered toast were flying in every direction; men were tangled up with a revolving, growling mass of black and brown fur, and half a dozen feminine voices were crying pitifully:

"Oh, save Toby!" "Don't let Weary kill him!" "Poor little Toby, he has no teeth!"

Toby was not the dog Druro had fished out of the Lundi River—to that bull-terrier there had been many successors, and all had come to bad and untimely ends. Druro, indeed, had sworn that he would never acquire another dog; but Toby had sprung from none knew whence and acquired him. He was a little black, limping fellow of no breed at all, whose eyes had grown filmy from long gazing at Lundi Druro as if he were a sun-god or something that dazzled the vision. He usually carried a sacrificial offering in the shape of an enormous stone culled on his travels, and, with this in his mouth, would sit for hours, gazing at his god playing poker or otherwise engaged. The only time he relinquished this stone was when he had a fight on hand, a rather frequent occurrence, as his

perpetual limp and partially chewed-off ears testified. For, though his teeth were worn away by the stone-habit, he had a soul of steel and was afraid of nothing in the dog line. Gay's dog was one of those from whom he would stand no nonsense, and they never met without attempting to settle their feud for once and all. Druro usually settled it by banging Weary on the nose until he let go, for the latter was a powerful beast, and if allowed to work his wicked way, Toby would not have had a hope. But today, for some reason known to himself, Druro had an objection to hitting Gay's dog and contented himself with wrenching Weary's jaws apart, a dangerous and not very easy feat to accomplish. Weary, however, came in for several sound kicks and cuffs from other directions, and his mistress was in by no means an angelic frame of mind by the time she had her champion safe back between her knees, held by his collar.

"Why don't you keep your wretched little mongrel at home?" she inquired bitterly of Druro.

"It's a free country," responded Lundi blandly, wiping his damp brow and Toby's bloody ear with the same handkerchief. "You should train your bully to go for dogs of his own size."

"You know Toby always starts it."

"Well, I don't say he doesn't," admitted Druro. "But he does it on principle. He's a born reformer—aren't you, Tobe? Picks a scrap with any one he considers a disreputable, dissipated character." Toby's master smiled mockingly at Weary's mistress.

"Reformation, like charity, should begin at home," she flashed back, and the instant she had uttered the words could have bitten off her tongue. For everyone was smiling delightedly. A few quarrels and scandals give a zest to life in Rhodesia, and are always warmly welcomed. No one knew the real foundation of Gay's and Druro's misunderstanding, but it had been plain for some time that there was one.

"We were talking about getting up a picnic," said peace-loving Mrs. Hallett. "Mrs. Hading must be shown a real Rhodesian picnic."

"I want it to be a moonlight one!" cried Berlie. "They are twice as much fun."

"Yes; but there won't be a moon for nearly a month," someone complained.

"Well, we must have a day picnic now, and a moonlight one next month. We shall want your car, Lundi."

"You can have it any time. Where do you think of going?"

"Either to Sombwelo Forest or Selukine."

Everyone agreed that Mrs. Hading must see both of these lovely places.

"I have to go to Selukine anyway, on business," said Mrs. Hading, who had no idea of letting her plan to motor through that district in Druro's company be interfered with by picnics, "so please let it be Sombwelo."

"You can have my ranch there as a base of operations," proffered Lundi, "and make my boys do the work."

They all applauded this except Gay, who submitted that a picnic was not a picnic unless conducted on alfresco lines, with all the cooking and eating done out of doors by the picnickers themselves. Druro understood that she objected to his ranch and was sorry he had spoken, especially as some of the others looked at her with understanding eyes also. However, she was outvoted, everyone crying that if she liked hard work and out-door cooking, and spiders and ants running over the table-cloth and mosquitoes biting her ankles, she could have them, but they would have the ranch. To Druro's surprise and relief, she laughed and gave in quite pleasantly. Being a man, he could not know that, at that very moment, she was dismally deciding that, considering all that had passed, she could not possibly go to Druro's ranch.

"I shall have to be taken ill at the last moment," she reflected, and could have wept, for she loved picnics, and Druro's ranch had a secret call for her heart. But she laughed instead, and helped, with a cheerful air, to draw up the lists of those who were to supply cars, chickens, cakes, crockery, and all the other incidentals that go to the making of a successful picnic. The tea-party had by this time become enlarged to the size of a reception, and with everybody talking and arguing at once, no one (except Gay) noticed that, after a little quiet conversation, Mrs. Hading and Druro withdrew and disappeared. It transpired later that they had ordered an early lunch and started for Selukine in the Argyle.

And that was only the beginning of it. In the week that followed, it became more

usual to see Mrs. Hading in Lundi Druro's car than out of it.

Gay, staunch to her resolve, absented herself from the festivity at Sombwelo. It was no great exaggeration to plead that she was ill, for her spirit was sick if her body was not. But no one spared her the details of a successful and delightful day. It seemed that Druro had been a perfect host and Mrs. Hading a graceful and gracious guest. And, from that time forward, never a day passed in which the two did not spend some, at least, of its hours together. When Marice was not by Druro's side in the big red car, sometimes learning to drive, sometimes just tearing through the air, *en route* to some mine or other which she wanted to see, they might be found in the "Falcon" lounge, playing bridge with another couple or just sitting alone, talking of London lamp-posts. Sometimes they played two-handed poker, for Marice not only sympathized but shared with Druro his passion for cards. Perhaps this drew their hearts as well as their heads together. At any rate, to lookers-on they seemed absorbed in one another.

Mrs. Hading essayed skilfully and very winningly to draw Gay into her intimate circle, and it vexed her to realize how she evaded her plans. Berlie, she had already subjugated and made a tool of; but Gay stood aloof and would not be beguiled. While perfectly courteous to Mrs. Hading and whole-heartedly admiring her beauty, she had yet distrusted and disliked her from the first. Now her dislike deepened, for she saw that the widow was harming Druro. She kept him from his work, and sympathized and pandered to the passions that already too greatly obsessed him. There were always cocktails and cards on the table before them. Druro was drawing closer round him the net of his weaknesses from which Gay had so longed to drag him forth. Between the latter and Lundi Druro there now existed a kind of armed peace which appeared to be based, on his side, in indifference, and, on hers, in pride. There was often open antagonism in their eyes as they faced each other. She despised him for lingering and lagging at the heels of pleasure, and he knew it. Sometimes, when he was not actively angry with her, he thought she had grown older and sadder in a short while, and wondered if she were having trouble about young Derry, who was up-country, or whether old Derek was going the pace more than usual at home. It must be these secret troubles, he thought, that had suddenly changed her from the laughing girl he knew into a rather beautiful but cold woman. Cold, yes, cold as the east wind! Sometimes her clear eyes chilled him like the air of a certain little cold hour of the dawn that he very much dreaded; it was a relief to turn away from them to the warm and subtle scents and frondlike ways of Marice Hading.

For weeks now, he had divided his time so carefully between Mrs. Hading and poker at the club, that there was nothing at all left for the Leopard mine. His partner, M. R. Guthrie, commonly known as "Emma," sometimes came from the mine to look for him, pedalling moodily into Wankeloon a bicycle, and always pedalling away more moodily than he came. He was a shrivelled-up American with a biting tongue, and the only man in the country from whom Druro would take back talk.

"What is this wine-woman-and-song stunt you are on now, Lundi?" he inquired, late one night, when he had cornered Druro in the club with a small but select poker-party of the hardest citizens in the country. Druro gave him a dark glance.

"That's my business," he said curtly.

"Have you any other business?" asked Emma bitterly. "You don't happen to own a mine, I suppose?"

"What are mines compared to jack-pots?" inquired Druro gravely. "Besides, what are you on that mine for, Emma? A decoration? Or do you think you are my wet-nurse? I don't remember engaging you in that capacity."

Guthrie rose, offended.

"All right, my boy—go to blazes your own way!"

"I can get there without leading-strings, anyway," Lundi retorted cheerfully.

"But not without apron-strings," muttered his partner, departing on the faithful bicycle. "I dunno what's come to the fellow!"

In truth, Druro hardly knew himself. A kind of fever had taken possession of him, a fever of unrest and discontent with himself and all things. He couldn't remember how it began or when, but it seemed to him that life, in one moment, from being interesting and vivid, had turned old and cold and tasted like a rotten apple in his mouth. And he did not care how many drinks he took to wash the flavour away. He knew that he was drinking too much and neglecting his work, and jeopardizing other people's money as well as his own by so doing, but his soul was filled with a bitter carelessness and indifference to these facts. He was anxious not to inquire too deeply within himself on the matter of what ailed him, being dimly aware of a something at the back of his mind that could inform him

only too well. He wished to avoid all discussion with that something, sitting like a veiled, watching figure, waiting for some unoccupied hour. Up to now, he had been very successful in dodging the appointment, but he had premonition that he would be caught one of these days soon—in some little cold dawn-hour perhaps.

There came a day when Mrs. Hading decided to return the hospitality shown her in Wankelo by giving an entertainment of her own. She mentioned her intention lightly to Druro.

"I really must try and arrange to give a little jolly of my own in return for all the big jollies people here have given me."

In reality, she had determined on something in the nature of "a surprise to the natives" that would put all their little picnics and dinner-parties entirely in the shade, and duly impress not only Wankelo but Rhodesia and, incidentally, Lundi Druro. For, after several weeks of close intercourse with the latter, she had come to the conclusion that she might do very much worse than marry him. More, she actually desired to do so. The stimulus of his insouciant gaiety and originality, good looks and unfailingly good spirits had come to be a necessary part of her existence. She needed him now, like a bracing cocktail she had grown used to taking so many times a day and could no longer do without. Besides, the Leopard was panning out well, at the rate of a thousand pounds sterling per month, and had the prospect of doing far better.

These were good enough reasons for Mrs. Hading's decision that Druro, as well as Wankelo, should be impressed by the finished splendour and grace of her "little jolly." She intended to show him that, when it came to choosing a wife who could spend his thousands graciously and to the best effect, he could never do better than Marice Hading. To which end, she concentrated her whole mind on the purpose of making her entertainment a complete and conspicuous success.

A little group of those people whom she favoured with her intimacy were called into council, theoretically to help her with advice, though in practice she needed little of them but admiring applause. They met every morning in a corner of the lounge which, by introducing her own flowers, books, and cushions, she had made peculiarly hers. Here over morning tea the plans for her "jolly" were projected and perfected, and here were always to be found Berlie Hallett and her mother, Cora Lisle, Johnny Doran, Major Maturin, and one or two lesser but useful lights.

Druro, though he did little more than decorate the assembly with his good-tempered smile, was a most necessary feature of it, and Dick Tryon was more often than not to be found there also, though whether he came to scoff or bless, no one was quite certain. His position in the circle of Mrs. Hading's satellites had never been clearly defined. He was supposed by some people to be hopelessly in love with Gay Liscannon, and that supposition alone was enough to make Marice Hading anxious to attach him to her personal staff. Besides, he was an interesting man and a clever lawyer—always a useful combination in a friend. At any rate, he was one of those who helped to applaud the programme of Mrs. Hading's jolly, which she eventually decided was to take the form of a bridge tournament followed by supper and a dance.

This sounds a simple enough affair, but, under Mrs. Hading's treatment, it became rarefied. A chef for the supper had been commanded from Johannesburg, a string orchestra for the dance from Salisbury, and exquisite bridge prizes were being sent from a jeweller's at the Cape. The hotel dining-room was to be transformed into a salon for the card tournament, the lounge decorated as a ballroom, and an enormous marquee erected for the supper.

The day dawned at last when, all these arrangements being completed, there was nothing for the select council to do but congratulate each other on the prospect of a perfect evening. Druro, however, who had for some days been showing (to the initiated eyes of his male friends, at least) signs of restlessness, not to say boredom, marred the harmony of this propitious occasion by absenting himself, thereby causing the president of the meeting palpable inquietude and displeasure. She missed her laughing cavalier, as she had a fancy for calling him, from her retinue. Plainly *distraite,* she sat twisting her jewelled fingers and casting restless glances toward the door until certain emissaries, who had been sent forth, returned with the news that no one had seen Druro since eleven o'clock the night before, when he had gone off in a car with some mining men. The widow hid her annoyance under a pretty, petulant smile and the remark:

"He must be given a penance this afternoon." After which she abruptly dismissed the audience until tea-time.

When tea-time came, however, with its gathering in Mrs. Hallett's sitting-room (the lounge being in preparation for the evening's festivities), there was still no Druro. Further inquiry had elicited the fact that the men he had gone off with were from the Glendora. The Glendora was a mine owned by an Australian

syndicate and run entirely by Australians, a hard-living, hard-drinking crowd, who, by reason of their somewhat notorious ways and also because none of them had wives, were left rather severely alone by the Wankelo community. One or two of the managers, however, belonged to the club, and it was with these that Druro had disappeared.

Mrs. Hading, whose petulance was not quite so pretty as in the morning, rather gathered than was told these things, and she saw very plainly that she had not gathered all there was to tell. Men have a curious way of standing back to back when women want to find out too much. But she did not need a great deal of enlightening, and when a man said with careless significance, "I expect he has forgotten all about tonight," and the other men's eyes went blank, she guessed what was at the bottom of it all. She had learned by now what were the occasions on which Druro so poignantly *forgot*, and she was furious, not because gambling might be bad for his bank account or his immortal soul, but that he should dare to have a more burning interest than herself.

"What about sending someone to remind him?" suggested Maturin. Marice Hading regarded him coldly.

"He is engaged to open the ball with me this evening. I do not think he is likely to forget." There was more than a ring of arrogance in her tone, and, looking straight past him into the eyes of Gay Liscannon, she added acridly, "Whomsoever he may have thus distinguished in the past."

Gay, who, by some mischance, had happened accidentally upon the meeting, was taken off her guard by this direct attack, as the ready flush in her cheek clearly told. A moment later, she was her pale, calm self. But Mrs. Hading saw that her arrow shot at a venture had drawn blood. She really knew nothing of Gay's quarrel with Druro, and her venture was based on a remark Berlie had let fall. But she was aware of a shadow between Gay and Druro that her sharp and curious eyes had never been able to penetrate, and that infuriated her. Tryon, lazily examining his shoes, here interposed a casual remark.

"I am willing to prophesy that what has happened once can happen again—in spite of William De Morgan."

It was Marice Hading's turn to flush.

"If I do not dance with Mr. Druro tonight, it will not be because he is absent,"

she said, with cold arrogance.

"*Nous verrons*," he answered agreeably. She gave him an insolent look. He had declared sides at last, and she knew where she stood.

Gay dressed for the dance with but little enthusiasm. Pride made her put aside her longing to stay at home with her own wretchedness—pride and bitter curiosity, but, above all, a haunting fear of what the evening might bring forth. She had a strange premonition that something final and fatal was going to happen to her love for Druro. It was to be given its death-thrust, perhaps, by the announcement of an engagement between him and the widow. Surely, Marice Hading's significance had meant that if it had meant anything! This fete was to be the scene of her triumph. She meant to brandish Druro as a trophy—fastening him publicly to the wheels of her chariot. Strangely enough, what Gay dreaded still more was that Druro would not turn up at all. She felt a miserable foreboding about the gang at Glendora. And it was based on good grounds. They had once lured her brother Derry out to that camp, and what he had told her of his experiences there had left her with a wholesome dread and detestation of the Australians.

"I wonder I got out with my skin," said Derry. "They rooked me right and left. There isn't a finer set of sharpers outside of Mexico City—and the whole gang ready to eat you up alive if you show by the twitch of an eyelash that you are 'on' to them. There's one pirate there—Capperne—who's worse than all the rest. Nothing can beat him. You know he's sharping you all the time, but he's so slick you can never catch him out. And it wouldn't be wise to, either."

These were the men that Druro had gone out to play poker with—Lundi Druro, with his love of fair play and easily roused temper and carelessness of consequences. It was a heavy and apprehensive heart that the girl hooked up inside her ball gown.

The "Falcon" was a fairy-land of softly shaded lights and flowers of every shade of yellow and gold. Few flowers except those of the hardiest kinds could be got in any quantity at Wankelo, so Mrs. Hading had cleverly decided to use only those of one colour, choosing sunflowers, marigolds, and all the little yellow children of the Zinnia family. These, mingled with the tender green of maidenhair fern, of which quantities had been obtained from Selukine, massed against walls draped with green, made an exquisite setting for her entertainment

and her own beauty. She glided here and there among the amber lights, welcoming her guests and setting them at the little green-clad card tables, a diaphanous vision of gold-and-orange chiffons, her perfect neck and shoulders ablaze with diamonds, and her little flat-coiffed black head, rather snakelike on its long throat, banded by a chain of yellow topazes.

Everything blended in the picture she had made for herself, and the picture was perfect to behold. But, unfortunately, the person whom it had been created chiefly to impress was missing. Druro had not come.

The bridge tournament waned to an end, and the dainty and expensive prizes were awarded; the guests flowed in a gentle, happy tide to the supper marquee and partook of such a collation of aspics and salads, and soufflés and truffles, and such a divine brew of cup and amazing brand of cocktails as Wankelo had never before dreamed of in its philosophy; then back they ebbed, more happily and hilariously than they had flowed, to the ballroom, where, on the stroke of midnight, the special string orchestra from Salisbury strung out sweet, tremolo opening bars of the first waltz. And Druro had not come!

Mrs. Hading gracefully surrendered herself to the arms of a great man who had been obliging enough to drop in accidentally by the evening train from Buluwayo, and, floating down the room, opened the ball. Her partner was a very great man indeed, both in South African and English politics, and it was a feather of no small jauntiness in Marice Hading's cap that she had been able to secure him for the vacant seat at her supper-table and afterward beguile him to the ballroom and into asking her to dance. His presence lent a final note of distinction to an extraordinarily successful evening, and she had every reason to be proud and triumphant—except one! But it was that one thing that poisoned all. No triumph could quench her rage and humiliation at Druro's defection.

"He shall pay! He shall pay!" were the words that beat time in her brain, all the while she was floating and gliding among her guests, full of graceful, weary words and charming, tired smiles, the only colour in her face showing on her bitter lips.

"He shall pay me my price for this," she promised herself softly, "and it shall not be a light one."

(Hugh Hading had paid his price for her girlhood; Lundi Druro should pay for the rest of her life!)

Only one thing could put her right with her own pride and before the little world which had witnessed the slight, and that she would exact—the announcement that he was hers, body and soul, to do with as she pleased. That the honour would be an empty one, this evening's *déroute* would seem to have demonstrated; he had proved once more that he was no man's man, and no woman's man, either; he belonged to his sins, and his weaknesses, and his failings. But, for the moment, it would be enough for Marice Hading that he should propose to her and be accepted. Her time would come later—afterward. There were many modes of recompense of which she was past mistress, many subtle means of repayment for injuries received. Such a mind as hers was not lacking in refined methods of inflicting punishment. It would be proved to him, in bitter retribution, that Marice Hading could not be trifled with and neglected —*forgotten for a game of cards*!

In the meantime, she eased her anger a little by snubbing Tryon, when he came to claim a waltz she had given him early in the week. Looking at him with cool and lovely disdain as she leaned on the arm of the great politician who still lingered with her, she disclaimed all recollection of any such engagement.

"You should be careful not to make such mistakes, Mr. Tryon," she said haughtily.

"*Soit*! The mistake is mine as well as the loss," he murmured gracefully, knowing very well what was his real crime. "But prophets must be prepared for losses. In olden days they have even been known to lose their heads for prophesying too truly." And on that he made a bow, and returned to Gay, whom he had left in their sitting-out place, which was his car. She had danced but little all the evening and seemed lost in dark thoughts.

"Tired?" he asked, leaning on the door beside her.

"No; but I'm sick of this dance," she said fiercely. "Take me for a spin, Dick."

"Right. But the roads are pretty bad in the dark, you know."

Gay pondered a moment.

"The Selukine road isn't bad"—she paused a moment, then slowly added, "and the road to Glendora."

It was Tryon's turn to ponder. The road to the Glendora was the worst in the country, but it didn't take him long to read the riddle.

"Come on, then!" he said abruptly. "Shall I get your cloak?"

"No; let me wear your things, Dick." She took up a big motor-coat and deer-stalker from the driving-seat and slipped into them. The rose-pink gown disappeared and was lost under the darkness of tweed, and the cap covered her bright hair. She sat well back in the shadows of the tonneau.

Tryon set the car going, climbed moodily into the lonely driving-seat, and steered away into the darkness just as the music stopped and a crowd of dancers came pouring out of the ballroom.

The Glendora lay west of the town, and the road to it ran past the club. As luck would have it, a man coming from the latter place, and pushing a bicycle before him, almost collided with them, causing Tryon to pull up short.

"Is that you, Emma Guthrie?" he called irritably.

"Yep!" came the gloomy answer.

"Seen anything of Lundi?"

"Nope!" on a deeper tone of gloom. Gay touched Tryon's shoulder.

"Make him come, too," she whispered.

"I'm just taking a run out to the Glendora," announced Tryon. "Want to come?"

"I do," said Guthrie, with laconic significance, and climbed in beside the driver. They flipped through the night at thirty miles an hour, which was as much as Tryon dared risk on such a road. The Glendora was about ten miles off. Gay, furled in the big coat and kindly darkness, could hear the two men exchanging an occasional low word, but little was said. It was doubtful whether Guthrie knew who Tryon's other passenger was.

In time, the clanking and pounding of a battery smote their ears, and the twinkling myriad lights of a mining camp were spread across the darkness. One large wood-and-iron house, standing alone on rising ground, well back from the road, was conspicuously brilliant. The doors were closed, but lights and the sound of men's voices raised in an extraordinary uproar streamed from its open, unblinded windows and fanlights. Abruptly Tryon turned the car so that it faced for home, halted it in the shadow of some trees, and jumping out, strode toward the house, followed by Guthrie and Gay.

Almost as they reached it, the door was flung open, and a man came out and stood in the light. He was passing his hand over his eyes and through his hair in an odd gesture that would have told Gay who he was, even if every instinct in her had not recognized Druro. The pandemonium in the house had fallen suddenly to a great stillness, but as Guthrie and Tryon reached the house, it broke forth again with increased violence, and a number of men rushed out and laid hands on Druro as if to detain him. He flung them off in every direction; a couple of them fell scrambling and swearing over the low rail of the veranda. Then, several spoken sentences, terse, and clean-cut as cameos, fell on the night air.

"Come on home, Lundi; we have a car here."

"I tell you he has killed Capperne! Capperne is dead as a bone!"

"All right!" came Druro's voice, cool and careless. "If he's dead, he's dead. I am prepared to accept the consequences."

The Australians stood off, grouped together, muttering. Guthrie and Tryon moved to either side of Druro, and between them he walked calmly away from the house. When they reached the car, he took the seat beside Tryon, Guthrie climbed in next to Gay, and they drove away without a word being spoken. The whole nightmare happening had passed with the precision and ease of a

clockwork scene played by marionettes. Now the curtain was down, and nothing remained but the haunting, fateful words still ringing in the ears of them all. Small wonder they sat silent as death. As the car entered the precincts of the town, Druro said to Tryon:

"I must go to the police camp and report this thing, Dick. But, first drive to the 'Falcon,' will you? I've just remembered that I had an appointment there and must go and apologize."

They drew up at a side entrance of the hotel and Druro stepped out and turned almost mechanically to open the door for those behind. So far he had shown no knowledge of Gay's presence, but he now looked straight into her eyes without any sign of surprise. He held out his hand to help her to descend, and, in the same instant, swiftly withdrew it.

"I forgot," he said, and, for an instant, stood staring at his palm and then at her in a dazed, musing sort of way. "There is blood upon it!"

Gay could not speak. Her heart felt breaking. It seemed to her that, in that moment, with the shadow of crime on him, he had suddenly changed into a bright-haired, innocent, wistful boy. She longed, with an infinite, brooding love that was almost maternal, to shelter and comfort him against all the world. But she could do nothing. Even if she could have spoken, there was nothing to say. Only, on an impulse, she caught the hand he had drawn back, and, for a moment, held it close between her warm, generous little palms. Then she slipped away into the darkness, and he went into the hotel, walking like a man in a dream.

PART II

Cold-blooded nerve, otherwise intrepid cheek, is a much admired quality in that land of bluffs and *blagues* called Rhodesia. Therefore, when Lundi Druro walked into Mrs. Hading's ballroom in his old grey lounge suit, with ruffled hair and the distrait eyes of a man dreaming of other things, and proceeded, in casual but masterly fashion, to detach his hostess from the tentacles of a new admirer, Wankelo silently awarded him the palm of palms. But no one who saw Mrs. Hading's face as she walked out of the ballroom by his side envied him his job of conciliation.

However, they could not know that her cold looks were for their benefit rather than Druro's. Banal upbraidings would not bring off the *coup* she had planned, and she did not intend to employ them. When she and Druro were out of earshot in a far corner of the veranda, the face she turned to him wore nothing on it but an expression of lovely and tender pain that he found much harder to contend with than anything she could possibly have said.

Contritely he proffered his profound apologies and regrets. But when all was said and done, it boiled down to the same old lame duck of an excuse that was yet the simple and shameful truth.

"I forgot all about it."

Like Gay under similar circumstances, she was infuriated by the combined flimsiness and sincerity of the plea. But, unlike Gay, she was too clever to give herself away and ruin her plans by an outburst of indignation. She only fixed her sad and lovely dark eyes on his and said quietly:

"Is that all you have to say to me, Lundi? With everyone laughing at my humiliation and disappointment—my foolishness!"

He flushed at the use of his name, the tone of her voice, the inference in her

words.

"I am most frightfully sorry," he repeated, deeply embarrassed. "It was unutterably caddish of me. I can never forgive myself, or expect you to forgive me."

"I think you know by now that I can forgive you anything," she answered, in a low voice.

His embarrassment increased.

"I'm not worth a second thought from any woman," he asseverated firmly.

"But if I think you are?" There was a little break in her voice, and suddenly she put out her hands toward him. "If I cannot help——"

"Mrs. Hading," he interposed hastily, "you don't know what you are saying. I am a blackguard—a scamp, unfit to touch a woman's hand."

"Let me be judge of that," she said.

"I have not even told you everything about tonight. When you hear what has happened, you won't want to speak to me again." She suddenly took out a little lace handkerchief and began to cry. He stared at her with haggard eyes. "Do you know that I have killed a man tonight?" he said sombrely.

That gave her pause. Her nerves went taut and her face rigid behind the scrap of lace. Even *her* cold soul balked at murder, and her plans of mingled revenge and self-advancement rocked a little. She looked at him direct now, with eyes full of horrified enquiry.

"I did not mean to distress you with the story," he said. "But I struck a man over the card-table, and they say he is dead."

It seemed to her that she caught a sound of relief, even triumph in the statement—almost as though he was glad to have such a reason for stemming the tide of her words, and not taking the clinging hands she put out to him. Her keen mind was on the alert instantly. What was at the bottom of it all? Perhaps the man was not dead. Perhaps this was just a little trick of Druro's to slip the toils he felt closing round his liberty—her toils! Being a trickster herself, she easily

suspected trickery in others. Rapidly she turned the thing over in her mind. She had no intention of involving herself with a man who had got to pay the penalty for committing a crime—but nothing simpler for her than to repudiate him if anything so unpleasant should really arise. On the other hand, in case he was juggling with the truth, she must establish a hold, a bond that, being a man of honour, he would not be able to repudiate. The situation called for the exercise of all the finesse of which she was mistress. She put away her handkerchief and looked at him gravely.

"There must be some dreadful mistake."

He shrugged his shoulders rather wearily.

"I don't think so." His manner inferred, "And I don't much care, either."

"But you must care," she said urgently. "You must fight it, Lundi. If you won't do it for your own sake"—she came a step nearer to him—"I ask you to do it for mine." He was staring moodily into the gloom of the night and the deeper gloom of his own soul. "To make up to me for the humiliation you have put upon me tonight," she said, almost in a whisper, "I think I have a right to claim so much."

That jerked him from his dreams. He looked her straight in the eyes.

"If anything I can say or do will make up to you for that, you will have no need to claim it," he said firmly, and, bowing over her hand, took his leave. People who saw him go thought he looked more haggard than when he came. But this was accounted for when, within the hour, news of the happenings at Glendora sped like wildfire through the town.

Before morning, however, there were certain hopeful tidings to mingle with the bad, and Marice Hading had cause to congratulate herself on her foresight in establishing her bond. Capperne was not dead. And there was hope of saving him. Half his teeth were knocked down his throat; in falling he had struck his head and cut it open; his heart, weakened by dissipation, had all but reached its last beat, and lung complication had set in. But the chances were that, being a worthless, useless life, precious to no one but himself, he would pull through and live to "sharp" another day. The doctors, at any rate, worked like tigers to insure this end. For there was no doubt that, if he died, the consequences must be extremely unpleasant for Druro. It was highly improbable that the latter would pay the penalty with his life, but a verdict of manslaughter against him could

scarcely be avoided. He had struck Capperne down after a violent dispute in which the Australian, accused of sharping, had given him the lie, and Capperne's friends, the only witnesses of the fracas, were prepared, if Capperne died, to swear away Druro's life and liberty. As it was, they moved heaven and earth to have him put under arrest—"in case of accidents"—but their efforts were crowned with neither appreciation nor success, and Druro went about much as usual, careless, amusing, and apparently not unduly depressed. Still, it was a dark and doubtful period, and that his future hung precariously in the balance, he was very well aware, and so were his friends.

The only thing noticeably unusual in his habits was a certain avoidance of the Falcon Hotel and the society of womankind; and this, of course, was very well understood. It was natural that a man under a storm-cloud that might burst any moment and blot him out should wish to keep out of the range of women's emotional sympathy. Men's sympathy is of a different calibre. Even when it is a practical, living thing that can be felt and built on, it is often almost cold-bloodedly inarticulate and undemonstrative, which is the only kind of sympathy acceptable to a man in trouble, especially a man of Druro's type, who did not want to discuss the thing at all, but just to take what was coming to him with a stiff lip.

One good result of it all was that now, at last, his mine was getting a little attention. Once more he donned blue overalls and a black face and embroidered his pants with cyanide burns. And Emma Guthrie was content, or as content as Emma Guthrie could be. Rumour now said that crushing would be commenced on the mine in two months' time, and that ten stamps were to be added to the milling-plant already existing. This looked good for Druro's financial prospects, however gloomy his social ones might be. But he never talked. Emma Guthrie was the man who did all the bucking about the mine and its future. Rumour did the rest handsomely, and it was unanimously accorded that fate would be playing a shady trick indeed on Lundi Druro if, just when his future was painting itself in scarlet and gold with purple splashes, he was to be put out of the game by the death of a waster like Capperne.

On the day, then, that Capperne was at last pronounced to be out of the wood, there was almost general rejoicing in Wankelo. The little township threw its hat up into the air, and everyone burst into bubbles of relief and gaiety. In the club and hotels men valiantly "breasted the bar," vying with each other in the liquid celebration of Druro's triumph and the defeat of the enemy at Glendora, and all

the women rushed to tea at the "Falcon" to discuss the news and, incidentally, to see how Mrs. Hading took it, and whether any further developments would now arise with regard to herself and Druro.

As soon as Mrs. Hading realized that Druro meant to absent himself from the felicity of her society during his period of uncertainty, she had thought out a pose for herself and assumed it like a glove. It was the pose of a woman who withdraws a little from the world to face her sorrows alone—or almost alone. A few admiring friends were admitted into her semi-devotional retreat. Mrs. Hallett was allowed to read to her awhile every day, and Berlie to arrange her flowers. Major Maturin brought her the English papers and any news that was going. A quiet game of bridge was sometimes indulged in, but Marice spent much of her time reading and writing, and a straight-backed chair with a cushion before it and a beautifully bound book of devotions lying on it hinted at deeper things. A certain drooping trick of the eyelids lent her an air of subdued sadness and courage that was attractive. A pose was always dearer to Marice Hading than bread, and this one gave her special pleasure—first, because it was becoming; secondly, because it was a restful way of getting through the hot weather, and, thirdly, because it conveyed to people the idea to which she wished to accustom them—that she and Druro were something to each other. She was no longer to be seen in the lounge. Having successfully impressed Mrs. Hallett with her sorrowful mien, that lady had placed her sitting-room, the only private one in the hotel, at Marice's disposal, and it was there, surrounded by flowers and books of verse, that she received the few friends she allowed to see her and wrote a daily letter of great charm and veiled tenderness to Druro. He nearly always responded with about three lines, making one note answer three letters, sometimes more. Druro was no fancy letter-writer. He could tell a woman he loved her, fervently enough, no doubt, either on or off paper, if the spirit moved him. But he never told Marice anything except that he was all right, and chirpy, and pretty busy at the mine, and hoped to see her one of these days when the horizon looked a little clearer. Brief and frank as were these missives, she studied them as closely as if they had been written in the hieroglyphics of some unknown language, and had often nearly bitten her underlip through by the time she reached the end of them.

With the growing conviction that Capperne would recover, her letters to Druro grew more intimate and perhaps a shade insistent on his over-sensitiveness in absenting himself for so long from the society of his best friends. It was natural that, when the good news was definitely confirmed, she should expect him to present himself, and perhaps that was why she came down to the lounge that day

for tea, instead of having it served in the private sitting-room as usual.

She was looking radiant. The systematic rest-cure, combined with the services of her maid, a finished *masseuse*, had done wonders for her, and a gown of chiffon shaded like a bunch of pansies and so transparent that most of her could be seen through it successfully crowned her efforts.

Druro felt the old charm of lamp-posts stealing like a delicate, narcotizing perfume over his senses as he took her hand and listened to her soft murmurs of congratulation. After all, it is true that almost any woman can marry any man if she has a few looks, a few brains, and the quality of persistence. Besides, Marice had him safely bonded. The shrouded figure at the back of his mind that was waiting for some quiet hour in which to discuss the mess he was making of his life would have to be narcotized, too, or denied and driven forth.

Gay Liscannon came in with a riding party of noisy people, who clattered over, clamouring for tea and clapping Druro on the shoulder with blithe smiles. She gave him a friendly hand-clasp and said:

"Glad to see you're all right again, Lundi."

That was the spirit of all their welcomes. No one said openly: "Hooray! You're out of the jaws of the law." But they welcomed him like a long-lost brother turned up from the dead, and immediately began to talk about getting up some kind of "jolly" for him. It must be admitted that Rhodesians are always on the look-out for an excuse for a jolly, but this really seemed a reasonable occasion. They told him he looked gloomy and needed a jolly to cheer him up.

"A picnic is the thing for you," said Berlie Hallett, who loved this form of diversion better, even, than flirting. "Let us give him a picnic in his own district, Selukine."

A thoughtful look crossed Marice Hading's face.

"What about his own mine?" she said. "Can't we come and picnic there, Lundi? I have never seen the Leopard."

The idea was ardently welcomed.

"Yes—the Leopard mine! We'll take our own champagne and baptize the new

reef and Lundi's future fortunes. It shall be the great Leopard picnic—the greatest ever!"

It was furthermore suggested that, as there was a moon, it should be a moonlight picnic with a midnight supper at the mine.

Lundi was fain to submit, whether he liked, it or not. He wondered a little what Emma Guthrie would say at having the mine invaded, but personally he did not care a toss. The narcotizing spell had fallen suddenly from him again, and life and his future fortunes looked uninterestingly grey. He became aware of the shrouded figure tapping for attention at the back of his brain. Gay was the cause of it, somehow. He abruptly got up to go, saying he must get back to the mine.

"Emma will want some talking over before he will allow any picnicking around there," he said. "I think I had better go and start on him right away."

"Oh, don't go yet!" they cried, and Marice Hading looked at him chidingly. But he had no heart for their gay arrangements, and took himself off after finally hearing that the date was fixed for two nights later, all cars to be at the "Falcon" at eight o'clock in the evening and the start to be made from there.

Only a legitimate reason would have kept Gay away from a jolly given in Druro's honour. But she expected to have that reason in the indisposition of her father, who had been ailing for some time. She was not sorry, for she felt a shrinking from what the picnic might bring forth, just as she had felt on the night of Mrs. Hading's dance.

However, fate was not inclined to spare her anything that was due to her. Colonel Liscannon was so much better that he could easily be left, and, moreover, an old crony had come in from the country to spend a couple of days with him. So there was no chance of Gay's evasion without a seeming rudeness to Druro. But she was very late in arriving at the "Falcon," where she was to be a passenger in Tryon's car.

At the last, it was a matter of ordering something at the chemist's for her father and sending off a telegram that detained her, and she did not reach the hotel until nearly a quarter to nine. Long before she got there, she saw that all the cars were gone except one which she easily recognized as Tryon's.

"Dear old Dick! He is always to be relied on," she said, and had a half-finished

thought that she would rather be with him that night than any one, except——

Then she went quickly into the lounge, where, no doubt, he would be waiting, and found him indeed, but sitting around a little table with coffee and liqueurs in the company of Druro and Mrs. Hading, the latter looking none too pleased.

"Ah," said she, with acerbity, as Gay came in, "at last! We were beginning to think you were never coming."

"But why did you wait for me?" inquired Gay, politely bewildered. "I thought Dick——"

"Some idiot has walked off with my car," explained Druro. "So Tryon is taking us all."

"And we are waiting for petrol as well as you," smiled Tryon; "so sit down." He put a chair for her next to Mrs. Hading, but that lady, after a swift glance into a mirror on the wall, skilfully manoeuvred her seat until she was opposite instead of next to the girl. Gay, in a little white frock of soft mull, with a cascade of lace falling below her long, young throat, resembled a freshly-gathered rose with all the fragrance and dewiness of the garden of Youth upon her. When Marice looked at her, she felt like a Borgia. She would have liked to press a cup of poison to the girl's curved red lips and force her to drink. In that glimpse in the mirror, she had seen that her own face, above a delicate shroudy scarf with long flying ends, rose like some tired hothouse orchid, beautiful still, but fading, paling, passing; and she hated Gay's youth and freshness with a poignant hatred that was like the piercing of a stiletto. She wondered why she had been such a fool as to wear that gown of purplish amethystine tulle tonight. It was a colour that made her face look hard and artificially tinted. True, her bare neck and shoulders, which were of a perfection rarely seen outside of an art gallery, showed at their best through the mazy shroudings, and her throat looked as if it had been modelled by some cunning Italian hand and sculptured in creamy alabaster. Her throat, indeed, was Marice Hading's great beauty, and her pride in it the most sinful of all her prides. She spent hours in her locked room massaging it and smoothing it with soft palms, working snowy creams into it, modelling it with her fine fingers, as though it were of some plastic material other than flesh and blood. She watched for the traces of time on it and fought them with the art and skill of a creature fighting for its life. Indeed, when a woman makes a god of her beauty, it is her life for which she is fighting in the unequal battle with time.

Night was naturally the time at which this reverenced beauty of hers shone most effectively to the dazzlement of women and the undoing of men. Day was not so kind. The South African sun is ruthless to exposed complexions, and has an unhappy way of showing up the presence of thick pastes and creams which have been worked into contours in danger of becoming salients. So, although Marice never wore a collar, but always had her gowns cut into a deep V both back and front, she invariably shrouded herself with filmy laces and chiffons. She drew these about her now and rose wearily. It seemed to her she had noticed Druro looking at Gay with some strange quality in his glance.

"If we don't make a move, we shall never get there at all," she said sharply.

Everything was going wrong tonight. Here she was stuck with two people whom she detested, after specially planning to make the drive alone with Druro!

"Come along; I expect the car is fixed up by now," said Tryon, and they all moved out. A black porter was patrolling the stoep.

"Has my boy been here with petrol for the car?" asked Tryon.

"Yas, sar."

"And filled it?"

"Yas, sar."

They approached to get in, and a fresh annoyance for Mrs. Hading arose. Druro said casually:

"How are we going to sit?"

"You are driving, of course," stated Marice, in an authoritative tone.

"No," said Tryon dryly; "I never let any one handle my car but myself."

Now, nothing would make Marice renounce the comfort of the front seat. Even if she would have done it for the sake of sitting with Druro, she knew that the jarring and jolting so unavoidable on African roads would put her nerves on edge for the evening. So there was nothing further to be said, but she felt, as she flung herself into the seat beside Tryon, that this was verily the last straw. For a

time she showed her displeasure with and disdain of Tryon by sitting half turned and conversing with Druro, who was obliged to lean forward uncomfortably to answer her remarks. But she soon tired of this, for the strong wind caused by the car cutting through the air tore her flatly arranged hair from its appointed place and blew it over her eyes in thin black strings. This enraged her, as the dishevelment of a carefully arranged coiffure always enrages a fashionable woman. She loathed wind at any time; it always aroused seven devils in her. She longed to box Tryon's ears. But the best she could do was to sit in haughty silence at his side, while the wind took the long ends of her scented tulle scarf and tore it to rags, fluttering them maliciously in the faces of the two silent ones behind. Every now and then Druro mechanically caught hold of these ends, crumpled them into a bunch, and stuffed them behind Mrs. Hading's shoulders, but a few minutes later they would be loose again, whipping the wind. Once, when he was catching the flickering things from Gay's face, his hand touched her cheek, and once, when they both put out their hands together, they clasped each other's fingers instead of the fragile stuff. But they never spoke. And their silence at last began to weigh on the two in front. They found themselves straining their ears to hear if those two would ever murmur a word to each other. And if they did not, *why didn't they*?

"Has he got his arm round her?" wondered Tryon savagely. (He too had counted on tonight and the long, lonely drive with Gay, and was in none too pleasant a mood with life.)

"Is he holding her hand?" thought Marice Hading, and ground her teeth. "Has there ever been anything between them?"

But Druro and Gay were doing none of these things—only sitting very still, and thinking long, long thoughts. And whatever it was they thought of, it put no gladness into their eyes. Any one who could have peered into their faces in the pale moonlight must have been struck by the similarity in the expression of their eyes, the vague, staring misery of those who search the horizon vainly for something that will never be theirs, some lost city from which they are for ever exiled.

The African horizon was wonderfully beautiful that night. As they came out from the miles of bush which surround Wankelo into the hill-and-valley lands of Selukine, the moon burst in pearly splendour from her fleecy wrappings of cloud and showed long lines of silver-tipped hills and violet valleys, and, here and

there, great open stretches of undulating space with a clear view across leagues and leagues to the very edge, it seemed, of the world. As one such great stretch of country rolled into view from a rise in the road, Druro spoke for the first time, in a low voice, vaguely and half to himself.

"There is the land I love—*my* country!"

With his hand he made a gesture that was like a salute. After all, he was a Rhodesian, and this was his confession of faith. The story of the lamp-posts was only a bluff put up to disguise the hook Africa had put in his heart, the hook by which she drags all those who love her back across the world, denying, reviling, forswearing her even unto seventy times seven, yet panting to be once more in her adored arms. All Rhodesians have this heart-wound, which opens and bleeds when they are away from their country, and only heals over in the sweet veld air.

Gay did not answer. He had hardly seemed to address the remark to her; yet it went home to her heart because she, too, was a Rhodesian, and this was the land she loved.

Suddenly they swept down once more into a tract of country thick with bush and tall, feathery trees. Here the rotting timbers of some old mine-head buildings and great mounds of thrown-up earth inked against the sky-line showed that man had been in these wilds, torn up the earth for its treasure, and passed on. Near the road an old iron house, that had once been a flourishing mine-hotel, was now almost hidden by a tangle of wild creepers and bush, with branches of trees thrusting their way through gaping doorways and windows.

"This was the old Guinea-Pig Camp. It is 'gone in' now, but once it was a great place—this old wilderness," said Tryon to Mrs. Hading, and misquoted Kipling.

"They used to call it a township once,
Gold-drives and main-reefs and rock-drills once,
Ladies and bridge-drives and band-stands once,
But now it is G. I."

He stopped, and the car having reached the foot of the hill that led out of the valley stopped, too, as if paralysed by its owner's efforts at parody. It had been jerking and bucking like a playful mustang for some time past, and behaving in an altogether curious manner, but now it was stiller than the dead. Tryon

waggled the levers to no avail, then flung himself out of the car and got busy with the crank. Not a move. Druro then got out and had a go at the crank. No good. Thereafter, the two made a thorough examination of the beast, but poking and prying into all its secret places booted them nothing. As far as the eye of man could see, nothing was wrong with the thing but sheer obstinacy. It was more from habit than a spirit of inquiry that Druro finally gave a casual squint into the reservoir. Then the mischief was out. It was empty; the boy had never filled it. It was doubtful whether he had put in any petrol at all. The two men stared at each other aghast.

"Well, of all the rotten niggers in this rotten country!" breathed Tryon, at last, and, with the words, expressed all the weight of the white man's burden in Africa, mingled with rage at his present powerlessness to smite the evil-doer. Druro grinned. It was not his funeral, and, to the wise, no further words were necessary. But Mrs. Hading had not been long enough in Africa to be wise. This final calamity seemed all part and parcel of the mismanagement of the evening, and she did not care to conceal her annoyance.

"I cannot imagine any one but a fool allowing himself to be placed in such a predicament," she said, looking at Tryon with the utmost scorn.

He shrugged his shoulders, dumb with mortification. Druro, smiling with his usual native philosophy, now got his portion.

"Is there anything to do besides standing there smirking?" she inquired acridly.

"I should think we had better foot it to the Guinea-Pig." To do him justice, he had been thinking as well as smirking, but Marice was in no mood to be just. "A fellow called Burral lives there and has a telephone. He may have some petrol. All may not yet be lost!" He continued to smile. Not that he felt cheerful—but the situation seemed to him to call for derision rather than despair.

"Foot it? Do you mean walk through this wild bush? Good Heavens! How far is it?"

"Only about a mile or so, and there is quite a good path. Still, if you think it better to stay here in the car with Tryon while I go——"

"No; I'll go," said Tryon hastily.

"No you don't," persisted Druro. "I know the way better than you do." But Mrs. Hading put an end to the argument as to who should escape her recriminations.

"I refuse to be left in this wild spot with any one," she declared, and flung one last barb of hatred at Tryon. "How could you be such a fool?"

But Tryon's withers could be no further wrung. He merely felt sorry for Druro. The widow was showing herself to be no saint under affliction. Not here the bright companion on a weary road who is better than silken tents and horse-litters!

They started down the path to Burral's, Druro and Mrs. Hading ahead. Gay and Tryon following at a distance too short not to hear the widow's voice still engaged in acrid comment.

"What a fuss to make about nothing!" said Gay, a trifle disdainfully. "I'm afraid Africa won't suit her for long, if that's how she takes incidents of every-day life."

"I don't think she'll suit Africa," rejoined Tryon savagely. "Still, I'm not denying that I am a first-class fool to have trusted that infernal nigger. I could kick myself."

"Kick the nigger instead, tomorrow," laughed Gay, adding in the Rhodesian spirit, "what does it matter, anyway?"

The path now became narrower and overhung with wandering branches and creepers. The brambles seemed to have a special penchant for Mrs. Hading's flying ends of tulle and lace, and she spent most of her time disengaging herself while Druro went ahead, pushing branches out of the way. Poor Marice! Her feet ached in their high-heeled shoes, and her French toilette was created for a salon and not out-of-door walking. Truly, she was no veld-woman. What came as a matter of course to Gay was a tragedy to her.

"How stupid! How utterly imbecile!" she muttered bitterly. "A hateful country—and idiots of men!"

"Cheer up!" said Druro, with an equability he did not feel. Nothing bored him more than bad temper. "We'll soon be dead—I mean, we'll soon be at Burral's."

"I find your cheerfulness slightly brutal," she remarked cuttingly, "and the

thought of Burral's does not fill me with any delight."

"I'm sorry," he began, but his apology and the stillness of the night were both destroyed by a sudden loud crack of a rifle.

"By Jove! Who's that, I wonder?" exclaimed Druro. "There's nothing much to shoot about here." Then, to Mrs. Hading, "Stand still a minute—will you?—while I reconnoitre." He went a few yards ahead and gave a halloo. They all stood still, listening, until the call was returned in a man's voice from somewhere not far off. At the same time, a soft cracking of bushes was heard near at hand.

"It must be Burral out after a buck!" called out Tryon. He and Gay were still some way behind. Marice half-way between them, and Druro was apparently trying to disentangle her flickering, fluttering chiffons from a fresh engagement with the bushes when the terrible thing happened. The lithe, speckled body of a leopard came sailing, with a grace and swiftness indescribable, through the air and, leaping upon the fluttering figure, bore her to the ground. A scream of terror and anguish rent the night, and Gay and Tryon, galvanized by horror, powerless though they were to contend with the savage brute, rushed forward to the rescue. But Druro was there before them. They saw him stoop down and catch the huge cat by its hind legs, and, with extraordinary power, swing it high in the air. Snarling and spitting, it twisted its flexible body to attack him in turn, and, even as it went hurtling over his head into the bush behind, it reached out a paw and clawed him across the face. At the same moment, a man with a gun came crashing through the undergrowth, followed the flying body of the leopard into the bush, and with two rapid shots gave the beast its quietus. Reeking gun in hand, he returned to the party in the pathway.

"Got the brute at last," he panted. "Only wounded him the first shot; that's why he came for you people. My God! Who's hurt here?"

No one answered. Mrs. Hading lay moaning terribly on the ground, with Tryon and Gay bending over her. Druro was stumbling about like a drunken man. "Is it you, Lundi Druro? Did that devil get you, too? Where are you hurt?"

"It's Burral, isn't it?" said Druro vaguely. "Yes; I got a flick across the eyes. Never mind me. Get that lady to your place, Burral, and telephone to Selukine. Tell them to send a car and a doctor and to drive like mad."

"My throat—oh, my throat!" keened Marice Hading. Tryon supported her. Gay was tearing her white skirt into strips and using them for bandages. Druro came stumbling over to them.

"For God's sake, get her to Burral's place, Dick!" said he. "Burral's wife is a nurse and will know what to do. Can you two fellows carry her? I would help you—but I can't see very well. I'll come on behind."

Gay helped to lift Marice into the two men's arms, and they went ahead with their moaning burden; then she came back to Druro, who was staggering vaguely along.

"Let me help you, Lundi. Lean on me."

He put out an arm, and she caught it and placed it around her shoulders.

"I can't see, Gay," he said, in a voice that was quite steady yet had in it some quality of terrible apprehension. She peered into his face. The moon had become obscured, but she could see that his eyes were wide open with torn lids. There was a great gash down his cheek.

"Come quickly!" she cried, her voice trembling with tears. "Oh, come quickly, Lundi! We must bathe and dress your wounds as soon as possible. Leopard wounds are terribly poisonous."

"All right," he said. "Sure you don't mind my leaning on you? I hope they get a doctor at once for Mrs. Hading."

They went forward slowly, he taking curiously uneven steps. She was tall, but he had to stoop a little to keep his hold on her.

"There hasn't been a leopard in these parts for nearly two years," he mused. "The last was shot on my mine the day we struck the reef—that is why we called it the Leopard. You remember, Gay? Do you think Mrs. Hading is badly wounded?"

"Her throat and chest are very much torn, but I don't think the wounds are deep."

"Poor woman! Good Lord; what bad luck!"

"Try and hurry, Lundi."

"But I can't see. Perhaps if I could wipe the blood out of my eyes, Gay—where the deuce is my handkerchief?"

"Here is mine—let me do it for you. Sit down for a moment on this ant-heap."

She knelt by his side and gently wiped away the blood. By the sweat that was pouring down his face, she knew that he must be suffering intense pain, and was almost afraid to touch the wounded eyes.

"Is that better? Can you see now?" she asked fearfully.

"No," he said quietly. There was a moment of anguished silence between them, then he laughed.

"Cheerful if I am going to be blind!"

The words tore her heart in two, appealing to all that was tender and noble in her nature, and to that brooding maternal love that was almost stronger in her than lover's love. She seemed, as once before when trouble was on him, to see him as a bright-haired boy with innocent eyes, whom life had led astray, but who was ready with a laugh on his lips to face the worst fate would do. And she cried out, with a great cry, tenderly, brokenly:

"No, no, Lundi; you shall not be blind!"

She put her arms round him as if to ward off the powers of darkness and evil, and he let his bloody face rest against the soft sweetness of her breast. Leaning there, he knew he was home at last. Her warm tears, falling like gentle rain upon his wounded eyes, slipped down into his heart, into his very soul, cleansing it, washing away the shadows that had been between them. Now he knew what the shrouded figure at the back of his mind had waited for so long to say to him—that he loved this girl and should make his life worthy of her. He had always loved her, but had been too idle and careless, too fond of the ways and pleasures of men to change his life for her. Now that he held her in his arms, and could feel the blaze of her love burning through the walls of her, meeting the flame in his own heart, it was too late. Fate, with lightnings in her hand, had stepped between them, and a woman who held his promise intervened.

"Gay," he said gently, her name felt so sweet on his lips, "by a terrible mistake I have destroyed your happiness and mine. Forgive me."

"There is no question of forgiveness, Lundi," she whispered; "I will help you to stand by it."

He held up his blurred eyes and torn, bleeding lips, and she kissed him as one might kiss the dead, in exquisite renouncement and farewell. Only that the quick are not the dead—and cannot be treated as such. A more poignant misery waked in both their hearts with that kiss. He could not see her—that was terrible—but the satiny warmth of her mouth was so dear, so exquisitely dear! He suddenly remembered her as she was that night in her little rose-leaf gown with all the dewdrops twinkling on her. He wondered if he would ever see her again in all her beauty.

"You were so sweet that night of the dance, Gay," he said, "in your little pinky gown, with the dewdrops winking on you!"

She understood that he was wondering if he should ever see her again.

"You shall—you shall!" she cried. "Oh, hurry! Come quickly! Let us get to the house and to help."

The serene and careless philosophy characteristic of him came back.

"If I am to be blind, all right," he said quietly. "I'll accept it without a kick, because of this hour."

Once more they stumbled deviously and slowly on. A light showed nearer now, in a house window, and presently the other two men were on their way to meet them with lanterns and a brandy-flask. In a short time, Druro was established in Mrs. Burral's sitting-room, having his eyes bathed and bandaged by her skilful hands.

"What about Mrs. Hading?" had been his first question. Marice's low moans could be plainly heard from behind the curtain which divided the one room of the little iron house.

"Her throat and shoulders are very much lacerated," said Mrs. Burral. "I think we have avoided the danger of blood-poisoning for you both, as I was able to clean the wounds so quickly with bichloride. But she will be dreadfully scarred, poor thing! And you, Mr. Druro, I'm afraid—I'm afraid your eyes are badly hurt."

It seemed years to them all, though it was scarcely more than half an hour before assistance came from Selukine. All tragedies take place in the brain, it has been said, and poignant things were happening behind several foreheads during that bad half-hour of waiting. Marice Hading, lying on Mrs. Burral's bed, hovered over by that kind woman, was suffering more acutely in the thought of her ravaged beauty than from the pain of her wounds. Druro's bandaged eyes saw with greater clearness down the bleak avenues of the future than they had ever seen in health. Tryon was afraid to look at Gay. He was outwardly attentive to Burral's tale of the leopard's depredations—chickens torn from the roost, a mutilated foal, a half-eaten calf—and of the final stalking and unlucky wounding of the beast, rendering it mad with the rage to attack everything it met; but his brain was occupying itself with a thought that ran round and round in it like a squirrel in a cage—the thought that Gay was lost to him for ever. He had seen her looking at Lundi Druro with all her tortured soul in her eyes. Now she stood at the window, staring into the night.

When, at last, the whir of motor-wheels was heard on the far-off road, each of them hastened to recapture their wretched minds and drag them back from the lands of desolation in which they wandered, to face once more the formalities of life behind life's mask of convention. There came a sound of many voices—subdued, deploring, anxious, inquiring. The picnickers had heard of the accident and were returning in force to succour the lost ones. It was a sorry ending to the great Leopard picnic.

Mrs. Hading and Druro were driven to the Wankelo Hospital, and doctors and nurses closed in on them. Specialists came from Buluwayo and the Cape, and, after a time of waiting, it was known that the danger of blood-poisoning was past for both of the victims. But whether Lundi Druro was to walk in darkness for the rest of his days could not be so quickly told or what lay behind the significant silence concerning Mrs. Hading's injuries. It was known that her condition was not dangerous, but she saw no one, and, in the private ward she had engaged, she surrounded herself with nurses whose business it was not to talk, and doctors, even in Rhodesia, do not gratify the inquiries of the merely curious. So, for a long period of waiting, no one quite knew how the tragedy was all to end.

In another part of the hospital, Druro sat in his room with bandaged eyes and Toby on his knees, gossiping with the friends who came to beguile his monotony, giving no outward sign that hope had been dragged from his heart as

effectively as light had been wiped from his eyes. From the black emptiness in which he sat, he sent Marice Hading a daily message containing all the elements of a mental cocktail—a jibe at fate, a fleer at leopards in general, and a prophecy of merrier times to come as soon as they were out of their present annoyances. In reply, she wrote guarded little notes (that were read to him by his nurse), making small mention of her own injuries but seeming feverishly anxious concerning his sight. All he could tell her was that he awaited the arrival and verdict of Sir Charles Tryon, the famous eye-specialist, now somewhere on his way between Madeira and Wankelo. It was Dick Tryon, who, knowing that his brother was taking a holiday at Madeira, had cabled asking for his services for Druro.

Poor Dick Tryon! He blamed himself bitterly for the whole catastrophe on the grounds that, if he had only looked into the petrol-tank instead of taking a Kafir's word, the car would never have been held up or the encounter with the leopard occurred. It was no use Lundi Druro's telling him that such reasoning manifested an arrogant underrating of the powers of destiny.

"You are a very clever fellow, Dick, but even you can't wash out the writing on the wall," philosophized the patient, from behind his bandage, "nor scribble anew on the tablet of Fate, which is hung round the neck of every man. If the old hag meant me to be blind, she'd fixed me all right without your assistance."

But Tryon could not be reasoned with in this wise. Perhaps it was the shipwreck in Gay's eyes that would not let him rest. Druro could not see that; but it was part of Dick Tryon's penance to witness it every day when he fetched Gay and her father in his car to visit the hospital. She always came laden with flowers and cheery words, and left an odour of happiness and hope behind her. But Tryon had seen what was in her eyes that night at Burral's, and behind all her hopeful smiling he saw it there still. He realized that she and Druro had found each other in the hour of tragedy, and that for him there was no rôle left but that of spectator—unless he could prove himself a friend by helping them to each other's arms, in spite of Marice Hading. As for Druro and Gay, they had never been alone together since that night—and never meant to be. They had had their hour.

Another of Tryon's self-imposed jobs was to motor to Selukine and bring back Emma Guthrie to see his partner. For there were moments when Druro could stand no one's society so well as the bitter-tongued American's.

"Go and bring in Emma to say a few pleasant words all round," he would enjoin, and Emma would come, looking like a wounded bear ready to eat up everything in sight. But, strange to say, after the first two or three visits, his words were sweeter than honey in the honeycomb, and all his ways were soothing and serene. He had nothing but good news to dispense. The novelty first amused then exasperated Druro, and he ended up by telling Guthrie to clear out of the hospital and never come back.

Emma did come back, however, and every time he showed his face, it was to bring some fresh tale of the sparkling fortunes hidden in the bosom of his Golconda. The mine was a brick, a peach, a flower. Zeus dropping nightly showers of gold upon Danaë was nothing to the miracles going on at the Leopard.

One evening after dinner, while Druro was sitting alone with his own dark thoughts, a message was brought to him—a message that Mrs. Hading would be glad to see him. It appeared that she had been up and about her room for some days, and was as bored as he with her own society.

Leaning on the arm of his nurse, he walked down the long veranda and came to her big, cool room, delicately shaded with rose lights and full of the scent of violets and faint Parisian essences. He could not see her of course, or the rose lights, but he sensed her sitting there in her long chair, looking languorous and subtle, with colours and flowers and books about her. The nurse guided him to a seat near her and left them together.

"Well, here we are, Lundi—turned into a pair of wretched, broken-down crocks!"

The words were light, but the indescribable bitterness of her voice struck at him painfully.

"Only for a little while," he said gently. "We'll both be back in the game soon, fitter than ever."

"Never!" There was the sound of a shudder in the exclamation. "How can one ever be the same after *that*——"

"You've been a brick! You mustn't give way now, after coming through so bravely."

"How I hate Africa!" she exclaimed fiercely.

Druro could not help smiling.

"Poor old Africa! We all abuse her like a pickpocket and cling to her like a mother."

"I don't cling. All I ask is never to see her again."

"I don't wonder. She has not treated you too well."

The smile faded from his lips, leaving them sombre. It was like looking into a dark window to see Lundi Druro's face without the gaiety of his eyes. At the same time, their absence threw up a quality of strength about his mouth and jaw that might have gone unobserved. He was conscious of her attention acutely fixed upon him, but he could not know with what avid curiosity she was searching his features, or guess, fortunately for him, at the cold, clear thought that was passing through her mind.

"How awful to have to drag a blind husband about the world! Still—the money will mitigate. I can always pay people to——" Then a thrill of pleasure shot through that bleak and desert thing which was her heart. "He will never see me as I am now."

Yes; this reflection actually gave her pleasure and content in Druro's tragedy. He, of all the world, would still think of her as she had been before the leopard puckered her throat and scarred her cheek with terrible scars. At the thought, her vanity, which was her soul, suddenly flowered forth again. Her voice softened; some of the old glamour came back into it.

"Will you take me away from this cruel country, Lundi—as soon as we are both better?"

To leave Africa, and that which Africa held! All Lundi Druro's blood called out, "No," but his firm lips answered gently:

"Yes; if you wish it," then closed again as if set in stone.

"And never come back to it again?"

"That is a harder thing to promise, Marice," he said. "One never knows what life and fate may demand of one. My work might call me back here."

"Yes, yes; that is true," she said peevishly. "The main thing is that you will never expect me to come back. But, of course, if you are blind, it will not be much use your coming either."

The blow was unexpected, but he did not flinch.

She was the first person who had taken such a probability for granted; but he had long faced the contingency himself.

"If I am to be blind, we must reconstruct plans and promises, Marice.
They are made, as far as I am concerned, conditionally."

"No; no conditions!" she cried feverishly. "I am going to marry you, whether your eyes recover or not. Promise me you won't draw back, if the worst comes?"

She could not bear to lose him—this one man in all the world who would still think her beautiful. All her soul which was her vanity cried out passionately to him.

"Of course I will promise you, dear, if you think it good enough," he said, "if you still want me and think a blind man can make you happy."

"Yes; I want you blind," she answered strangely. "You can make me very happy." Then she reached for the bell-button and pressed it. Her nerves were giving out, and she needed to be alone. But the future was arranged for now, and she could rest. She made a subtle sign to the entering nurse, and Druro never guessed that he was being evicted by any one but the latter in her professional capacity. To be deceived is doubtless part of the terrible fate of the blind.

She had succeeded in deceiving Druro in more than this. Confirmed now in the belief that he was necessary to her happiness and that to fulfil his promises to her was the only way of honour, he knew that he must thrust the thought of Gay out of his mind for ever. Even in the grey misery of that decision, he could still feel a glow of gratitude toward the woman who loved him enough to face the future with a blind man. Because his mind was a jumble of emotions fermented by the humility born of sitting in darkness and affliction, for many days he spoke a little of it to Tryon, who came, as was now his custom, to help pass away the evening.

So Tryon was the first person in Wankelo to hear of Marice Hading's greatness of heart—and the last person in the world to believe in it. But he did not say so to Druro. He had long ago sized up Marice Hading's subtle mind and shallow soul, and it was not very difficult for him to read this riddle of new-born nobility. Druro and his rich mine were to pay the price of her lost beauty. What booted it if he were blind? So much the better for the vanity of a woman who worshipped her beauty as Mrs. Hading had done. It was certain that, blind or whole, she meant to hold Druro to his bond, and that she would eventually make hay with his life, Tryon had not the faintest doubt. Destruction for Druro—shipwreck for Gay! A woman's cruel, skilful little hands had crumpled up their happiness like so much waste paper, and Tryon, with the best will in the world, saw no clear way to save it from being pitched to the burning. The best he could do, for that evening at least, was to shake Druro's hand warmly at parting and tell him that he was a deuced lucky fellow.

Two days later, Sir Charles Tryon arrived, a short, square man with most unprofessional high spirits and a jolly laugh that filled everyone with hope. It was late in the afternoon when he got to Wankelo, and, after a cursory test of Druro's eyes, he announced himself unable to give a decisive verdict until after a more complete examination the following day. He then departed to his brother's house for dinner and a good night's rest after his long journey.

No sooner had Dick tucked him safely away than he was back again at the hospital, for he had a very shrewd notion of the brand of misery Druro, condemned to a night's suspense, would be suffering. And he guessed right. Emma Guthrie, just arrived, was in the act of "cheering him up" with an account of the mine's output from the monthly clean-up that day.

"How many ounces?" asked Druro indifferently. The prosperity of the mine bothered him far less than the fate of his eyes, for he knew himself to be one of those men who can always find gold. If one mine gave out, there were plenty of others.

"Five hundred, as usual," said Guthrie jubilantly. "Here it is—feel it; weigh it."

From a sagging coat pocket he abstracted what might, from its size and shape, have been a bar of soap but for the yellow shine of it, and placed it in Druro's right hand. The latter lifted it with a weighing gesture for a moment and handed it back.

"That's all right."

"All right! I should say!" declaimed the bright and bragful Emma. "Two thousand of the best there, all gay and golden! I tell you, Lundi, we've got a peach. And she hasn't done her best by a long chalk. She's only beginning. You buck up and get your eyes well, my boy, and come and see for yourself." He began to hold forth in technical terms that were Greek to Tryon concerning stopes, cross-cuts, foot-walls, stamps, and drills. Every moment his voice grew gayer and more ecstatic. He seemed drunk with success and unable to contain his bubbling, rapturous optimism, and that Druro sat brooding with the sinister silence of a volcano that might, at any instant, burst into violent eruption did not appear to disturb him. Fortunately, some other men came in and relieved the situation; when Guthrie took his leave, a few moments later, Tryon made a point of accompanying him to the gate. He was getting as sick as Druro of Emma's perpetual gaiety and came out with the distinct intention of saying so as rudely as possible.

"What do you mean by bringing your devilish good spirits here? Have you no bowels? Kindly chuck it for once and for all."

Guthrie, squatting on his haunches, feeling his bicycle tyres, turned up to him a face grown suddenly rutted and haggard as a Japanese gargoyle.

"That drum-and-fife band is only a bluff, Dick," he said quietly. "The Leopard is G. I., and if that boy loses his eyes as well, neither of us will ever climb out of the soup again."

Tryon came out of the gate and stared at him interestedly.

"What do you mean? How can the Leopard——"

"I mean that the reef is gone—for good, this time."

"The reef gone?" reiterated Tryon stupidly. "Why—good Lord, I thought you'd found it richer and stronger than ever!"

"So we did. But, my boy, mining is the biggest gamble in the world. It pinched out, sudden as a stroke of apoplexy, a few days after Lundi's accident. We've got a month's crushing in hand now, and when that's gone, we'll have to shut down. We're bust!"

"But what about that five-hundred-ounce clean-up you handed him?"

"All bluff! I drew two thousand quid for native wages and threw it into the melting-pot. That lovely button goes back to the bank tomorrow. They've got to be bluffed, too, until Lundi's able to stand the truth."

"I don't know if he'll thank you for it, Emma," said Tryon, at last.

"I don't say he will; I don't say Lundi can't take his physic when he's got to, as well as any man. But I can reckon he's got an overdose already. I'll wait."

Tryon stared a while into the shrewd, wizened face, then said thoughtfully:

"I think you're quite right. There are moments when enough is too much, and I haven't a doubt but that a little extra bad luck would just finish what chance he has of seeing again. Keep it up your sleeve anyway, until we hear my brother's verdict."

"Oh, I'll keep it," said Emma grimly. "Once his bandages are off, we'll let the hornets buzz, but not before."

"Meantime," remarked Tryon, "if you like to make me a present of the information, I will promise to use it carefully and for nothing but Druro's benefit."

Guthrie gave him a long, expressionless glance.

"There are worse things than having your eyes clawed out by a leopard," continued Dick enigmatically.

"What worse?"

"You might, for instance, have your heart plucked out by a vulture while you're lying helpless."

"Poison the carcass!" Emma elegantly advised. "That'll finish the vulture before it has time to gorge full." And, as he straddled his battered bicycle, he added a significant remark, which showed that he very well knew what he was talking about. "Lundi'll always be blind about women, anyway."

Tryon did not return to Druro's room, but went thoughtfully toward that wing of the hospital in which he knew the quarters of the young and pretty matron to be situated. Having found her, he put before her so urgent and convincing an appeal for an interview with Mrs. Hading that she went herself to ask that lady to receive him. A clinching factor was an adroit remark about his brother's interest in Druro's chances. He guessed that such a remark repeated would bring him into Marice Hading's presence quicker than anything else, and he was right. Within five minutes, he was in the softly shaded, violet-scented room where Druro had groped his way some nights before—the difference being that he could see that which Druro had mercifully been spared.

The beauty of the woman sitting in the long chair had been torn from her like a veil behind which she had too long hidden her real self. Now that she was stripped, a naked thing in the wind, all eyes could see her deformities and read her cold and arid soul. The furies of rage and rancour were grabbling at her heart, even as the leopard had scrabbled on her face. It was not the mere disfigurement of the angry, purplish scars that twisted her mouth and puckered her cheeks. A shining spirit, gentle and brave in affliction might have transformed even these, robbing them of their hideousness. But here was one who had "thrown down every temple she had built," and whose dark eyes were empty now of anything except a malign and bitter ruin. It was as though nothing could longer cover and conceal her cynical dislike of all things but herself. The face set on the long, ravaged throat, once so subtly alluring, had turned hawklike and cruel. It seemed shrivelled, too, and, between the narrow linen bandages she still wore, it had the cunning malice of some bird of prey peering from a barred cage.

Tryon looked once, then kept his eyes to his boots. He would have given much to have fled, and, in truth, he had no stomach for his job. It seemed to him uncommonly like hitting at some wounded creature already smitten to death. But it was not for himself he was fighting. It was for Gay's sweet, upright soul, and the happiness of a man too good to be thrown to the vultures of a woman's greed and cruelty. That thought hardened his heart for the task he had in hand.

Marice came to the point at once. It seemed that, with her beauty, she had lost or discarded the habit of subtle attack.

"What does Sir Charles think of his chances?"

It was Tryon who had to have recourse to subtlety. Juggling with his brother's professional name was a risky business, and he did not mean to get on to dangerous ground.

"He can't tell yet—he was afraid to be certain, tonight—is going to have another go at them tomorrow. But——"

"But?" She leaned forward eagerly. "There is not much hope?"

There was no mistaking her face and voice. It was as he had guessed; *she did not want Druro to recover*. Tryon had no further qualms.

"*I* am not going to give up hope, anyway," he said, with that air of dogged intent which is often founded on hopelessness. She gave a little sigh and sat back among her cushions, like a woman who has taken a refreshing drink.

"Dear Druro, it is very sad for him!" said she complacently, and presently added, "but I shall always see that he is taken care of."

Something in Tryon shuddered, but outwardly he gave no sign, only looked at her commiseratingly.

"It is that we are thinking of—Guthrie and I. Are you strong enough physically and well-enough off financially to undertake such a burden?" She regarded him piercingly, a startled look in her eyes. "Doubtless you are a rich women—and, of course, no one could doubt your generosity. Still, a blind man without means of his own——"

"*What?*" She fired the word at him like a pistol-shot.

"He does not know," said Tryon softly. "We are keeping it dark for some days yet. The two shocks together might——" He paused.

"What—*what*?" she panted at him, like a runner at the end of his last lap.

"The mine is no good. They are dropping back into it every penny they ever made, and the reef has pinched out. Guthrie told me this tonight on his oath." The woman gave a long, sighing breath and lay back painfully in her chair. But Tryon had a cruel streak in him. He would not let her rest. "He is a ruined man, and may be a blind man, but, thank God, he has you to lean on!"

"You are mad!" said she, and burst into a harsh laugh. Tryon's face was full of grave concern as he rose.

"Shall I send your nurse?"

She pulled herself together sharply.

"Yes, yes; send her—but, before you go, promise me, Mr. Tryon, never to let Druro know you told me."

("Is it possible that she has so much grace in her?" he pondered.)

"Never!" he promised solemnly. "He shall find out the greatness of your love for himself."

Like fate, Tryon knew where to rub in the salt. As he went down the veranda, he heard the same harsh, cruel laugh ringing out, somewhat like the laugh of a hyena that has missed its prey.

After Sir Charles had gone, Druro sat for a while silent, elbows on the table, thinking. He had insisted upon getting up as usual, though they had tried to keep him in bed. He was not going to take it lying down, he said. So now he sat there, alone, except for Toby, who sat on his knee and, from time to time, put out a little red tongue and gently licked his master's ear.

The nurses who came softly in to congratulate him slipped away softlier still, without speaking. They could understand what it meant to him to know that he would see the sunshine again, the rose and primrose dawns, the great purple shadows of night flung across the veld. What they did not know was that, in spirit, he was looking his last on the land he loved and seeing down a vista of

long years greyer than the veld on the greyest day of winter. His lips were firmly closed, but they wore a bluish tinge as he sat there, for he was tasting life colder than ice and drier than the dust of the desert between his teeth; and the serpent of remorse and regret was at his heart.

But not for long. Presently he rose and squared his shoulders, like a man settling his burden for a long march, and said quickly to himself some words he had once read, he knew not where.

"'A man shall endure such things as the stern women drew off the spindles for him at his birth.'"

His nurse, who had been waiting in the veranda, hearing his voice, now came in and greeted him gaily. "Hooray, Mr. Druro! Oh, you don't know how glad we all are! And the whole town has been here to wish you luck and joy on the news. But Sir Charles made us drive them all away. He says you may see no more than two people before you have lunched and rested, and he has selected the two himself."

"What cheek!" said Druro. "And what a nice soft hand you've got, nurse!"

"Be off with you now!" laughed the trim Irish nurse. "And how can I read you the letter I have for you with one hand?"

"Try it wid wan eye instid," said he, putting on a brogue to match her own. She laughed and escaped, and, later, read the letter, at his wish.

LUNDI DEAR:

I grieve to hurt you, but it is no use pretending. I can never live in this atrocious Africa, and I feel it would be cruel to tear you away from a country you love so much. Besides, after deep consideration, I find that my darling husband's memory is dearer to me than any living man can be. Forgive me—and farewell.

MARICE.

"She left by the morning's train," said the nurse. "You know she has been well enough to go for more than a week."

As Lundi did not answer, she went away and left him once more sitting very still. But with what a different stillness! The whole world smelled sweet in his nostrils and spoke of freedom. His blood chanted a paean of praise and hope to the sun and moon and stars. An old cry of the open surged in him.

"Life is sweet, brother! There is day and night, brother, both sweet things, sun, moon, and stars, all sweet things; there's likewise a wind on the heath!"

The voice of Tryon broke in on his communings.

"How do you feel, old man?"

"That you, Dick?" Druro stooped down and felt for Toby once more. "I feel inclined to run out into the street and throw my hat into the air, and yell out that I'll fight any one, play poker against any one, and match my girl and my dog against all comers."

"Indeed! Then I'll leave you, for you're certainly suffering from a dangerous swagger in the blood."

Tryon's smile had more than a tinge of sadness in it as he turned to go. This action of his was one of those that smell sweet and blossom in the dust, but, as yet, he was too near it to savour much more than its bitterness. The path is narrow and the gate is straight for those who serve faithfully at Love's high altar. As he went from the room, he looked with tender eyes at the flower-like girl who had come in with him and stood now with smiling lips and eyes full of tears looking at the man and the dog.

"You ought to give him a lecture, Gay. It isn't good for a man to be so puffed up with pride."

"Gay!" said Druro, standing up and letting Toby down with a rush.

"Yes, Lundi. Dick fetched me. I had to come and tell you how glad——"

She slid a hand into his, and he drew her into his arms and began to kiss her with those slow, still-lipped kisses that have all the meaning of life and love behind them.

Toby, having trotted out into the garden, now returned with a large stone which

he had culled as one might gather a bouquet of flowers to present upon a triumphant occasion.

Rosanne Ozanne

PART I

Although the Ozannes kept an hotel in Kimberley, they were not of the class usually associated with hotel-running in rough mining-towns. It was merely that, on their arrival in the diamond fields, they had accepted such work as came to their hands, in a place where people like Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Beit were washing blue ground for diamonds in their own claims, and other men, afterward to become world-famous millionaires, were standing behind counters bartering with natives or serving drinks to miners.

John Ozanne, the honest but not brilliant son of an English clergyman, did not disdain to serve behind his own bar, either, when his barman was sick, and his wife, in servantless days, turned to in the hotel kitchen and cooked the meals, though such work was far from her taste and had not been included in her upbringing as a country doctor's daughter. In fact, the pair of them were of the stuff from which good colonials are made, and they deserved the luck that gradually came to them.

In time, the little hotel grew into a large and flourishing concern. John Ozanne was seen no more in his bar, and his wife retired into the privacy of her own wing of the building, though her capable hand was still felt in the hotel management. It was at this period that the little twin daughters were born to them, adding a fresh note of sweetness to the harmony that existed between the devoted and prosperous couple.

They were bonny, healthy children, and very pretty, though not at all alike—little Rosanne being very dusky, while Rosalie was fair as a lily. All went well with them until about a year after their birth, when Rosanne fell ill of a wasting sickness as inexplicable as it was deadly. Without rhyme or reason that doctors or mother could lay finger on, the little mite just grew thinner and more peevish day by day, and visibly faded under their eyes. Every imaginable thing was tried without result, and, at last, the doctors grown glum and the mother despairing

were obliged to admit themselves beaten by the mysterious sickness.

Late one afternoon, Mrs. Ozanne, sitting in her bedroom, realized that the end was near. The child lay on her lap, a mere bundle of skin and bone, green in colour and scarcely breathing. The doctor had just left with a sad shake of his head and the conclusive words:

"Only a matter of an hour or so, Mrs. Ozanne. Try and bear up. You have the other little one left."

But what mother's heart could ever comfort its pain for the loss of one loved child by thinking of those that are left? Heavy tears fell down Mrs. Ozanne's cheek on to the small, wasted form. Her trouble seemed the more poignant in that she had to bear it alone, for her husband was away on a trip to the old country. She herself was sick, worn to a shadow from long nursing and watching. But even now there was no effort, physical or mental, that she would not have made to save the little life that had just been condemned. Her painful brooding was broken by the sound of a soft and languorous voice.

"Baby very sick, missis?"

The mother looked up and saw, in the doorway, the new cook who had been with them about a week, and of whom she knew little save that the woman was a Malay and named Rachel Bangat. There was nothing strange in her coming to the mistress's room to offer sympathy. In a South African household the servants take a vivid interest in all that goes on. "Yes," said the mother, dully. The woman crept nearer and looked down on the little face with its deathly green shadows.

"Baby going to die, missis," she said.

Mrs. Ozanne bowed her head. There was silence then. The mother, blind with tears, thought the woman had gone as quietly as she came, but presently the voice spoke again, almost caressingly.

"Missis sell baby to me for a farthing; baby not die."

The mother gave a jump, then dashed the tears from her eyes and stared at the speaker. In the dusky shadows of the doorway the woman, in her white turban and black-and-gold shawl, seemed suddenly to have assumed a fateful air. Yet she was an ordinary enough looking Malay, of stout, even course, build, with a

broad, high cheek-boned face that wore the grave expression of her race. It was only her dark eyes, full of a sinister melancholy, that differed from any eyes Mrs. Ozanne had ever seen, making her shiver and clutch the baby to her breast.

"Go away out of here!" she said violently, and the woman went, without a word. But within half an hour the languorous voice was whispering once more from the shadow of the doorway.

"Missis sell baby to me for a farthing; baby get well."

The mother, crouching over the baby, straining her ears for its faltering heart-beats, had no words. In a sort of numb terror she waved the woman off. It was no more than fifteen minutes later that the Malay came again; yet it seemed to Mrs. Ozanne that she waited hours with cracking ear-drums to hear once more the terms of the strange bargain. This time, the words differed slightly.

"Missis sell baby to me for two years; baby belong all to me; missis no touch, no speak." In the dark palm she proffered lay a farthing. "Take it quick, missis; baby dying."

Sophia Ozanne cast one anguished glance at the face of her child, then gave it up, clutched the farthing and fell fainting to the floor.

An hour later, other servants came to relate that the baby was still alive and its breathing more regular. In another hour, they reported it sleeping peacefully. The heart-wrung mother, still weak and quivering from her collapse, crept through the hotel and came faltering to the kitchen threshold, but dared not enter. Near the fire, on a rough bed formed of two chairs and a folded blanket, the child lay sleeping. Even from the door she could see that its colour was better and the green shadows gone. The atmosphere of the kitchen was gently warm. Rachel Bangat, with her back to the door, was busy at the table cutting up vegetables. Without turning round, she softly addressed the mother.

"You keep away from here. If you not remember baby my baby for two years, something happen!"

That was all. But under the languor of the voice lay a dagger-like menace that struck to the mother's heart.

"Oh, I'll keep the bargain," she whispered fervently. "Only—be kind to my child,

won't you?"

"Malays always kind to children," said Rachel Bangat impassively, and continued peeling vegetables.

It was true. All Malay women have a passion for children, and consider themselves afflicted if they have never borne a child. Illegitimate and unwanted babies will always find a home open to them in the Malay quarter of any South African town. The mother, comforted in some sort by the knowledge, stole away —and kept away.

Within two weeks the child was sitting up playing with its toes. Within a month it was toddling about the kitchen, though the little sister did not walk until some weeks later. The story got about Kimberley, much as Mrs. Ozanne tried to keep it secret. For one thing, the child's extraordinary recovery could not be hidden The doctor's amazement was not less than that of the friends who had watched the progress of the child's sickness and awaited its fatal termination. These, having come to condole, stayed to gape at the news that Rosanne was better and down in the kitchen with the cook. Later, Mrs. Ozanne's nurse appeared regularly in the Public Gardens with only one baby, where once she had perambulated two. Little Rosanne was never seen, and, indeed, never left the back premises of the hotel except on Sunday afternoons, when Rachel Bangat arrayed her in gaudy colours and took her away to the Malay Location. The child's health, instead of suffering, seemed to thrive under this treatment, and she was twice the size of her twin sister. Mrs. Ozanne had means of knowing, too, that, though Rosanne gambolled round in the dust like a little animal all day, she was well washed at night and put to sleep in a clean bed. That was some comfort to the poor mother in her wretchedness. She knew that Kimberley tongues were wagging busily and that, thanks to the servants, the story had leaked out and was public property. There were not wanting mothers to condemn her for what they variously termed her foolishness, ignorant supersitition, and heartlessness. But there were others who sympathized, saying that she had done well in a bad situation to trust to the healing gift some Malays are known to possess together with many other strange powers for good and evil. The doctor himself, after seeing little Rosanne with a pink flush in her cheeks, had said to her mother:

"It's a mystery to me—in fact, something very like a miracle. But, as it turns out, you did quite right to let the woman have the child. I should certainly advise you to leave it with her for a time."

Even if he had not so advised and had there been no sympathizers, in the face of all opposition Mrs. Ozanne would have stuck to her bargain. She knew not what dread fear for her child's safety lay shuddering in the depths of her heart, but this she knew: that nothing could make her defy that fear by breaking bond with Rachel Bangat.

Even her husband's anger, when he returned from England, could not make her contemplate such a step. She had written and told him all about the matter from beginning to end, describing the gamut of emotions through which she had passed—anxiety, suffering, terror, and dreadful relief; and he had sympathized and seemed to understand, even applauding her action since the sequel appeared so successful.

But, apparently, he had never fully realized the main fact of the bargain until he returned to find that, while one little daughter was dainty and sweet under a nursemaid's care, the other, dressed in the gaudy bandanas and bangles of a Malay child, gambolled in the back yard or crawled in the kitchen among potato peelings and pumpkin pips. First aghast, then furious, he brooded over the thing, held back by his terrified wife from making a move. Then, at the end of three days, he broke loose.

"It's an outrage!" he averred, and stamped to the back regions with his wife hanging to his arm trying to stay him. In the kitchen no sign of Rachel Bangat, but the child was sitting in a small, rough-deal sugar-box, which served for waste and scraps, using it as a go-cart. Amidst the debris of vegetable and fruit peelings, she sat gurgling and banging with a chunk of pumpkin, while the other chubby hand held a half-eaten apple. John Ozanne caught her up.

"Leave her, John; for God's sake, leave her!" pleaded his wife, white-faced. At her words a sound came from the scullery, and the cook bounded into the doorway and stood looking with a dark eye.

"You take my baby?" she asked. Perhaps it was the gentleness of her tone that made John Ozanne stop to explain that it was not fitting for an Englishman's child to be dragged up in a kitchen, and that the thing could not go on any longer.

"I quite understand that you've been very good, my woman, and I shall see that you are well re——"

"You take her; she be dead in twenty-four hours," said Rachel Bangat impassively. Her deep languorous voice seemed to stroke its hearers like a velvety hand, yet had in it some deadly quality. To John Ozanne, unimaginative man though he was, it was like hearing the click of a revolver in the hand of an enemy who is a dead shot. His grasp slackened round the child, and his wife took her from him and set her back in the box. They went out alone. Never again was an attempt made to break the two years' compact.

At the end of the allotted time, Mrs. Ozanne returned the farthing to the Malay, who received it in silence but with a strange and secret smile. Little Rosanne, healthy and strong, was taken into the bosom of her family, and John Ozanne, with scant ceremony or sentiment, paid Rachel Bangat handsomely for her services and dismissed her. Presumable the Malay Location swallowed her up, for she was seen no more at the hotel, and the whole strange episode was, to all outward appearance, finished.

These happenings having been overpast for some fifteen years, many changes had come, in the meantime, to the Ozanne family. The head of it—that good citizen, husband, and father, John Ozanne—after amassing a large fortune, had severed his connection with the hotel and retired to enjoy the fruits of his industry. Fate, however, had not permitted him to enjoy them long, for he was badly injured in a carriage accident and died shortly afterward, leaving everything to his wife and daughters. The latter, having enjoyed the advantages of education in England and France, were now returned to their mother's wing, and the three lived together in a large, cool stone residence which, pleasantly situated in Belgravia (even then the most fashionable part of Kimberley), was known as Tiptree House.

Both girls were extremely pretty, with all the bloom and grace of their eighteen years upon them, and moved in the best society the place afforded—a society which, if not more cultured, was at least more alive and interesting than that of the average English country town. For Kimberley continued to be the place where the most wonderful diamonds were to be picked out of the earth, as commonly as shells off the beach of a South Sea Island, and the adventurous and ambitious still circulated there in great numbers. There was no lack of gaiety and excitement, and the Ozanne girls joined in all that went on, and were extremely popular, though in different ways and for different reasons. Rosalie, blond, with a nature as sunny as her hair, and all her heart to be read in her frank, blue eyes,

was beloved by her friends for her sympathy and sweetness; while the feelings that Rosanne excited were more in the nature of admiration and astonishment at her wit and fascination, and the verve with which she threw herself into life. She was always in demand for brilliant functions, which she made the more brilliant by her presence; but, though she had the art of attracting both men and women, she also possessed a genius for searing and wounding those who came too close, and she was not able to keep her friends as Rosalie did. Her dark beauty was touched with something wild and mysterious that repelled even while it charmed, and her ways were as subtle and strange as her looks. Indeed, though she lived under the same roof with her mother and sister, and to all outward appearance seemed to be one with them in their daily life and interests, she was really an exile in her own family, and all three were aware of the fact. Rosalie and Mrs. Ozanne, being single-hearted, simple people, were in complete accord with one another; but there was no real intimacy between them and Rosanne, and though they had (for love of the latter) tried for years to break down the intangible barrier that existed, all efforts were vain and usually resulted in pain to themselves. It was as though Rosanne dwelt within the fortified camp of herself, and only came glancing forth like a black arrow when she saw an opportunity to deal a wound.

Mrs. Ozanne, in brooding over the matter—as she often did—silently and sadly, assigned this secret antagonism in Rosanne to the strange episode of the girl's babyhood, and bitterly blamed the Malay woman for stealing her child's heart and changing her nature. Sometimes she actually went so far as to wonder if it would not have been better to have let Rosanne die than have made the uncanny bargain that had restored her to health. Once she had even pondered over the possibility of the Malay having tricked her by exchanging the real Rosanne for another child, but it was impossible to entertain such an idea long; Rosanne bore too strong a resemblance to her father's side of the family, and there were, besides, certain small birthmarks which no art could have imitated.

Still, indubitably a *something* existed in Rosanne that was foreign to her family. And the cruel streak in her character which betrayed itself in cutting comments, as bright as they were incisive, and tiny acts of witty malice were incomprehensible to her kindly-natured mother and sister. Furthermore, her hatred, when it was aroused, seemed to possess the mysterious quality of a curse. For instance, it appeared to be enough for her to give one dark glance at someone she intensely disliked or who had crossed her wishes, for that person to fall sick, or suffer accident or loss or some unexpected ill. Mrs. Ozanne had

noticed it times out of number; in fact, she secretly kept a sort of black list of all the things that had happened to people who had been so unfortunate as to offend Rosanne. At first, it had seemed to the mother impossible that there could be anything in the thing, but the evidence had gradually mounted up until now it was almost overwhelming. Besides, Mrs. Ozanne was not alone in remarking it. Rosalie, too, knew, and conveyed her knowledge in round-about ways to her mother, for they would never speak openly of this strangeness in one they dearly loved. But it was through Rosalie that the mother heard that the same thing had gone on at school. There, the other girls had superstitiously but secretly named Rosanne "The Hoodoo Girl," because to have much to do with her always brought you bad luck, especially if you fell out with her. In fact, whenever you crossed her in any way, "something happened," the girls said.

"*Something happen!*" Those had been the Malay cook's words that had haunted and intimidated Mrs. Ozanne. And that was what it all amounted to. Rosanne had, in some way, acquired the power of her foster-mother for making things of an unpleasant nature happen to people she did not like. Kind-hearted Mrs. Ozanne, with mind always divided between stern conviction and a wish to deride it, suffered a mental trepidation that grew daily more unbearable, for what had been serious enough when Rosanne was younger began to be something perilously sinister now that she was turning into a woman and her deeper passions and emotions began to be aroused. In fact, the thing had come home to Mrs. Ozanne with renewed significance lately, and she was still trembling with apprehension over several strange happenings.

This was one of them: Pretty Mrs. Valpy, an intimate of the family, and by way of being one of the only two close friends Rosanne could boast, had fallen out with the latter at a ball where she was chaperoning the two girls. From a little misunderstanding about a dance, a serious quarrel had arisen. Rosanne, considering herself engaged for the seventh waltz to Major Satchwell, had kept it for him only to find that Mrs. Valpy, having in error written his name down for the same dance instead of the next, had kept him to it, with the result that Rosanne was obliged to "sit it out," a proceeding not at all agreeable to her as the best dancer in Kimberley. She had been in a fury, and, when the two came to her at the end of the dance, she did not disguise her annoyance. Major Satchwell apologized and explained the error away as best he could, knowing himself in the wrong for having been prevailed upon by Mrs. Valpy; but the latter aggravated the offence by laughing merrily over it and saying, with a touch of malice:

"After all, you know, Rosanne, I'm the married woman, and if there *was* a doubt I should have the benefit of it before a mere girl. Besides, I'm sure it did you good to see, for once, what it feels like to be a wall-flower."

Rosanne gave her a look that quenched her merriment, and, she declared, made her feel queer all the evening; and when, in the dressing-room later, she tried to make it up with Rosanne, she was coldly snubbed. She then angrily remarked that it was the last time she would chaperon a jealous and bad-tempered girl to a dance, and left the sisters to go home with another married friend.

The next day her prize Pom, which, because she had no child, she foolishly adored, disappeared and was never seen again; and a few days later her husband fell very ill of pneumonia. On the day of the biggest race-meeting of the season, he was not expected to live, and on the night of the club ball he had a serious relapse, so that Violet Valpy, who adored racing and dancing, missed both these important fixtures. In the meantime, Major Satchwell was thrown from his horse and broke a leg.

Of course it was foolish, even blasphemous, to point any connection between Rosanne and these things—Mrs. Ozanne said so to herself ten times an hour—but, in their procedure, there was such a striking similarity to all Rosanne's "quarrel-cases," that the poor woman could not help adding them to the black list. Just as she could not help observing that, after the three events, Rosanne cheered up wonderfully and came out of the gloomy abstraction which always enveloped her when she was suffering from annoyance at the hands of others and left her when the offence had been mysteriously expiated by the offenders. Mrs. Ozanne was indeed deeply troubled. The disappearance of the Pom was bad enough; but, after all, George Valpy had nearly died, while poor Everard Satchwell would limp for life. It had once been supposed that he and Rosanne were fond of each other and might make a match of it. Mrs. Ozanne herself had believed that the girl liked him more than a little; but evidently this was not so, or—the worried woman did not finish the thought, even in her own mind, which was now busy with further problems connected with her beautiful, dark daughter.

Rosanne had always shown a great love for jewels. As a child, coloured stones were most popular with her, but since she grew up she had transferred her passion to diamonds, and, though her mother pointed out that such jewels were not altogether suitable to a young girl, she had gradually acquired quite a number

of them and wore them with extraordinary keenness of pleasure. Some she had obtained in exchange for jewels that had been gifts from her mother or birthday presents from old friends of the family, her devouring passion for the white, sparkling stones apparently burning up all sentimental values. Even a string of beautiful pearls—one of two necklaces John Ozanne had invested his first savings in for his twin daughters—had gone by the board in exchange for a couple of splendid single-stone rings. An emerald pendant that had come from Mrs. Ozanne's side of the family, and been given to Rosanne on her seventeenth birthday, had been parted with also, to the mother's intense chagrin, Rosanne having thrown it into a collection of jewels which she exchanged, with an additional sum of money, for a little neck-circlet of small but very perfect stones that was the surprise and envy of all her girl friends.

She possessed, also, a fine pendant and several brooches, and was, moreover, constantly adding to her stock. It was her mother's belief that most of her generous allowance of pocket-money went in this direction, and more than once she expostulated with her daughter on the subject. But, as may have been already guessed, Rosanne was not made of malleable clay, or the mother's hands of the iron that moulds destinies. So the strange, dark daughter continued to do as she chose in the matter of jewels and, indeed, every other matter.

Not the least of the reasons for Mrs. Ozanne's disapproval of her daughter's jewel transactions was the fact that they took the girl into all sorts of places and among odd, mean people. She was hand and glove with every Jew and Gentile diamond-dealer in the place, but she also knew a number of other dealers of whom reputable dealers took no cognizance, and who dwelt behind queer, dingy shops whose windows displayed little, and where business was carried on in some gloomy inner room. Certainly, Mrs. Ozanne neither guessed at the existence of such people nor her daughter's acquaintance with them. It was enough for the poor woman that the sight of Rosanne sauntering in and out of jeweller's shops, leaning over counters, peering at fine stones or holding them up to the light, was a well-known one in Kimberley, and that many people gossiped about the scandal of such proceedings and blamed Mrs. Ozanne for letting the headstrong girl do these things.

However, it was not the thought of people's criticism on this point that was now troubling Mrs. Ozanne, but a matter far more disquieting. She had begun to realize that Rosanne, though she had long since exchanged away all her earlier jewels for diamonds, was still increasing her stock of the latter in a way that

could not possibly be accounted for by her dress allowance; for she was fond of clothes, and her reputation as the best-dressed girl in Kimberley cost heavily. But even if she had spent the whole year's allowance in lump at the jewellers', it would not have paid for the beautiful stones she had lately displayed.

On the night of the club ball, for instance, in a room packed with pretty women beautifully gowned and jewelled, Rosanne blazed forth, a radiant figure that put everyone else in the shade. In a particularly rare golden-red shade of orange tulle, her faultless shoulders quite bare, her long throat and small dark head superbly held and ablaze with jewels, she was a vision of fire. She looked like a single flame that had become detached from some great conflagration and was swaying and dancing through the world alone. She shone and sparkled and flickered, and was the cynosure of all eyes. Mrs. Ozanne had never been so proud of her—and so perturbed. For where had that new diamond spray of maidenhair fern come from, that shone so gloriously against the glossy bands and curls of dark hair; and whence the single stone, that, like a great dewdrop, hung on her breast, suspended by a platinum chain so fine as to be almost invisible? Other people were asking these questions also, and once the distracted mother, lingering in a cool corner of the balcony while her daughters were dancing, heard the voice of an acquaintance saying acidly:

"What a fool the mother is! She must be ruining herself to buy that girl diamonds to trick herself out in—like a peacock!"

Rosanne did not look like a peacock at all, but like fire and water made incarnate. The diamonds she wore seemed as much a part of her natural element as her hair and eyes and the tinted ivory flesh of her. Mrs. Ozanne knew it, and so did the speaker, who was also the mother of three plain daughters. But that did not bring balm to Sophia Ozanne's heart, or did it comfort her soul that Sir Denis Harlenden, the distinguished traveller and hunter, after some weeks of apparent dangling at Rosanne's heels, was now paying such open and unmistakable court that all other mothers could not but sit up and enviously take notice. Rosalie, too, it was plain, had a little hook in the heart of Richard Gardner, a promising young advocate and one of the best matches in Kimberley. But what booted it to Sophia Ozanne to triumph over other mothers when her mind was filled with forebodings and unhappy problems? She tried solving one of these on arriving home after the ball, but with no very great success.

In the dim-lit hall of Tiptree House—a lofty, pleasant room arranged as a lounge

—they all lingered a few moments. Rosalie, with a dreaming look in her blue eyes, stood sipping a glass of hot milk. Rosanne had thrown off her white velvet cloak and flung herself and her crushed tulle into a great armchair. Mrs. Ozanne, with a cup of chocolate in her hand, looked old and weary—though in point of years she was still a young woman.

"Rosanne," she ventured, "a lot of people were remarking on your diamonds tonight."

"Yes?" said the girl carelessly. Her thoughts seemed elsewhere, and she did not look happy, in spite of the success that had been hers that evening.

"Yes; even Dick—" put in Rosalie timidly, then corrected herself—"even Mr. Gardner noticed them, and rather wondered, I think, how you came to be wearing such beautiful stones."

Rosanne sat up swiftly.

"Dick Gardner had better mind his own business," she said quickly, "or he will be sorry. I never liked that man."

Rosalie turned pale. Mrs. Ozanne braced herself to the defence of her gentle, little, fair daughter.

"But, my dear, it is not only Mr. Gardner; I heard many people saying things—that I must be ruining myself to buy you such jewels, and that——"

"Well, you're not, mother, are you?" Rosanne had risen and stood, smiling her subtle, ironical smile.

"No, dear, of course not; but I feel very uneasy, and I should like to know——"

"You need never feel uneasy about me, mother. I am well able to take care of myself and mind my own affairs"—she began to move out of the room—"and I also know how to deal with interfering people who try to mind them for me. Don't worry, mother dear, but go to bed. You look tired."

The door closed behind her. Rosalie threw herself into her mother's arms.

"Oh, mother, she meant that for Dick!" she cried, and burst into tears.

Mrs. Ozanne, trembling herself, strove to comfort her child.

"Nonsense, darling, she's only cross and tired. She did not mean anything. Besides, what can—" She faltered and broke off.

"What can't she do?" sobbed Rosalie. "And Dick did, he *did* say that everyone was amazed at her diamonds—and so they were."

"But what is all this about Dick, dear?" asked her mother, with a tender little smile. The subject was changed, as she meant it to be.

"Oh, mummie, we're engaged! I was only waiting for Rosanne to go to tell you; and I was so happy."

"And you will go on being happy, darling. He is a splendid fellow—and a good man, too. Nothing shall happen to prevent your being the happiest pair alive," comforted Mrs. Ozanne, and, with crooning, motherly words, herded Rosalie to bed. But she herself stayed sleepless for many hours.

"Rosanne," she said, at lunch the next day, before Rosalie came in, "I think you ought to know that your sister is engaged to Richard Gardner."

Rosanne started and stared at her mother in silence for a moment. It even seemed to Mrs. Ozanne that a little of the bright colour left her cheek.

"It happened last night, and he is coming to see me this afternoon."

Then Rosanne said a queer thing.

"I can't help that." Her face had a brooding, enigmatic look, and she seemed to be staring at her mother without seeing her. "I'm sorry, but I can't help it," she repeated slowly.

"Help it!" Mrs. Ozanne's eyes took on a haggard look. "What do you mean, dear?"

"Nothing," said the girl abruptly, and began to talk about something else as Rosalie came into the room. No more was said about the engagement, and Rosanne, after hurrying through her lunch and barely eating anything, jumped up and hurried away with the announcement that she was going down to Kitty

Drummund's and would not be back to tea.

Kitty Drummund was that other close friend of whom mention has already been made. A young married woman, her husband was manager of one of the big compounds belonging to the De Beers Company. A compound is an enormous yard fenced with corrugated iron, inside which dwell several hundreds of natives employed down in the mines. These natives are kept inside the compounds for spells of three to six months, according to contract, and during that time are not allowed to stir out for any purpose whatsoever, except to go underground, the shaft-head being in the enclosure. At the end of their contracts, they are allowed to return to their kraals, after having been rigorously searched to make certain that they have no diamonds on them. Scores of white men are employed in the business of guarding, watching, and searching the natives, and it was over these men and, indirectly, over the natives, also, that Leonard Drummund was manager, his job obliging him and his wife to live far from the fashionable quarter of Kimberley.

Their house, in fact, though outside the compound, was close beside it and within the grounds of the company, being fenced off from the town by a high wire fence. The only entrance into this enclosure was an enormous iron gate through which all friends of the Drummunds or visitors to the compound had to pass, under the scrutinizing stare of the man on guard, who had also the right to challenge persons as to what business took them into the company's grounds. It was thus that De Beers guarded, and still do guard to this day, the diamond industry from thieves and pirates, and would-be members of the illicit diamond-buying trade.

Through this big gate, on the afternoon after the club ball, Rosanne passed unchallenged, as she was in the habit of doing four or five times a week, being well known to all the guards as a friend of Mrs. Drummund's. Many of the guards were acquaintances of hers, also, for, when they were not in the act of guarding, they were young men about town, qualifying for bigger positions in the company's employ. The young fellow on guard that day had danced with Rosanne the night before, and when she went through she gave him a smile and a friendly nod. He thought what a lovely, proud little face she had, and that that fellow Harlenden would be a lucky man to get her, even if he were a baronet.

Kitty Drummund, among cushions and flowers, behind the green blinds of her veranda, was waiting in a hammock for her friend. For a very happy reason she

had been obliged to forego gaieties for a time; but her interest in them remained, and she was dying to hear all about the ball. Rosanne, however, seemed far from being in her usual vein of quips and quirks and bright, ironical sayings about the world in general. Indeed, her conversation was of the most desultory description, and Kitty gleaned little more news of her than she had already found in the morning newspaper. Between detached snatches of talk, the girl fell into long moments of moody silence, and even tea and cigarettes did not unknit her brow or loose her tongue. Kitty, who not only expected to be entertained about the dance but had also excellent reasons for supposing she should hear something very exciting and important about Rosanne herself, was vaguely troubled and disappointed. At last she ventured a gentle feeler.

"What about Sir Denis, Nan?"

Rosanne turned a thoughtful gaze on her, and this time a little of her old mockery glimmered in it.

"He still survives."

"Don't be silly, darling. Len heard this morning at the club—what everyone is saying—*you* know—how much he is in love with you, and that he's sure to propose soon."

"He proposed last night, Kit. We are engaged."

Kitty sat up with dancing eyes.

"And you've been keeping it back all this time! Oh, Rosanne, how could you? Such a darling man! You are lucky. What a lovely bride you'll make! You must put it off until I can come. Shall you be married in bright colours, as you always said you would? And you'll be Lady Harlenden!"

Kitty was not a snob, but titles didn't often come her way and she couldn't help taking a whole-hearted delight in the fact that Rosanne would have one.

"I shall never be Lady Harlenden. I don't mean to marry him, Kit."

"Don't mean to marry him!" Kitty Drummund's lips fell apart and all the dancing excitement went out of her eyes. She sat and stared. At last she said wonderingly but with conviction:

"But you care for him, Rosanne!"

"I know," said the other sombrely. "I love him. I love him, and I can't resist letting him know and taking his love for a little while. It is so wonderful. Oh, Kit, it is so wonderful! But I can never marry him. I am too wicked."

"Wicked!"

Kitty stared at her. The lovely dark face had become extraordinarily distorted and anguished, and seemed actually to age under Kitty's eyes. The girl put up her hands and pressed them to her temples.

"Oh, I am so unhappy," she muttered, "and I can't tell any one! Mother and Rosalie don't understand——"

Kitty Drummund was only frivolous on the surface. At core she was sound, a good woman and a loyal friend. She took the girl's hands.

"Tell *me*, dear," she said gravely; "I'll try and help."

But Rosanne shook her head. The agonized, tortured look passed slowly from her features, and her face became once more composed, though white as ashes. Her eyes were dull as burnt-out fires.

"I can't," she said heavily. "I can't tell any one; I don't even understand it myself."

She fell into silence again, but presently turned to Kit with a stern look, half commanding, half imploring.

"Swear you'll never tell any one what I've said, Kit—about the engagement or anything else."

Kitty promised solemnly.

"Not even Len," insisted Rosanne.

"Not even Len. But, oh, Nan, I shall pray that it will all come right!"

"Prayers are no good," said Rosanne, with abrupt bitterness. "God knows I've

given them a fair chance!"

"Darling, one never knows when a prayer may be answered, but it *will* be—sometime."

Rosanne began suddenly to talk of something else, and the strange incident ended; for when Rosanne wished to drop a subject she dropped it, and put her foot on it in such a way that it could not be picked up again. Besides, this was scarcely one on which Kitty, however much she desired to help, could press her friend. So she did the wisest thing she could think of under the circumstances—made the girl go indoors to the piano and play to her. She knew that Rosanne gave, and was given to, by music in a way that is only possible to deep, inarticulate natures such as possess the musician's gift. One had only to listen to her music, thought Kitty, to know that there were depths in her that no woman would ever fathom, though a man might, some day. Denis Harlenden might—if she would let him.

Listening, as she lay in her hammock, to the wild, strange chords flung from under Rosanne's fingers, and again the plaintive, tender notes that stole out like wounded birds and fluttered away on broken wings to the sunlight, Kitty realized that she was an ear-witness to the interpretation of a soul's pain. Though she had never heard of Jean Paul Richter's plaint to music—"*Thou speakest to me of those things which in all my endless days I have found not, nor shall find*"—something of the torment embodied in those exquisitely bitter words came to her through Rosanne's music, and she was able to realize some tithe of what the girl was suffering.

Yet, in the end, Rosanne came out of the drawing-room with the shadows gone from her face and all the old mocking, glancing life back in it. If she had given of her torment to music, music, whether for good or ill, had restored to her the vivid and delicate power which made up her strangely forceful personality. She was hurriedly drawing on her gloves.

"I've just remembered the Chilvers' dinner-party tonight and must fly. You know how Molly Chilvers nags if one is late for her dull old banquets."

She kissed Kitty, tucked a rug round her, for the cool of evening was beginning to fall, and went her ways. But as she followed the path that led through the blue-ground heaps, past the iron compound, and down to the big gate, she was

thinking that if Molly Chilvers' banquets were dull, the banquet of life was not, and it was the banquet of life she had put her lips to since she knew and loved Denis Harlenden. She was to meet him tonight! That thought had power enough to drive out the little snakes of despair and desolation that had been eating her heart all day. Let the morrows, with their pain of parting, take care of themselves! Today, it was good to be alive! That was her philosophy as she went, light-foot, through the blue-ground heaps.

There was no one about in the big outer enclosure. The monotonous chanting of Kafir songs came over the iron walls of the compound, the murmuring of many voices, clank of pot and pan, smell of fires, and the soft, regular beat of some drumlike native instrument. The day-shift boys had come up from the mines and were preparing their evening meal.

Passers-by were never supposed to go near to the walls of the compound, but in one place the path wound within a yard or two of it, and, as it happened, this spot was just out of eye-reach of the towers which stood at the four corners of the compound (unless the guards popped their heads out of the window, which they rarely did). True, the guard at the gate commanded a full view of the spot, but if he had been looking when Rosanne reached it, he would only have seen her stooping to tie up her shoe. He was not looking, however. It was not his custom, even though it might be his duty, to spy on Mrs. Drummund's visitors, especially such a visitor as Miss Ozanne. Therefore, no one saw that, when she had finished tying up her shoe, she leaned forward from the path and slid out her hand to a tiny mound of earth that lay near the compound wall—a little mound that might very well have been pushed up by a mole on the other side—dived her fingers into the earth, and withdrew a small package wrapped in a dirty rag. Then, swiftly she thrust something back into the earth, smoothed the little heap level, rose from tying her shoe, and lightly sauntered on her way. The next time she had occasion to use her handkerchief she slipped the little package into her pocket, and so, empty-handed except for her sunshade, she passed through the big gate.

At seven o'clock that evening, the carriage stood before the door of Tiptree House, waiting to convey the Ozanne family to the Chilvers' dinner-party, and Mrs. Ozanne, in black velvet and old lace, waited in the hall for her two daughters. She sat tapping with her fan upon a little Benares table before her, turning over in her mind, as she had been doing all the afternoon, two sentences

from a letter Richard Gardner had sent her. It was an honourable and manly letter, putting forward his feelings for Rosalie and the fact that he had already asked her to be his wife. He had meant, he wrote, to call that afternoon on Mrs. Ozanne and ask verbally for her consent to the engagement, but something had happened to prevent his coming. However, he hoped, all being well, to call instead on the following day and put his position before Mrs. Ozanne.

"*Something has happened!*" "*All being well!*"—those were the phrases that repeated themselves in Sophia Ozanne's mind over and over again, rattling like two peas in an empty drum. It was on account of them that she had refrained from showing Rosalie the note; but her precaution was wasted, for the girl had also received a letter from her lover, and, curiously enough, it contained the two sentences which were so vividly present in Mrs. Ozanne's consciousness. Rosalie had repeated them to her mother at tea-time, and in the quiet drawing-room, as the two women sat looking at each other with apprehensive eyes across the teacups, the seemingly innocent words sounded strangely pregnant of trouble.

Perhaps that was why Rosalie looked less pretty than usual as she came in and joined her mother. Her white satin gown gave her a ghostly air, and the forget-me-not eyes had faint pink rims to them that were unbecoming. The mother had barely time to make these mental observations when Rosanne entered. To their surprise, she was still in her afternoon gown and hat.

"I'm not going to the Chilvers' tonight," she said rapidly. "I've already sent Molly a message, but please make her my further excuses, mother."

"But, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Ozanne reproachfully, "you'll spoil her party! I think you ought to make an effort, even if you are late."

"Oh, no, mother; I can't. Besides, it was silly of her to give a party the night after a ball, when everyone is fagged out." She looked the picture of glowing health as she said it—more like some bright wild mountain-flower than a girl.

"I'm quite sure you are not so tired as either Rosalie or myself," pursued her mother warmly, "and I think that at least you might have let me know of your decision earlier."

"Yes, mother; I suppose I might, though I don't quite know what difference it would have made. I beg your pardon, anyway. But I don't see why you go, either, if you are tired. Rosalie looks dead beat." She was looking at her sister in an

oddly tender way.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Rosie?" she asked, in a voice so soft and appealing that Mrs. Ozanne would not have been astonished if the gentle and easily moved Rosalie had responded by pouring out her heart. But, instead, she turned away, biting a trembling lip, and put on her wraps without speaking. Rosanne shrugged her shoulders and went out of the room in her rapid, silent way.

"Mother, I feel I hate her!" Rosalie muttered, with burning eyes. Her mother was profoundly shocked.

"Oh, hush, my darling!" she whispered. "You don't know what you are saying."

Linking her arm in her daughter's, she led the way in silence to the carriage.

Rosanne, meanwhile, went into the dining-room and had something cold brought to her there by Maria, the old Cape cook. All the other servants were out for the evening, as was the rule on the rare occasions when the family did not entertain. Having dined, the girl went to her bedroom. The house was of the bungalow type—everything on the ground floor and no upper stories. All the bedrooms gave on to the great veranda that ran round the house, but Rosanne's room, being at the corner, had two French windows, one facing the front garden with a full view of the tennis-courts and drive, the other, shaded by creepers and a great tree-fern, looked out to the clustered trees and winding paths of the side gardens. It was from this door that Rosanne emerged, half an hour later, dressed in something so subtly night-coloured that she looked like a grey moth flickering through the trees of the garden. Softly she let herself out of the little side gate chiefly used by the servants, and, slipping from shadow to shadow in the dim lights of quiet back streets, she made her way toward the commercial part of the town. The main street—that same Du Toit's Pan Road where John Ozanne's hotel had once flourished—was brightly lighted by large arc-lamps, but never once did Rosanne come within range of these. It was in a dingy lane giving off from the big thoroughfare that she at last stopped before a shop whose shuttered window bore the legend—"Syke Ravenal: Jeweller." Upon an undistinguished looking side door she knocked gently, distinctly, three times. It opened as if by magic, and, like a shadow, she slipped into the darkness behind it.

Harlenden was a little early. Rosanne had said nine o'clock, and it wanted, perhaps, twenty minutes to the hour when he rang at Tiptree House and was told

by Maria, after a few moments' waiting, that she could not find Miss Rosanne anywhere.

"Very well; I'll wait here," he said, and, lighting a cigar, sat down in one of the deep chairs in the dimly lighted veranda.

He was a lean, fair, well-groomed man, with a hard-cut face that told nothing. You had to make your own deductions from a pair of stone-grey eyes, a mouth close-lipped without being cold, and a manner not wanting in indications of arrogance that yet pleased by a certain careless grace and sureness. As Emerson says, "Do as you please, and you may do as you please, for, in the end, if you are consistent you will please the world." Perhaps it was his unfailing habit of following out this rule that made the world respect Denis Harlenden, even if it were not pleased with him. Certainly, his people would not be very pleased that he had chosen a Kimberley hotel-keeper's daughter to carry on the line of one of the oldest baronetcies in England. But, to speak with truth, he had given neither his people nor the Kimberley Hotel a thought in the matter. He loved Rosanne for her wit, her beauty, her courage, a certain sportsmanlike daring which showed in all her actions, and her unlikeness to any other woman he had ever known. Moreover, he was certain that she was the one woman who could keep his love without boring him. He, like Kitty Drummund, was aware of unfathomed depths in her, and he was not at all sure that he should like everything he found in those depths if he ever fathomed them. But, in any case, he preferred them to shallows. A shallow woman could not have kept Denis Harlenden's heart for a week—or a day. He also valued surprises, and Rosanne was full of surprises.

She gave him one now. At the sound of a slight, crushing of gravel underfoot, he had risen and stepped toward the end of the veranda, and, standing there beside the great tree-fern, he saw her coming from the side garden into the faint rays of light from the house. She had her two hands folded over her breast as though holding something precious there, and her face was rapt. He had never before seen her in that odd, sheathlike garment of silver-grey velvet. It gave her, he thought, with that brooding look on her face and her faintly smiling mouth, an air of moon-like mysteriousness. Almost as silently as a moonbeam, she slid into the veranda and would have passed on into her room but that he put his arms round her and drew her to his heart.

The thought had come over him suddenly to test her courage and coolness thus,

and she did not disappoint him. For a moment he felt her heart fluttering like a wild bird against his; then she gave a little low laugh.

"Oh, Denis!" she whispered, against his lips. But when he let her go he saw that her face was white as milk.

"You *were* frightened, then?" he questioned.

"No, no; I knew at once it was you—by the scent of your dear coat." She stroked it with one hand, then made to move away, but he still held her. What had made her turn white, then, if she were not afraid?

"Let me go away and change my gown," she said, trying to edge away into the dark.

"But why? I love it. You are like a witch of the moon in it."

"No; it isn't a nice gown," she insisted childishly and still tried to escape, but he could be obstinate, too.

"I want you to keep it on—and, darling, darling, don't waste any of the moments we may be together! You told me yourself it could only be an hour."

She gave a deep sigh. It was true. Moments spent with him were too precious to waste. There might not be so many more. Still, she did not abandon her plan to get away from him to her room, if only for a minute. Gently she resisted his half-movement to lead her to a chair. He knew, by now, that she was holding something in her left hand which she did not wish him to see. They remained standing by the tree-fern, each will striving for supremacy. In the meantime, he went on speaking in his extraordinary charming voice that had power to make her heart ache with even the memory of its dear sound.

"Not that I can see why I should only have an hour."

"Mother will be back by ten," she said.

"Why shouldn't she know at once? I don't like this hole-and-corner business, Rosanne. It is not good enough for you." He kissed her on the lips, and added, "Or me."

Her face was in shadow, but his was not, and she could see that fires were lighted in the stone-grey eyes that banished all its masklike impassivity and brought a wonderful beauty into it. She stood trembling to his kiss and his voice and the magic of her love for him. Almost it seemed as if she must do as he wished. But she knew she must not. If her mother once knew, everyone would have to know, and how brutal that would be to him when she had to tell him that it must all come to an end, that she could not and would not marry him!

"You must let me tell her tonight," he was saying, with quiet firmness.

"No, no!" she faltered.

"Yes. And there is another thing; give me your left hand, Rosanne."

She did not give it so much as that he drew it from behind her. It was tightly clenched. Holding it in his own, he drew her to a chair at last. She seemed to have no more strength to resist. Then, sitting down before her, he gently unclenched one finger after another until what she had hidden there lay sparkling in the night. Almost as if it had been something evil, he shook it from her palm into her lap, and taking her hand to his lips, kissed it, then placed upon the third finger a ring.

"You must only like the jewels I give you, Rosanne," he said, with unveiled meaning.

They sat there for a long, aching, exquisitely silent moment, her hand in his, the great square emerald set in a wonderful filigree and scrolling of gold on her finger, the other thing gleaming with a baleful light between them. Then the spell broke with the roll of carriage wheels on the drive. A minute later, Mrs. Ozanne came into the veranda, Rosalie clinging to her arm. Harlenden was on his feet instantly, and, before Rosanne could intervene, had proffered his request to speak to her mother. The latter looked as much dazed by his words as his presence.

"Not tonight, Sir Denis, please."

"It is rather important," he pleaded, looking very boyish. But she seemed to notice nothing, and shook her head.

"Some other time—my poor Rosalie is ill—in trouble; she has heard some

distressing news."

He drew back at once, apologizing, and a few minutes later was gone. Rosanne followed her mother and sister into the house, a strangely yearning, sorrowful look upon her face. Nothing was said. Rosalie seemed half-fainting, and her mother, still supporting her, led her to the door of her bedroom. They disappeared together. Rosanne stared after them, but made no attempt to help. When they had gone, she sat still in the hall, waiting. Sometimes she looked at the sparkling thing in her hand (she had caught it up from her lap when her mother came into the veranda), a slim, flexible string of diamonds for weaving in the hair—glowing and glimmering like spurts of flame imprisoned within frozen dewdrops. Sometimes she looked at the great emerald Denis Harlenden had set on her finger. But her eyes had something of the fixed, unseeing stare of the sleep-walker. At last Sophia Ozanne came back and stood beside her. Neither looked at the other.

"What is it mother?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Richard Gardner is very ill. They hoped it was only a sore throat that would soon yield to treatment; but he went to a specialist today—that Doctor Stratton who came out to see the Cape governor's throat—and he seems to think—" Poor Mrs. Ozanne halted and choked as if she herself were suffering from an affection of the throat. Rosanne still sat silent and brooding.

"He seems to think it is something malignant—and, in that case, he and poor Rosalie—" She broke down.

"Will never be able to marry, mother?" asked Rosanne, not curiously, only sadly, as if she knew already. Her mother nodded.

"Who told you?"

"Richard's brother was at the Chilvers'; he thought we had better know at once."

Mrs. Ozanne sat down by the little Benares table and, resting her face on her hands, began to cry quietly. Rosanne stared before her with an absorbed stare. She seemed in a very transport of grave thought. When Mrs. Ozanne at length raised her eyes for an almost furtive glance, she thought she had never seen anything so tragic as her daughter's face. Her own was working horribly with misery and some urgent necessity.

"Rosanne!" she stammered at last, afraid of the sound of her own words. "Couldn't you do something?"

The girl removed her dark gaze from nothingness and transferred it to her mother's imploring, fearful eyes.

"Oh, mother!" she said quietly. "Oh, mother! I am more unhappy than you or Rosalie can ever be!"

PART II

Rosalie Ozanne kept her bed for a week or more. She had sunk into a sort of desolate lethargy of mind and body from which nothing could rouse her. Her mother was in despair. Richard Gardner was too ill to come to see the girl he loved, and he did not write. The blow that had fallen upon his promising and prosperous life seemed to have shattered his nerves and benumbed his initiative. He had no words of hope for Rosalie; so he said nothing. Thus, in silence and apart, the two were suffering their young agony of wrecked hopes and love laid on its bier.

Rosanne, meanwhile, to all appearances, went on her way rejoicing. For a moment, in the shock of mutual grief over Rosalie's trouble, she and her mother had drawn nearer in spirit, and strange words of sorrow and sympathy, as though dragged from her very depths, had come faltering from the girl's lips. But the next day all trace of such unaccustomed softness had disappeared. She was her gay, resilient self once more, bright and hard as the stones she loved to wear, and more reserved and withdrawn from her family than ever. She avoided both her mother and sister as much as possible, spending most of her time in her own room or with her friend Kitty Drummund. As usual, too, she was often out riding and driving—but no longer with Denis Harlenden. Major Satchwell had been received back into the favour of her intimate friendship, and it was he who was always to be found riding or limping at her side.

Harlenden had not called at Tiptree House since the night when, after the Chilvers' dinner-party, he had requested an interview with Mrs. Ozanne and been asked to wait until a more propitious moment. Indeed, the latter, with mind full of foreboding and sorrow for her stricken child, had almost forgotten that he had ever made such a request. But Rosanne had not forgotten. And Rosanne knew why her lover stayed away from Tiptree House. He had made his reason sufficiently clear in a letter she had received the morning after their last meeting in the veranda. The terse sentences of that letter were like himself—cold and

quiet without, but with the burn of hidden fires beneath the surface.

"Until you are prepared to let the world know how things are with us, I shall not come again. And another thing, Rosanne: I love you. Your kiss is on my lips, and no other woman's lips shall ever efface its exquisite memory You love me, too, I think. But do you love me more than certain other things? If not, and if you cannot be the Rosanne I wish you to be, caring only for such things as are worthy of your beauty and my pride, this love of ours can never come to its perfection but will have to be rooted out and crushed as a useless, hopeless thing. When you see this as I do, send for me. I shall not be long in coming."

Curiously enigmatic words if read by any but the eyes for which they were intended. But Rosanne knew what they meant, and read them with her teeth dug into her lip and cheeks pale as a bone. The first time she read them she burst into a furious, ringing laugh, and crushing the letter into a ball, flung it into the waste-paper basket and went out. That was the afternoon on which she renewed her friendship with Everard Satchwell. But when she came home she sought the waste-paper basket, and taking out the letter, uncrumpled it and read it again. Thereafter she read it many times. Sometimes she went to bed with it crushed to her breast. But she never answered it. Instead, she wrote to Everard Satchwell and completed the work, already begun, of beguiling him back into her life just as he was beginning to hope he could do without her.

One day, when she was out riding with him, they met Harlenden riding alone. He had a moody, lonely look that wrenched at her heart for a moment until she saw the civilly indifferent smile with which he returned her half-appealing glance and Satchwell's cheery greeting. As their eyes met, his were so empty of what she knew they could contain for her that her heart turned cold in her breast. For the first time, the well-bred impassivity of his face irked and infuriated her. She doubted, almost hated him. She could have struck him with her riding-whip because he gave no sign of the hurt she had dealt him, but, instead, her face grew almost as smilingly masklike as his own; only when she got home, within the refuge of her bedroom walls, did it change and become distorted with pain and rage, its beauty marred and blotted out with tears.

That he should ride coolly by and give no sign, while *her* heart ached as if a knife were in it, while she drained to the dregs the cup of lonely love! That was bitter. But bitterer still the knowledge that within herself lay the reason of their separation, as well as the power to end it. She could bring him back this very

hour if she wished, was her thought. Yet, could she? Were not those other bonds that held her soul in slavery stronger than herself—stronger (as he had suggested in his letter) than her love for Denis Harlenden?

Miserably, her face lifeless and pale as the face of one who has lain among the ashes of renouncement and repentance, she rose from the bed where she had flung herself weeping, and creeping to an old-fashioned oak bureau of heavy make, sat down before it and began to unlock its many drawers and take therefrom a number of little jewel-cases. One by one she opened these and spread before her the radiant, sparkling things they contained with their myriad points of light and dancing colour. She ran the things through her fingers and bathed her hands in them like water. Then she curved her palms into a cup and held them filled to the brim with such a sparkling draught as only a god could drink—a draught with fire and ice in it, blood and crystal water, purity and evil. The roses of life and the blue flowers of death were all intermingled and reflected in that magic draught of frozen fire and liquid crystal. As the girl gazed into it, colour came back to her pale face, and her eyes caught and returned the flashing beams of light. It almost seemed as if she and the stones, able to communicate, were exchanging the signals of some secret code.

One jewel was more beautiful than all the rest, the lovely, flexible chain of stones she had been holding to her breast that night when Harlenden surprised her coming from the garden into the veranda—the thing he had shaken from her hand into her lap as if it had been a toad. She remembered Harlenden, now, as she gazed into the iridescent shapes of light, seeming to see in their brilliant, shallow depths worlds of romance that every-day life knew not of. At last she caught the thing up and kissed it burningly, then pressed it against her heart as if it possessed some quality of spikenard to ease the pain she still felt aching there. The sound of the dinner-gong shook her from her strange dreams, and hastily, yet with a sort of lingering regret, she began to gather up the jewels and lay them once more into their downy nests of white velvet. Her fingers caressed and her eyes embraced every single stone as she laid it away.

"I must get some more," she murmured feverishly to herself; "I must get some more—soon!"

She had forgotten Denis Harlenden now. Her lips took on a hungry, arid line, and her eyes were suddenly hard and more brilliant than the stones she handled. The lust of diamonds, which is one of the greatest and most terrible of all the lusts,

had got her in its scorpion-claws and was squeezing love from her heart and beauty from her soul.

"Rosanne, your sister is worse," her mother said, at dinner. They had reached dessert, but these were the first words that had passed between them. Rosanne's shoulders moved with the suggestion of a shrug.

"I think she gives way," she remarked coldly. "She could shake off that illness with the exercise of a little self-control."

"It is easy to talk like that when you are not the sufferer, dear. You forget that her whole heart is wrapped up in Dick. I believe that if he dies, she will—." The mother's words ended in something very like a sob. She looked utterly worn out and wretched. Her eyes wistfully searched Rosanne's, but the latter's mood appeared to be one of complete *sang-froid*.

"You always look on the worst side of things, mother," she said calmly. "If Dick dies, and I daresay he will—cancer of the throat is nearly always fatal, I believe —Rosalie will get over it in time and marry some other man."

"Rosanne, I never thought you could be so heartless!"

"Nonsense, mother; it isn't heartlessness but common sense, and I think you ought not to encourage Rosalie by being sympathetic. A little bracing brutality is what she needs to pull her out of her misery."

Mrs. Ozanne rose, her eyes shining with anger as well as tears.

"I forbid you to speak to me of your unhappy sister unless you can speak kindly," she said, and added harshly; "I sometimes think, Rosanne, that you are either not my child or that that Malay woman bewitched and cast some evil spell over you when you were a baby."

Rosanne looked at her with musing eyes.

"I have sometimes thought so myself," she said slowly, "and that, instead of you reproaching me, it is I who have the right to reproach you for bartering me away to witchcraft rather than letting me die an innocent little child."

Sophia Ozanne's lips fell apart, and the colour died slowly out of her handsome,

wholesome-looking face. She said nothing while she stood there gazing for a long minute at her daughter; but her breath came laboriously, and she held her hand over her heart as if she had received a blow there. At last, in silence, she walked heavily from the room.

Rosanne helped herself daintily to fruit salad, but when she had it on her plate she did nothing but stare at it. After a few moments she rang the bell and sent out a message to the stables that she would require the carriage for an hour.

"And tell my mother, if she asks, that I have gone to Mrs. Drummund's," she directed old Maria, as she went away to her room to put on a hat and wrap.

"It is pretty awful at home now," she complained to Kitty Drummund, some twenty minutes later. "The whole house is wrapped in gloom because Dick Gardner has a sore throat. One might as well live in a mausoleum."

"Dearest, it is a little more than a sore throat, isn't it? Len saw Tommy Gardner today, and he says Dick is in awful pain and can't speak. They are sending him away to the Cape tonight, as a last hope. Doctor Raymond, there, is supposed to be wonderfully clever with affections of the throat, though I must say I don't believe it will be much good, since Stratton has condemned him."

"Oh, talk about something else, Kit, for heaven's sake!" cried Rosanne, with a sudden access of desperate irritation. "I can't bear any more Dick Gardner."

Kitty stroked the hair and bare shoulders of the girl sitting on the floor beside her.

"I know you're not really heartless, Nan, but you do sound so sometimes. I expect all this trouble at home is on your nerves a little bit. Tell me, how are your own affairs, darling? Is the engagement still going on?"

"No; the engagement is finished. I told you I never meant to marry him."

"I think you are making an awful mistake, Nan. He's the only man for you—the only man who can——"

"Can what?" asked Rosanne, with fierce moodiness. "Save my soul alive?"

"How strange! Those were the very words I was going to use, though I don't

know why. They just came into my head."

"Everyone seems to be hitting the right nail on the head tonight," commented Rosanne dryly. "First, my mother; now, you. I wonder who'll be the third. All good things run in threes, don't they?"

Kitty knew better than to try to cope with her in that mood, so she remained silent until Rosanne rose and caught up her hat.

"Oh, don't go yet, darling! Do stay and see Len. He had to go out directly after dinner, but he promised not to be long. Fancy! They're having such excitement up at the compound. But I don't know whether I ought to tell you, though," she finished doubtfully.

"Oh, yes, do!" said Rosanne, wearily ironical. "Do tell me something that will make life seem less of an atrocious joke than it is—especially if you oughtn't to tell."

"Well, we're not supposed to breathe anything like this outside the compound walls, you know. Len told me not to mention it to a soul; but I don't expect he meant to include you, for, of course, you are all right."

"Of course!" Rosanne smiled mockingly at herself in the mirror before which she was arranging her hair preparatory to posing her hat upon it.

"Well, my dear, just think! They've discovered a Kafir boy in the compound who has been stealing thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds for months, and passing them to someone outside. They caught him in the act this afternoon."

"How frightfully exciting!" Rosanne had put her hat on now, but was still manoeuvring to get it at exactly the correct angle over her right eye. "How did he do it?"

"He made a little tunnel from under his sleeping-bunk to the outside of the compound wall, about a yard and a half long, and through that he would push a parcel of diamonds by means of a stick with a flat piece of tin at the end of it, something like a little rake and exactly the same length as the tunnel. He always pushed a little heap of earth through first, so as to cover the diamonds up from any eyes but those of his confederate outside. When the confederate had removed the diamonds, he pushed back the earth against the tin rake, which the

boy always left in place until he had another packet of diamonds ready to put through. In this way the hole was never exposed, except during the few moments, once a week, when the boy was putting in a fresh packet."

"But how awfully thrilling!" exclaimed Rosanne.

"Yes; isn't it? What they want to do now is to catch the confederate who is, of course, the real culprit, for encouraging an ignorant Kafir to steal."

"Who could it possibly be?"

"Goodness knows! Such heaps of people come inside this outer compound, tradespeople, servants with messages, and so on. But just think of it, Nan! Thousands of pounds' worth, and the Kafir boy only got ten pounds for each packet he pushed through."

"Well, what would a Kafir do with thousands of pounds, anyway?" said Rosanne, laughing irrelevantly. "I think ten pounds was quite enough."

"That's true—too much for the wretch, indeed! However, he has confessed and told everything he could to help our people to trap the other wretch. Unfortunately, that is not very much."

"No?"

"No; he says he has never seen the man who fetches the diamonds. The only one he has ever seen was a man he is not able to describe because he is so ordinary-looking, who came to his kraal in Basutoland about seven months ago, and made the whole plan with him to come and work on contracts of three months at a time as a compound-boy, steal as many diamonds as he could, and pass them out in the way I have described. Each parcel was to cost ten pounds and to contain no less than ten diamonds. No money passed between them, but every time a parcel was put through the tunnel, the confederate on the other side put a blue bead in its place among the sand. The boy found the bead and kept it as a receipt, and when he came out at the end of every three months' contract he wore a bracelet of blue beads on his wrist. Naturally, the authorities didn't take any notice of this when they searched him, for nearly all Kafirs wear beads of some kind. These beads were quite a common kind to look at; only when they were examined carefully were they found to have been passed through some chemical process which dyed the inside a peculiar mauve colour, making it impossible for the

Kafir to cheat by adding ordinary blue beads (of which there are plenty for sale in the compound) to his little bunch of 'receipts.'"

"How clever!" said Rosanne. "And how are they going to catch the confederate? Put a trap-parcel, I suppose, and pounce on him when he comes to fetch it?"

She had seated herself again, opposite Kitty, her arms resting on the back of the chair, her face vivid with interest.

"Cleverer than that," announced Kitty. "They are going to put the trap and watch who fetches it. But they won't pounce on him; they mean to follow him up and arrest the whole gang."

"Gang?"

"Len says there's sure to be a gang of them, and for the sake of getting them all, parcel after parcel of stones will be put through the tunnel, if necessary, until every one of them is traced and arrested."

"Rather risky for the diamonds, I should think!"

"They'll only put inferior ones in. Besides, the Kafir boy's contract is up in a week's time, and if all the gang aren't caught by then, they're going to let the boy go out and meet his confederate to deliver his beads, and then the arrest will be made."

"Surely the Kafir was able to describe him, if he had been in the habit of meeting him every three months?"

"He says he was a young white boy, very thin, who wears a mask and an overcoat. They have met twice at night, in an old unused house in the Malay compound, the other side of Kimberley. Can you imagine any one running such awful risks for the sake of diamonds, Nan? But Len says it goes on all the time —this illicit diamond-buying business—and the company loses thousands of pounds every year and is hardly ever able to catch the thieves. They're as clever as paint! They have to be, for if they are caught it means ten to twenty years' imprisonment for them, as they know. Mustn't it be awful to live in such a state of risk and uncertainty, never knowing when you're going to be found out, for, of course, there are plenty of detectives on the watch for illicit buying all the time?"

"Awful—yes, but terribly exciting," Rosanne said musingly. "Don't you think so?" she added quickly, and began to pull on her gloves.

"Ah, don't go, yet!" cried Kitty. "Len will be dreadfully disappointed to find you gone."

"Tell him you told me the story," laughed Rosanne. "That will cheer him up."

"I don't think I shall," said Kitty soberly. "I'm afraid he'd be awfully mad with me, after all, even though it is only you I've told. He'll say women can't keep things to themselves, and that you're sure to tell someone else, and so the whole thing will get about."

"You needn't worry, dear. It will never get about through me," said Rosanne quietly, and, kissing Kitty good-night, she went her ways.

As she passed through the brightly lit outer compound, stepping briskly toward the big gate, she was aware of more than one lurking shadow behind the blue-ground heaps. Also, it seemed to her that various guards were more alert than usual in their guardhouses. But she gave no faintest sign of observing these things, greeted the guard at the gate pleasantly, and, passing out to the street, stepped into the waiting carriage and was driven home. It wanted a few minutes to midnight when she stole from the veranda door of her room once more, dressed in her dim, straight gown of moonlight velvet with a swathe of colourless veil about her head and, sliding softly through the garden, went out into the quiet streets of the town until she came, at last, to a little indistinguished door next to a jeweller's window, whereon was neatly inscribed the name, "Syke Ravenal." On knocking gently three times, the door opened mechanically to admit her. Inside all was dark; but a few paces down a passage brought her to a door that opened into a small but brightly lighted room. An elderly man was seated at a table engaged in beautifully illuminating a parchment manuscript. This was Syke Ravenal.

"You are very late, my child," he said, in a gently benevolent tone. His voice was rich and sonorous.

"It was not safe to come before."

"Safe?" His dark, hawk-like face did not change, but there was a sound in his voice like the clank of broken iron.

"They've caught Hiangeli," she said.

"Ah!" He carefully folded the manuscript between two protecting sheets of blotting-paper and placed it in the drawer of his table. His hands shook as if with ague, but his voice was as perfectly composed as his face when he spoke again.

"Tell me all about it, my child."

"They got him in the compound today, as he was putting the parcel through. He has confessed as much as he knows about your son going to the kraal, and the blue beads, and the old house in the Malay compound where he was paid. They have now set a trap-parcel of stones and are sitting in wait to catch the confederate." She sank down in a chair opposite to him and leaned her elbows on the table. "To catch me," she said slowly.

He looked at her keenly. Her face was deadly pale, but there was no trace of fear in it. Whatever Rosanne Ozanne may have been, she was no coward. Neither was the man opposite her.

"Ah! They have no inkling, of course, that it was you who met Hiangeli and paid him?"

"No; he was not able to tell them any more than that it was a white boy." She added, with the ghost of a smile, "A thin, white boy, in a mask and an overcoat."

"Well, that's all right. They won't catch you, and they won't catch me, and Saul is safe in Amsterdam. Luck is on our side, as she always is on the side of good players. Hiangeli must foot the bill, because he played badly."

Rosanne sat listening. It was plain that Hiangeli's fate was a matter of indifference to her, but some storm was brewing behind her smouldering eyes. Ravenal went on calmly:

"It's been a good game while it lasted. The pity is that it must come to an end."

Then the storm broke forth.

"But it must not come to an end!" she burst out violently. "I can't live without it!"

The man looked at her reflectively.

"You're a great sport. I've never known a woman with finer nerve.
But, just the same, the game has got to come to an end."

"Game! You don't understand. It is meat and drink to me. I *must* have diamonds." She sounded like a woman pleading for some drug to deaden pain, memory, and conscience. Her voice was wild; she put out her hands to him in an imploring gesture. "I have given up everything for them—everything!"

He shook his head.

"We can't do any more of it," he said inflexibly. "Not for a year, at the outside."

Her hands fell on the table. She shivered as though she already felt cold and hunger.

"Suffer torment for a year?" she muttered. "It is impossible. I can't. I have nothing else. I've sacrificed everything to it—*duty, friendship, love*!" She leaned her head in her hands, and Ravenal did not hear the last words.

"Pull yourself together, my child. It is not like you to give way like this. Listen: Go home now and sit tight. Nerve and a quiet going about your ways are what are needed for the next few weeks. Don't come near me unless you have anything important to communicate; then come in the ordinary way to the shop with some jewel to be mended. But remember: There is no possible channel through which they can connect either of us with Hiangeli, and nothing in the world to fear."

"It is not fear I feel," she said dully.

"I know. It is disappointment. You are broken-hearted because the black diamonds cannot be handed over to you."

She did not speak, but if ever a woman's face betrayed hunger and passionate longing, hers did at that moment. All her beauty was gone. There was nothing but a livid mask with two burning eyes. A pitying look crossed Ravenal's face. He was not an unkindly man.

"Poor child," he said gently, "it's hard on you!" For a moment he seemed to hesitate, then, coming to a swift decision, rose and went over to a safe embedded in the wall, and unnoticeable by reason of a piece of Oriental embroidery pinned

above it and a chair standing carelessly before it. Unlocking it, he brought to the table a small jewel-case.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I can't let you have it for good, because it's not earned yet. Twenty more rough stones are wanted from you before this is yours. That was the bargain. But, considering all the circumstances, I'll *lend* it to you for a while."

Before he had finished speaking she had seized the case from his hands and pressed it open. A magnificent pendant gleamed up at her with all the smoky, mysterious beauty of black diamonds.

"I know I can trust you with it, for I have trusted you with more than that. My life is in your hands, just as much as yours is in mine. So keep the thing, and finish paying for it when you can. If we're never able to get any more rough diamonds from the mine, you'll have to pay in money."

She hardly seemed to hear, so wrapped was she in the contemplation of her new treasure, brooding and crooning over it like a mother with a child. He watched her for a moment, then rose and fetched the grey veil she had cast off on entering.

"Come now, my child; it is late, and you must be gone. Be careful. I know I need not remind you of the oath between us three."

"Silence—and suicide, if necessary," she murmured mechanically. She had taken the jewel from its case and was threading it on a chain round her throat, "Death rather than betray the other two."

"That's it," said the other, with cheerful firmness. "Now, good-night."

He lowered the lights and opened the door of the room. She passed into the dark passage, and he returned to the table and pressed a button which opened the front door. When he heard it softly close, he knew that she was out of the house and on her way home.

But her adventures were not yet over. Before she had gone very far she was aware of being followed. A mirror in a shop window reflected, afar off, the silhouette of the only other person besides herself in the now silent street—a tall man in a slouch hat. Apparently he had on shoes as light as her own, for his feet

made no more noise than hers, though her fine ear detected the steady beat of them behind her. For the first time, she knew terror. Supposing it were a detective who had tracked her from Syke Ravenal's door, and was now waiting to arrest her as she entered her own home! She realized that her courage had lain in the knowledge of absolute security, for now, at the menace of discovery, her heart was paralyzed with fright and she could scarcely breathe. Instinct told her to run, but acquired self-control kept her from this madness, and, by a great effort, she continued walking quietly as before. Gradually her nerve returned. She determined, by feint, to discover whether the man were really following her or if his presence were due to accident. Having now arrived at the residential part of the town, where every house stood back from the road and was sheltered by a garden, she coolly opened a gate at random and walked boldly in. The man was still some way behind, and she had ample time to pass through the garden and reach the veranda before he drew near.

It was a house strange to her, and she had not the faintest idea who lived there. All the windows and doors were closed and shuttered, but light showed through a fanlight over the hall door. The veranda, blinded by heavy green mats, contained the usual array of chairs, and she sank down on one, her heart beating like a drum, her ears strained to hear her pursuer pass. Instead, to her horror, she heard the gate briskly unlatched and footsteps on the path. Terrified by this unexpected move, and sure, now, that the end had come, she sprang to her feet and stood waiting like a straight, grey ghost for the man to enter the veranda. The light above the hall door fell full on him, and it is hard to say whether dismay or horror were strongest in her when she recognized Harlenden.

"Denis!" she stammered.

"Why are you here, Rosanne?" he asked quietly. "Do you need me?"

Astonishment kept her dumb for a moment, then, with a realization of the position, came anger.

"How dare you follow me?" she exclaimed, in a low, tense voice.

"I live in this house."

"*You live here?*" she faltered, and sat down suddenly, trembling from head to foot.

"Yes; and I have just returned from the club."

"Then it was *not* you following me?"

At that she sprang up and threw herself into his arms in a frenzy of fear.

"Who was it, then? Oh, Denis, Denis, save me; take me into your house—hide me!"

"Hush!" he said gently, and, keeping a supporting arm about her, guided her round the veranda, took a key out of his pocket, and let her and himself in by a side door. He closed and locked the door behind them, put her into a chair, then examined the window to make sure it was closed as well as shuttered. It was a man's sitting-room, full of the scent of leather and tobacco. Going to a spirit-stand on the table he poured out some brandy.

"Drink this," he said, in the same firm tone he had used all along, and mechanically she obeyed him.

"Where are we?" she murmured. "Whose house is this? I thought you lived at the club?"

"So I did until last week, when this house was lent me. Don't be afraid. The servants are all in bed, and there is no one about. You are much safer here than roaming about the streets at one in the morning."

"Then you *were* following me?"

"Certainly I was following you. I saw you come out of Syke Ravenal's shop and I walked behind you, but only because your way and mine happened to be in the same direction."

She passed her hand over her eyes with a hopeless gesture. It seemed as though this endless day of terrors and surprises would never be done, and she was weary, weary. He sat regarding her with grave eyes. She looked like a little, tired, unhappy child, and his heart was sick with longing to gather her in his arms and comfort her and take her sorrows on himself. But he knew that there were things beyond his help here, unless she gave him her full confidence and cast her burdens into his hands.

"Rosanne," he said, at last, "I ask you to trust me."

She looked at him with wretched eyes and a mouth tipped at the corners as though she would weep if she could. In truth, the enchantment of this man's love and her love for him was on her again, and the poignant torment of it was almost too exquisite to bear. His voice stole through her senses like the music of an old dream. His lean, strong frame, the stone-grey eyes, and close-lipped mouth all spoke of that power in a man which means safety to the woman he loves. Safety! Only such a storm-petrel as Rosanne Ozanne, weary, with wings beaten and torn by winds whose fateful forces she herself did not understand, could realize the full allure of that word. She felt like a sailor drowning in a wild sea, within sight of the fair land he never would reach. That fair land of safety was not for her feet, that had wandered down such dark and shameful paths. But, oh, how the birds sang on that sweet shore! How cool were the green pastures! Small wonder that her face wore the tortured misery of a little child. Denis Harlenden's heart turned to water at the sight of it, and the blood thrummed in his veins with the ache to crush her to his breast and keep her there against the world and against herself, spite of all the unfathomed things in her which estranged him. But he was strong enough to refrain from even touching her hands. Only his voice he could not stay from its caresses.

"Is not love enough for you, Rosanne?"

She trembled under it like leaves in the wind and lifted her eyes to his. They looked long into each other's souls through those windows which can wear so many veils to hide the truth. But, in that moment, the veils were lifted, and both saw Truth in all her naked terror and beauty. What he saw scorched and repelled but did not daunt him; instead, a nobler love, chivalrous and pitiful, was born of the sight. And she saw that love, and knew it great enough to clothe her even if she came to him stripped of fair repute and the world's honours.

"Yes; it is enough," she said brokenly, and cast a thing she wore about her neck to the floor. Then, suddenly, she collapsed in her chair and fell into a fit of dry weeping. Long, bitter sobs shook her frame and seemed to tear their way out of her body. She was like a woman wrenched upon the rack. Harlenden could do nothing but stand and wait, his own face twisted with pain, until the storm was past. Gradually it died away, with longer and longer intervals between the shuddering sighs. At last, she uncovered her face, bleached and ravaged by the tearless storm, yet wearing a gentler beauty than ever it had known, and rose

trembling to her feet.

"Take me home, Denis," she whispered. He wrapped her veil about her and she felt the thrill of his hands upon her, but he did not kiss her. They had come closer to each other than any kiss could bring them. Just as they were passing from the room, she remembered something and stepped back.

"I must touch that vile thing again," she said, "because it does not belong to me and must go back to where it came from." She stooped and picked the black, glittering object from the floor.

A spasm contracted Harlenden's face, but he asked no question. Silently they went from the house and into the dark streets. There was no moon. At her gate, he stooped and kissed her lips.

Mrs. Ozanne got up the morning of the following day with the urgent feeling on her of something to be done. It seemed as if there were some move to be made that would help her and her children in their unhappiness, only she didn't know what the move was. But she always remembered, afterward, with what feverish urgency she dressed, putting on walking-things instead of a wrapper, and stepping from her room into the bustling atmosphere of the house with a determined indifference to the tasks and interests that usually occupied her attention.

Rosalie was as surprised to see her mother dressed for going out as was the mother to find her daughter at the breakfast-table.

"Why, Rosalie, my darling, this is an unexpected joy!"

"Yes, mother; I thought I would make an effort."

It was the first time that the girl had been out of her room for over two weeks, and she looked frail as a snowdrop, and nearly as white.

"You can't have two daughters sick abed, you know," she added, with a wistful smile.

"Is Rosanne still——" Mrs. Ozanne often left questions and remarks about her other daughter unfinished.

The latter had spent the whole of the previous day in her room, seeming physically unable to leave her bed.

"Yes; I'm afraid she's really ill. She just lies there, not speaking or eating, and she looks—oh, mother, she looks so unhappy!"

"I begged her yesterday to see the doctor."

"She says no doctor can do her any good, and that we must just leave her alone. I fancy she's thinking out something that she's terribly worried about."

"There is something wrong," said the mother heavily. "Oh, Rosalie, if she were only like you, and would not hide her heart from those who love her!"

"We can't all be alike, mother darling! Rosanne has a stronger character for better or worse than I have. It is easy for me to throw my troubles on other people's shoulders, but she is capable of bearing in silence far greater sorrows, and of making far greater sacrifices."

"It is not a happy nature," sighed her mother. "I wonder if Kitty Drummund can do any good if I send for her?"

"Better not, mother. She says she wants to see no one at present, and you know she was at Kitty's the night before last."

"I have asked her so often not to go out at night like that—even to Kitty's. I dare say she caught cold driving."

"Poor Rosanne! It is more than a cold she has!"

Sophia Ozanne looked at her little, fair daughter with tender eyes, remembering the heartless way Rosanne had spoken of her sister's grief only two nights before.

"How different you are, my Rosalie—forgetting your own sorrow to think of others!"

The girl's eyes filled with tears, but she did not shed them.

"I'm afraid it's only another form of selfishness, mummie dear. I want to be kind

and loving to all the world, just so that God will be good to me and give Dick another chance."

"My poor, poor child!" The mother's arms were round her in a moment, ready for comfort, but Rosalie pushed her gently away, smiling with quivering lips.

"Don't pity me, mother. I'm determined to be brave, whatever comes. But tell me, where are you going, all prinked out in your walking-things?"

"I—I don't know yet, dear." Mrs. Ozanne looked startled and embarrassed. "I have various things to do."

"It's a frightful morning. Do you think you ought to go out?"

"I must," was the elder woman's firm answer, and she bustled away before there was time for further questioning. Not for anything did she mean to be deterred from the pressing desire in her to go out. Rosalie had been perfectly right about the weather. It was that arid time of year when the air swirls in gusts of hot wind, laden with gritty blue sand from the debris-heaps, and the finer red dust of the streets. Kimberley dust is notoriously the worst of its kind in a land plagued with dust. Buluwayo runs it pretty close, and Johannesburg, in the spring months, has special sand-devils of its own, but nothing in Africa has ever quite come up to Kimberley at its worst. This was not one of its worst, however; merely a day on which all who had wisdom sat at home within closed doors and sealed windows, awaiting a cessation of the penetrating abomination of filth.

Often, during the morning, Mrs. Ozanne found herself wondering what she was doing wandering about the town on such a day. Desultorily, and with an odd feeling that this was not what she should be about, she let herself be blown along the street and in and out of shops, face bent down, eyes half closed, bumping blindly into people, her skirts swirling and flacking, her hat striving its utmost to escape and take the hair of her head with it. There were no necessary errands to do. The servants did the shopping, and she rarely went out except to drive in the afternoons. Vaguely she wondered why she had not used the carriage this morning.

Lunch-time came, but she could not bring herself to return home. It seemed to her that there was still something she must do, though she could not remember what.

In the end, she went into a clean, respectable little restaurant and lunched off a lamb chop and boiled potatoes, regardless of the excellent lunch that awaited her at home. Then, like a restless and unclean spirit, out she blew once more into the howling maelstrom of wind and dust.

She began to feel, at last, as if it were a nightmare, this necessity that urged her on, she knew not whither. Dimly, her eyes still blinded by dust, she was aware that she had left the main thoroughfares and was now in a poorer part of the town. With the gait of a sleep-walker, she continued on her way, until suddenly a voice addressing her jerked her broad-awake.

"You come see me, missis?"

A woman had opened the door of a mean tin house and stood there waiting in the doorway, almost as if she had been expecting Sophia Ozanne. The latter stood stone-still, but her mind went racing back to a winter afternoon seventeen years before, when she had sat in her bedroom with the little dying form of Rosanne upon her knees, and a voice speaking from the shadow of her bedroom had said, "Missis sell baby to me for a farthing; baby not die." The same voice addressed her now, and the same woman stood in the doorway of the mean house gazing at her with large, mournful eyes. It was Rachel Bangat, the Malay cook.

"You come see me die, missis?" she questioned, in her soft, languorous voice.

"Die! Are you sick, Rachel?" said Mrs. Ozanne.

"Yes, missis; Rachel very sick. Going die in three days."

Sophia Ozanne searched the dark, high-boned face with horror-stricken eyes, but could see no sign of death on it, or any great change after seventeen years, except a more unearthly mournfulness in the mysterious eyes.

But she had often heard it said that Malays possess a prophetic knowledge of the hour and place of their death, and she could well credit Rachel Bangat with this strange faculty.

"How my baby getting along, missis?"

Such yearning tenderness was in the question that Mrs. Ozanne, spite of a deep repugnance to discuss Rosanne with this woman, found herself answering:

"She is grown up now, Rachel."

"She very pretty?"

"Yes."

"And very rich?"

"We are well-off."

"But she? I give her two good gifts that make her rich all by herself.
She no use them?"

"What gifts were those, Rachel?" The mother drew nearer and peered with haggard eyes at the Malay.

"I tell you, missis. Because I love my baby so much and want her be very rich and happy, I give her two good things—*the gift of bright stones* and *the gift of hate well*."

Sophia Ozanne drew nearer still, staring like a fascinated rabbit into the mournfully sinister dark eyes, while the soft voice rippled on.

"She no use those gifts I give her? I think so. I think she say, 'I hate that man,' and he die, sometimes quick, sometimes slow. Or she not hate too much, and he only get little sick. Or she wish him bad in his business, and he get bad. That not so?"

Sophia Ozanne thought of the black list she had kept for years of all the people whom Rosanne disliked and who had come to ill. In swift procession they passed through her mind, and Dick Gardner, with his anguished throat, walked at the end of the procession.

"Yes." Her dry lips ejected the word in spite of her wish to be silent.

"Ah!" said the Malay, softly satisfied. "And the bright stones? She not get all she want without buy?"

This time, Mrs. Ozanne did not answer; only her blanched face grew a shade whiter. The woman leaned forward and spoke to her earnestly, imploringly.

"You tell her get rich quick with the bright stones before too late. Her power going soon. Rachel die in three days, and then gifts go away from Rachel's baby. No more power hate or get bright stones. Tell her quick, missis. I make you come here today so you can go back tell her. All night and all morning I stand here make you come to me. Now, go back quick, tell my baby. Three days! Eight o'clock on third night, Rachel die."

As strangely as she had appeared, the Malay withdrew into her wretched shanty and closed the door.

Sophia Ozanne never knew by what means and in what manner she reached her home that day, but at about five o'clock she came into the hall of Tiptree House, and was met by her daughter Rosalie with the news that Rosanne had got up from her bed and left the house, taking a suitcase with her.

"And, oh, mother, I could see that she was in a high fever, her cheeks were so flushed and her eyes like fire! What shall we do?"

Her mother sat down and wiped great beads of moisture from her pallid face.

"I think we will pray, Rosalie," she said slowly.

It was still broad afternoon when Rosanne walked openly into Syke Ravenal's shop, bag in hand. The benevolent-faced old man, occupied in cleaning the works of a watch, looked up with the bland inquiring glance of a tradesman to a customer. But his face changed when he saw her eyes.

"You have news?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Take me to the inner room," she ordered curtly. Without demur, he led the way. The moment the door closed on them she flung the heavy leather bag on to the table.

"Take them," she cried wildly; "take them back! They are all there.
Not one is missing."

"Hush, my child—hush!" he gently urged. But she would not be hushed.

"I hate you," she said passionately. "I curse the day I entered this shop, an

innocent girl, and was beguiled by you and your son and my mad passion for diamonds into becoming your tool and accomplice. Oh, how I hate you! I can never betray you because of my oath, but I curse you both, and I pray I may never see or hear of you again."

"That's all right, my child," he said soothingly. She threw him one glance of loathing and contempt and walked from the place.

Rosanne had taken to her bed again, and this time when they brought the doctor she was too ill to object, too ill to do anything but lie staring in a sort of mental and physical coma at the ceiling above her.

"Let her be," said the old-fashioned family doctor, who had known her from babyhood. "She has a splendid constitution and will pull through. But let her have no worries of any kind."

So they left her alone, except in the matter of ministering occasional nourishment, which she took with the mechanical obedience of a child.

For two days Rosanne lay there, silent and strange. The third day her sickness took an acute form. She tossed and moaned and called out in her pain, her face twisted with torture. Her mind appeared to remain clear.

"Mother, I believe I am dying," she said, after one such spell, during the afternoon. "I feel as if something is tearing itself loose from my very being. Does it hurt like this when the soul is trying to escape from the body?"

"I have sent for the doctor again, darling."

"It is nothing he can cure. It is *here*, and *here* that I suffer." She touched her head and her heart. "But, oh, my body, too, is tortured!"

She lay still a little while, moaning softly to herself while her mother stood by, sick with distress; then she said:

"Send for Denis Harlenden, mother. I must see him before I die."

Mrs. Ozanne asked no question. Her woman's instinct told her much that Rosanne had left unsaid. Within half an hour, Harlenden was being shown into

the drawing-room, where she awaited him. He came in with no sign upon his face of the anxiety in his heart. This was the fourth day since he had seen Rosanne, and she had sent him no word.

"Sir Denis, my daughter is very ill. I don't know why she should be calling out for you——" She faltered. Marks of the last few days' anxiety were writ large upon her, but she was not wanting in a certain patient dignity.

Harlenden strode over and took her hands in his as he would have taken the hands of his own mother.

"It is because we love each other," he said gently, "and because, as soon as she will let me, I am going to marry her."

A ray of thankfulness shone across her features.

"Marriage! I don't know, Sir Denis; but, if you love her I can tell you something that will help you to understand her better, and perhaps you can help her."

Briefly, and in broken words, she related to him the strange incident of Rosanne's babyhood, its seeming effect upon her character, and the Malay's extraordinary words of two days before. She did not disguise from him that she believed Rosanne guilty, whether consciously or unconsciously, of many dark things, but she pleaded for her child the certainty that she had been in the clutches of forces stronger than herself.

"About the diamonds," she finished, at last, "I know nothing, and I am afraid to think. Did you read of that awful case of suicide in yesterday's paper—that man, Syke Ravenal, who has been robbing De Beers? I am tormented with the thought that she may have known something of him—yet how could she?"

"You must put such a thought out of your mind for ever and never mention it to a soul," said Harlenden firmly. "That man committed suicide because his only son had been killed by accident in Amsterdam. He left a vast fortune and a number of jewels which had been taken from their settings to De Beers, by way of conscience-money for several thousand pounds' worth of diamonds in the rough which he had stolen from them. There is absolutely no evidence to connect any other person with his crime, except a letter asking the company to deal lightly with a native boy called Hiangeli, who had been a tool of his."

"Then you think it could have nothing possibly to do with my poor child?"

"Certainly not," said Denis Harlenden, without flinching.

"Not that I think that she would have done it in her right senses, but, oh, Sir Denis, she has been under a spell all her life, an evil spell, which, please God, will be broken when that woman dies! You do not think me mad, I hope?"

"I do not," he answered gravely. "I am as sure of what you say as you yourself. What you do not know, Mrs. Ozanne, is that love has already broken that spell. Rosanne is already free from it."

She looked at him questioningly, longingly.

"I cannot tell you more," he said gently. "But, believe me, it is true. May I go to her now?"

The mother led the way. Rosanne, who had just passed through another terrible crisis of anguish, lay on her bed, still and white as a lily. A crimson-silk wrapper swathed about her shoulders, and the clouds of night-black hair, flung in a tangled mass above her pillows, threw into violent contrast the deadly pallor of her face. Her eyes, dark and wide with suffering, looked unseeingly at Harlenden at first, but gradually a ray of recognition dawned in them and she put out her hand with a faint cry.

"Denis!"

He took her hand and held it safe, while, with all the strength in him, he willed peace and calmness into her troubled mind.

"Denis, I think I am going to die."

"Dearest, I know you are going to live—for me."

"No, no; I am not worthy of life—or of you. I have been too wicked!"

"I want you to rest now," he said.

"I cannot rest till I have told you everything. I wanted to tell you the other night, you know, but I was too exhausted. Denis, I am a criminal—a thief! I have stolen

diamonds under cover of the friendship of another woman. I have received them from another thief in the mines, and taken them to a man, whose son, a merchant in Amsterdam, sent me my share of the robbery in cut stones set as jewels. The rough stolen stones meant nothing to me, but the finished ones dazzled and maddened me. I cannot describe to you what they did to my senses, but I was mad at the sight and touch of them. They had power to benumb every decent feeling in me. For them, I forgot duty. My poor mother, how she has suffered! I betrayed friendship; I debased love! Yes, Denis, I debased our love! I meant just to take the joy of it for a little while, then cast it away when it came to choosing between you and the stones."

"But you did not."

"No, thank God, I could not! It was stronger than my base passion, stronger than myself. Oh, Denis, I thank you for your love! It has saved me from a hell in life, and a hell hereafter, for I think God will not further punish one so deeply repentant as I."

"You are not going to die, Rosanne," he repeated firmly.

"Do you think I would live and let you link your clean, upright life with my dark one?" she said sadly. "You do not even know all the darkness of it yet. Listen: I found I had a power through which I could hurt others by just wishing them ill—and I used it freely. Ah, I have hurt many people! It tortures me to think of how many. I have been lying here for two days and nights trying to undo all the harm I have done, Denis—willing against the evil I have wished for, praying for happiness to be given back to every one of them." Her voice grew faint and far-off. "I have even tried to undo the harm I wished would come to the two people who tempted me into stealing, Denis. But, somehow, I feel that it is too late for them. That *something* in here"—she touched her heart—"which hurts me so much, tells me I cannot help those two wretched ones."

Her voice broke off; she was shaken like a reed with a terrible spasm of suffering. It was as though she were in the clutches of some brutal giant.

"Denis," she cried faintly, "I feel I am being rent asunder! Part of me is being torn away. Surely, even death cannot be so terrible!"

A clock on the table struck eight. Instantly she raised herself in bed, fell back again, gave a deep sigh, and lay still.

A few hours later, she woke with a gentle flush in her cheeks and a wonderful harmony in all her features. Her first glance fell upon her mother leaning over the foot of the bed, and she gave a happy smile.

"Oh, mother, I have had such a lovely dream! I dreamed Dick was well and coming back soon to Rosalie."

"And so he is, my darling. She has had a wire to say that Doctor Raymond has discovered that the throat trouble is not malignant but quite curable. He will be well in a few weeks."

"Then it *may* come true, my dream," she said softly and shyly. "My dream that she and I were being married on the same day, she to Dick, and I to—oh, Denis, how strange that you should be here when I was dreaming of you! What brought you here? Have you come to tell mother that we love each other?"

They began to realize dimly then, as they realized fully later on, that, by a merciful gift of Providence her mind was a blank concerning all the dark things of the past.

Memory of them had died with the dying of the Malay woman at eight o'clock on a summer evening, and no shadow of them ever came back to dim the harmony of her life with Denis Harlenden.

She is one of the happiest as well as one of the loveliest women in London today. Wrapped up in her home life and children, she still finds time to be seen about everywhere with her husband, and they are looked upon as one of the few ideally happy couples in society.

It has often been remarked, as a curious fact, that she never wears jewels of any kind, save an emerald ring and some exquisite pearls.

April Folly

PART I

Waterloo Station, greasy underfoot and full of the murky, greenish gloom of a November day, was the scene of a jostling crowd. The mail-boat train for South Africa stretched far down the long platform, every carriage door blocked by people bidding farewell, handing in bouquets of flowers, parcels of books, boxes of chocolates; bartering jests and scattering laughter; sending their love to the veld, to Table Mountain, to Rhodesia, to the Victoria Falls.

Only one first-class reserved compartment had no crowd before it, nor any further audience than a middle-aged woman, with a wistful Irish face and the neat and careful appearance peculiar to superior servants of the old-fashioned type. With her hands full of newly-purchased bookstand magazines and her eyes full of trouble, she stood gazing at the sole occupant of the carriage.

"Oh, Miss Diana your Ladyship . . ." he began once more.

"Shut it, Marney," said Miss Diana her Ladyship, elegantly. "I've had enough. You're not coming with me, and that's that. I'm not a child any longer never to stir about the world alone."

"Shure, and your aunt, Lady Grizel, will turn in her grave at it," keened poor Marney. An expression of scampish glee crossed the girl's face.

"Yes, old Grizzly will do some turning," she murmured. "Thank goodness that's all she can do now."

The maid crossed herself with a shocked air, though it was far from being the first time she had heard those profanities of the dead upon her mistress's lips. The latter gave her no time for further argument.

"What's the use of standing there stuffing up my view?" she demanded crossly. "If you want something to do, go and get me some flowers. Everyone has flowers but me. It's outrageous. Get heaps."

Marney flurried down the platform, bent on her errand, and Diana Vernilands immediately issued from the doorstep of the carriage and gazed eagerly and invitingly at the crowd.

Ordinarily the beauty alone of the sables which muffled her ears and fell to her heels would have focused attention, not to mention the eager liveliness of her face. But on this occasion no one returned her vivid glances. Everyone was busy

with their own affairs and friends. The only person seeming as isolated and lonely as herself was another girl, who, having made a tour from one end of the train to the other in vain quest of a seat, was now wearily and furiously doing the return trip. No porter followed her; she carried her own dressing-case and rugs, and she, too, was without flowers. This last fact clenched Lady Diana's decision. A bond of loneliness and flowerlessness existed between them. She hailed the other girl deliriously.

"Hi! Are you looking for a place?" she cried. "Come in here. I've got a carriage to myself."

The other was as astonished as relieved.

"Oh, may I? How awfully good of you!" she said warmly, and stepping into the carriage, bestowed her possessions in such small space as was not already encumbered. Then she looked at Lady Diana in the doorway with a pair of lovely but rather sad violet eyes that had smoky shadows beneath them.

"I shall have to fight about my ticket with the ticket collector when he comes round. It is only a second-class one. I hope you don't mind?"

"Mind!" said Diana. "I hate everyone in authority, and I love rows and cocktails and excitement. Still, it might save time to pay."

"It might," said the other "but I'm not going to. There were no second-class seats left, so the onus is on them. Besides"—her creamy face flushed faintly and her eyes became defiant—"I can't afford it."

Diana could very well believe it, for she had seldom seen a girl so badly dressed. However, the deep blue eyes that had all sorts of pansy tints lying dormant in them, and the winging black satin hair that looked as if smoke had been blown through it, could not be obscured even by a shabby hat. Diana's own hair being a violent apricot and her eyes of the same colour as a glass of sherry with the sun on it, she could admire without pain this type so different to her own.

The fact was that they were as striking a pair of girls as any one could hope to meet in a day's march, but the delicate beauty of one was under a cloud which only a connoisseur's eye could see through—badly-cut garments and an unfashionable hat! On the other hand, Lady Diana's highly-coloured and slightly dairymaidish prettiness would have been more attractive in simpler and less

costly clothes. While they were coming to these conclusions about each other an inspector of tickets entered the carriage. Diana delightedly braced herself for a row, but there was no need for it. Whether it was the charm of the strange girl's golden voice, or the subtle air of luxury and independence combined with a faint odour of Russian leather and honey that stole from the furs of Lady Diana Vernilands, none can tell, but the inspector behaved like a man under the influence of hypnotism. He listened to the tale of the second-class ticket as to words of Holy Writ, and departed like a man in a dream without having uttered a single protest, and at Lady Diana's behest, carefully locking the door behind him. A moment later whistles, shouts, and the clicking of hundreds of farewell kisses signalled the train's immediate departure. The devoted Marney, carrying what appeared to be a bridal bouquet of white lilies and roses, dashed up just in time to make a last attempt to accompany her mistress. But the door was unyielding, and the worst she could do was to claw at the window as she panted alongside the now moving train, crying:

"You'd better let me come with you, now, Miss Diana your Ladyship. . . ."

The latter only waved her hand in kind but firm dismissal.

"Go home and look after papa, Marney, and don't worry about me. I shall be back soon." As the train took a jump and finally fled from the station, leaving Marney far behind, she added thoughtfully, "I don't think!" and burst out laughing.

"Just as though I *would* hurry back to frowsy old England the first time
I've ever managed to get away from it on my own!"

The other girl looked at her with deep, reflective eyes.

"If you had been on your own as much as I have you wouldn't think it such a catch," she remarked, with a little dry smile.

"Oh, wouldn't I! I can't imagine anything more heavenly than having no relations in the world. It must be perfect paradise!"

"It's the paradise I have lived in for three years," said April Poole sombrely, "and any one who likes it can have it, and give me their hell instead."

"What!" cried Diana Vernilands, not sympathetic, but astounded and eager. She

stared at the other with envious, avid eyes that filled and brightened at last with an amazing plan. It burst from her like a shell from a gun. "*Let's change places: I be you, and you be me!*"

April considered her, and being very weary of her own destiny, considered the plan also. But though she was as ardent as any one for flyaway schemes and fantastic adventure, this plan looked to her too Arabian-nightish altogether, and not likely to hold water for more than the length of the journey from Waterloo to Southampton.

"How can we? I am a poverty-stricken girl, going out to governess at the Cape. You, a peer's daughter, I suppose, who will be met on the boat and surrounded by every care and attention. . . ."

"Yes, surrounded!" Diana interrupted savagely. With sudden fury she tore off the little sable hat, flung it on the seat beside her and stabbed it viciously with a great pearl pin. "I'm sick of being surrounded! I wish to goodness I were Alexander Selkirk, shipwrecked on a desert island."

"That wouldn't be much fun, either," said April. "I don't think there is much fun anywhere. We have all got what we don't want, and want what we can't get."

"You couldn't *not* want a face like yours," said Diana, handsomely. It gave her no pain, as has been mentioned before, because April was dark. If she had been addressing a blonde like herself, wild cats could not have torn such a compliment from Diana Vernilands.

"Couldn't I? Good looks without the surroundings and clothes to put them in are not much of a gift. Beauty in a third-class carriage and shabby clothes looks cheap and is fair game for any one's stalking."

"Well, change with me, then," urged Diana. "I'd rather be stalked than gazed at from afar like a brazen image."

She gave her hat another stab. April quivered all over, like a mother who sees a child ill-treated.

"Don't do that," she cried at last, in a poignant voice. She had seen that hat in her dreams for years, but never got so near it before. Diana Vernilands looked at her thoughtfully, then held it out.

"Put it on," she entreated. "Wear it, and be surrounded instead of me. Oh, for Heaven's sake do! I see you are just as keen as I am, and just as sick of being who you are. Try it on."

She may have meant the hat, or she may have meant the plan. April accepted the hat, and with it the plan. From the moment she saw herself in the glass her doom was dight. There was a little star-like purple flower, such as never grew on land or sea, nestling in the golden darkness of the fur. It seemed to April a flower that might have been plucked from the slopes of the blue hills of Nirvana, or found floating on the still waters of Lethe in that land where it is always afternoon. It brought dreams of romance to her heart, and made starry flowers of its own colour blossom in her eyes. She crushed the hat softly down upon her dark, winging hair, crinking and shaping it to frame her face at the right angle. Her fate was sealed.

"All right," she said, in a slow, dreamy voice. "Let's arrange it."

So while the train swooped on its way to the port whence the great ships turn their noses towards the Southern Cross, they drew up the plot, and the rôles were cast. Diana Vernilands, for the duration of the voyage only, was to be the penniless, friendless English girl, who could go her ways freely and talk and mix with any one she liked without being watched and criticized. April Poole, in the lovely hats and gowns and jewels of Lady Diana, would accept the dignity and social obligations that hedge a peer's daughter, even on a voyage to South Africa. On arrival at the Cape, each to assume her identity and disappear from the ken of their fellow-travellers: April to be swallowed up by a Cape suburb, where she was engaged to teach music and French to the four daughters of a rich wine-grower; Diana to proceed to her destination—the farm of an eccentric woman painter, somewhere on the veld.

It all looked as simple and harmless as picking apples in an orchard. No one would be any the wiser, they said, and no harm would accrue to anybody, while each girl would have the experience of enjoying herself in a new and original fashion. The only things they did not take into their calculations were their personal idiosyncrasies and the machinations of an old hag called Fate.

"What a time I'll have!" cried Diana. "Though what you will get out of it as the Earl of Roscannon's daughter beats me. You won't be sick of it half way and want to change back, I hope?"

"If you only knew how sick I am of being April Poole you wouldn't be afraid," was the fervent answer. Diana looked at her curiously.

"It can't be only the clothes—though of course I imagine it must be rotten, not having the right clothes. By the way, there are plenty for us both, you know. I did myself well in the shopping line, fortunately."

"I should hardly expect you to wear mine," said April drily. "No, as you rightly suspect, it isn't for the clothes, though they fascinate and lure me. And it isn't for the honour and glory of being Lady Diana, though that is fascinating too, and it will be priceless to have the joke on the rest of the world for once. It is for various subtle reasons which I don't suppose you would altogether understand. . . ."

"Never mind them, then," interrupted Diana. "I'm not a bit subtle, and don't care tuppence for reasons. All I care about is having a topping time for once in my life. Now, listen, I'll tell you a few things about myself, so that you won't get bowled if any one asks you. My father is Lord Roscannon, and our place is Bethwick Castle, in Northumberland. It's a gloomy old place that would give you the creeps. My mother died twenty-two years ago when I was born, and my father doesn't care about anything except archaeology, so I have always been in the clutches of my maiden aunt, Lady Grizel Vernilands, who ruled Bethwick and me as long as I can remember. Everyone called her the Grizzly Bear.

"Never mind, she's dead now, and I have been able to persuade papa that my health needs a sea voyage. He suggested the Continent—*of course* with a companion. But I have been clawed backwards and forwards on the Continent for years by Aunt Grizel, and have had enough. I chose Africa, because it sounds so nice and racy in novels, doesn't it? Fortunately papa's greatest friend, a parson and also an archaeologist, has a daughter out there. She paints, and lives on a farm somewhere on the veld in the Cape Colony, so I am allowed to go and stay with her for three months.

"I even escaped the company of my maid, as you saw, though she tried hard to persuade papa that I should get into trouble without her. I believe she would have come at the last, even without luggage, if I hadn't been too smart for her and had the door locked. Lucky, wasn't it? We should never have been able to execute our little scheme with her about. Now tell me your story."

"No need to go too closely into that," said April. "No one will put you any piercing questions about my family, or be in a position to contradict your

statements."

The Poole family tree, in fact, grew as tall and old as the Roscannon's upon the pages of heraldry, but drink and riotous living had perished its roots and rotted its branches long before April was born. Her father, its last hope, had been a scamp and gamester who broke his wife's heart and bequeathed the cup of poverty and despair to his child's lips. But these were things locked in April's heart, and not for idle telling in a railway carriage.

"I am an orphan without relatives or friends," she went on quietly. "No assets except musical tastes and a knowledge of languages, picked up in cheap Continental schools. I am twenty, and rather embittered by life, but I try not to be, because there's nothing can blacken the face of the sun like bitterness of heart, is there? It can spoil even a spring day."

Diana looked vague. In spite of tilts and tournaments with the Grizzly Bear, she had no more knowledge of that affliction of bitterness to which April referred than of the bitterness of affliction. The fact was patent in the gay light of her sherry-brown eye and her red mouth, so avid for pleasure. The book of life's difficulties, well conned by April Poole, was still closed to the Earl's only daughter.

"Perhaps she will know a little more about it by the end of the voyage," thought April, but without a tinge of malice, for in truth she was neither malicious nor bitter, though she often pretended to herself to be both. Whatever life had done to her, it had not yet robbed her of her powers of resilience, nor quenched her belief in the ultimate benevolence of Fate. Her joy in voyaging to a great unknown land had been a little dimmed by the prospect of the monotonous drudgery that awaits most governesses, but here, already cropping up by the wayside, was a compensating adventure, and her heart, which had been reposing in her boots, took little wings of delight unto itself and nearly flew away with excitement.

Eager as Diana, she threw herself into a discussion of clothes, personal tastes and habits, the exchange of cabins, and ways and means of circumventing the curiosity and suspicion of their fellow-travellers. Diana could not do her own hair, but had ascertained that there was a hairdresser on board whom she could visit every day. The ticket for her first-class stateroom she cheerfully handed over to April, in exchange for one which gave possession of a berth in a cheaper

cabin to be shared with another woman.

"We must do the thing thoroughly," she insisted, "and I shan't mind sharing in the least. It may be amusing if the other woman is pleasant. I don't think you and I had better know each other too well to begin with, do you? We can pretend to make friends as the voyage goes on. Or shall we say that we were at school together?"

"Let us say as little as possible," said April, who had an objection to telling lies, even little white ones. But Diana did not share her scruples, and plainly averred her intention of "spinning a yarn" to any one who asked questions.

In a whirl of excitement they arrived at the docks, and were hustled with the rest of the crowd up the steep gangway that led to the deck of the Union Castle Company's latest and most modern liner, the *Clarendon Castle*. April, who had exchanged her cloth coat for Diana's sables, felt the eyes of the world burning and piercing through the costly furs to the secret in her bosom. But Diana felt no such discomfort, jubilant in her new-found liberty, she paced the decks, inspected the ship, made friends with the first officer and several passengers, and finally went down to lunch in the dining saloon. She seated herself at the general table, and as a number of merry people were toasting each other farewell in champagne, she thought it only fitting to order a half-bottle for herself. Some of the women looked at her curiously, but that did not daunt Diana, especially after she had begun on the champagne.

April, placed at some distance in solitary state, noted and envied the coolness and composure of her fellow-conspirator. She, too, had meant to be one of the general crowd, but already the news of her rank and state had tickled the ears of the chief steward, and she found herself reverently waylaid and conducted with ceremony to a small table, whence she could gaze and be gazed upon by the rest of the world without fear of contamination. A steward, told off for her special service, hovered about her like a guardian angel, and during the meal a gold-braided personality approached and, murmuring the Captain's compliments, hoped that when the voyage had once started she would grace his table by her presence. Afar off, Diana cast her a grin over the rim of a wine-glass, but gave no further sign of recognition.

It is a phenomenon well known to travellers, that when the last warning bell rings on board a departing ship all the pretty women and interesting men go

ashore, leaving only the dull and fusty ones behind. Diana and April, however, were not depressed by this spectacle, for to the former, in her position of free-lance, all men looked interesting and all women superfluous; while April, in full possession of the beautifully appointed stateroom on the promenade deck, to which she had retired directly after lunch, was too busy reviewing the position to think about fellow-passengers just then. She was bothered over the business of sitting at the Captain's table. She had seen him on the boat deck as she came aboard, and her heart failed her at the thought of deceiving such a genial, kindly-looking man. It was plain that the experiment of "taking people in" was not going to be so pricelessly funny as she had anticipated. She said so to Diana, who came to her cabin as soon as the ship started to make a selection of clothes. But Diana would listen to none of her virtuous backslidings.

"You can't back out now," she said firmly. "A bargain's a bargain, and I've told everyone I am April Poole, going to Africa to be a governess, and all the ship knows you are Lady Diana Vernilands. We should be a spectacle for the gods if we change back now. No one would believe us, either. We'd only be looked upon with suspicion for the rest of the voyage, and all our fun and pleasure spoilt. For goodness's sake don't be an idiot!"

That was all the slightly conscience-stricken April got for her pains, and Diana stalked off triumphant, lugging a suit-case and an armful of wraps. April heard her explaining to a stewardess in the corridor that her baggage had got mixed up with Lady Diana Verniland's, and that it was very awkward; and then she saw and heard no more of her for several days. For immediately on emerging from the Solent the *Clarendon* ran into very heavy weather, which continued until the Bay of Biscay was passed, keeping all but the hardiest travellers confined to their cabins. April, who was among the victims, had plenty of solitary leisure in which to repent her misdeed if she felt so inclined. But the impulse to repent soon passed, and workaday wisdom reassured her that what she and Diana were doing was really very harmless and of no consequence to any one but themselves. No very great effort was required to make the best of the situation and enjoy it as much as Diana had evidently determined to do. It was very pleasant, after all, to be waited on and fussed about as though she were a person of infinite importance instead of a shabby, trim governess. She, who had padded the bumps of life for others so long, could now thoroughly appreciate having the same service performed for herself.

Being of a nature neither arrogant nor impatient, she soon endeared herself to the

stewardesses and serving-people, who, having some experience in the tempers and tantrums of fine ladies, were agreeably surprised by her gentle and charming manner, and could not do enough for her in return.

After the first few days of frightful illness she began to feel better, and was able to be moved from her cabin to the ladies' lounge. Wrapped in one or other of Diana's ravishing boudoir garments of silk and fur, she was supported there every morning, ensconced on the most luxurious sofa, and surrounded by attentions from the other semi-invalids. Nothing was too good for the peer's delightful daughter, and everyone behaved as if she were an angel dropped from heaven. In fact, with the lovely spirituelle air her illness had given, and the sea bloom just beginning to tint her cheeks again and dew her eyes, she looked rather like one.

The ship's doctor, who was young and susceptible, broke it gently to such of the male passengers who were able to bear the strain that a dazzling joy awaited their eyes when "Lady Diana" should be well enough to appear in public. The story of her charming looks and ways circulated softly round the boat, even as a pleasant wine circulates in the veins.

April knew nothing of these things. She only felt very happy in the kindness of everybody, in the gradual steadying of the ship, now emerging from the troubled Bay into smoother, warmer waters, and in the prospect of soon being allowed to go on deck. Sometimes she wondered why the real Diana gave no sign, but came to the conclusion that she, too, had been ill.

It was a natural enough thing to ask the doctor, when they were alone one day, if Miss Poole was among his patients. He seemed sufficiently astonished by the query.

"Miss Poole!" he echoed. "Oh, no; she's not ill—far from it. Do you know her?"

"Certainly I know her," smiled April, astonished in her turn. "I was wondering why she had not been to see me."

The doctor murmured something cryptic about her having "no doubt been too busy," and seemed to have nothing further to say. The face of the lounge stewardess wore a peculiar expression. A quiet, rather austere-looking woman, she always behaved like a mummy in the doctor's presence, standing behind him with folded hands and mute lips. But when he had gone she came to life.

"Do you mean the young lady whose baggage got mixed with yours at the beginning of the voyage, my lady?" she asked. April remembered the necessity to walk delicately.

"Yes . . . a pretty, fair girl," she said cautiously. "Very gay and bright."

"Very," agreed the stewardess laconically. Then the source of her eloquence dried up even as the doctor's had done. April began to think it was time to go on deck and see what was doing.

The next day was not only gloriously fine, but the ship came to harbour by that island which is as a bouquet of fruit and flowers pinned to a jagged breast. There seems always something sinister lurking behind the wreathed and radiant beauty of Madeira; but to those who come in ships from out the bitter fogs of England she is a siren with a blue and golden smile, and her gift-laden hands are soothing and serene.

April, lying in her deck-chair, thought she had come to fairyland. Escorted upstairs by the doctor and a retinue of stewardesses, she was installed in a sheltered corner that commanded the whole brilliant scene. The purser found her the most comfortable of chairs, the first officer brought her a bamboo table from his cabin for her books, the Captain stayed awhile from his duties to congratulate her on her recovery, and several men loitered near at hand casting reverently admiring glances. But she had eyes for nothing save the vivid scene before her. The smiling island, with its head in the mists and its feet in a sapphire sea still as a painted lake; boats full of flowers, corals, ivories, silken embroideries and unknown fruits; the burnished bodies of diving boys; the odour of spices and sandalwood; the clatter of strange tongues; the dark faces and bright clothes of the invading crowds of natives.

It was a spectacle to enchant the senses. She could not think why so many passengers were scurrying to and fro anxious to be taken ashore. It seemed as foolish as to try to get into a picture instead of sitting before it.

Everyone was wearing light clothes, for summer had come at full bound, and soon they would be in the tropics. There were beautifully cut white linen suits, smart skirts, and filmy blouses. A popular saying on the Cape mail-boats is that passengers to South Africa are all clothes and no money, while passengers returning are all money and no clothes. April did not know the epigram, nor the

truth of it. But she could plainly perceive that in the scanty kit of April Poole she would have been very much out of the running among this smart and jaunty crowd.

As it was, clad in a sleek silken muslin of lovely lines, snowy shoes and stockings, and a rose-laden hat, she could hold her own with any one. A longing filled her to see Diana Vernilands. She wanted to talk to her, exchange confidences, thank her, bless her, and, above all, to find out what it was she found so attractive in her side of the game. What on earth could it be that was so much more ravishing than to be at peace with the world, respected by it, liked by it, and yet independent of it? To wear lovely clothes in which you could enjoy the knowledge of looking charming without meeting suspicion in the eyes of women and the "good-hunting" glance in the eyes of men. This last constituted, indeed, that "subtle reason" at which she had hinted to Diana. Life had harried April too much for her few years. Obliged to travel its highways alone and unprotected, some of the adventures encountered there had cut her to the quick. While women looked askance at her, men looked too hard, and too long. Doubtless she had met the wrong kind. Lonely young girls without money or connections do not always find the knightly and chivalrous gentlemen of their dreams! Naturally pure-hearted and high-minded, she had asked nothing of those she did meet save respect and good-comradeship; but either she was too pretty or peculiarly unfortunate, for she had seldom been offered either. It was something, perhaps, that she still kept dreams, and a belief that there were knightly and chivalrous men somewhere in the world, though they might not be for her.

She was still, like Omar, wondering "What the vinters buy one half so precious as the stuff they sell"—lost in cogitations about Diana, when the subject of her thoughts, accompanied by three men, came down a companion-way from an upper deck. They were evidently set for the shore, and making their way to the ship's side as if certain that the best places in the best boats were preserved for them.

Diana's appearance betrayed the lack of a maid. Her dress was crumpled, her shoes badly laced, and her hat cocked carelessly upon her head. But the subtle Italian hand of the ship's coiffeur had touched her hair, saving the situation. Also, there was a sparkle in her eye and a *joie de vivre* in her laughter that made up for many deficiencies. Her companions appeared to have been picked for their good looks, sleek heads, and immaculate clothes. One, with whom she palpably stood on the happiest of terms, was, in fact, strikingly handsome. The other two,

loitering in her wake, seemed content if she tossed them a word over her shoulder from time to time. They all behaved as if they had bought the ship, and found the presence of the rest of the passengers an impertinence. Such of the latter as were still on board returned the compliment according to sex and the ability that was theirs. The men plainly admired Diana's nerve, while wondering with their eyebrows what on earth she could see in those three footling fellows. The women looked pityingly at the men, and with their noses indicated that Diana was some kind of dangerous and unpleasant animal escaped from a menagerie. A lady who had seated herself by April in a chair labelled "Major Sarle," curled her lip at the passing group in a manner painfully familiar to her neighbour. Presently, when they were left alone, the rest of the world having disappeared down the ship's side, she addressed April, but with a very different expression on her face.

"You are Lady Diana Vernilands, I think?" she said, smiling in a friendly manner. "I am Mrs. Stanislaw. So glad to see you up."

April was instantly on the alert. Not only did she know the name of Mrs. Lionel Stanislaw, but had very good cause to remember it as that of the lady with whom she was to have shared a cabin. The smiling face had once been a pretty one, but the tide of youth was fast receding, leaving uncovered a bleak and barren shore, whose chief salients were a disdainful nose and a mouth which looked as if it might be able to say bitter things. The eyes, however, were still handsome, if supercilious, and her manners velvety. No doubt there were claws beneath the velvet, but they were not for April . . . only for the girl who was using April's name! They had not talked for five minutes before she realized that in this woman Diana had an enemy. Not that Mrs. Stanislaw's words were censorious. She was too clever for that. Her remarks were merely deprecative and full of pity.

"A most amazing creature," she said gently, "but rather disturbing to live with. I confess I wish I had been cribbed and cabined with someone who had more conventional manners and kept earlier hours."

Here was something for April to ponder.

"She is very young," she faltered at length, and was unwise enough to add, "and pretty."

These being two heinous offences in the eyes of Mrs. Stanislaw, she proceeded at once to hang, draw, and quarter the criminal. But her voice was tenderer than before.

"Yes, isn't it a pity? . . . and so foolishly indiscreet. Do you know, they tell me that she is spoken of by all the men on the ship as the April Fool, a parody on her name, which is April Poole."

Pleasant hearing for her listener, who flushed scarlet.

"Can you imagine any one who has a living to earn being so unwise? I find it difficult to believe she is going to the Cape to teach someone's children. I only hope that the story of her indiscretions will not precede her, poor girl."

April was dumb. Mrs. Stanislaw came to the conclusion that she was dull and rather lacking in feminine sweetness, and after a while went away to bargain with a native for some embroideries. She would have been delighted to know what a poisoned barb she had implanted and left quivering in the side of the so-called Lady Diana.

Beneath the folded V of filmy lace on April's bosom her heart was beating passionately, and the rose-wreathed hat fortunately drooped enough to hide the tears of mortification that filled her eyes. *Her* name to be parodied and bandied about the ship on men's lips! A poor thing, but her own! One that for all her ups and downs she had striven and contrived to keep untarnished. How dared Diana Vernilands do this thing to her? What foolishness had she herself been guilty of to put it in another's power to thus injure her?

Her eyes were so blurred with tears that she did not notice at what particular moment another occupant had usurped the chair of Major Sarle. It was a man this time. April hastily seized a book and began to read. He must have stolen up with the silence of a tiger, and he reminded her of tigers somehow, though she could not quite tell why, except that he was curiously powerful and graceful looking. His hair, which grew in a thick short mat, was strongly sprinkled with silver, but his skin, though brick-red, was unlined. She judged him to be a sailor-man, for he had the clear and innocent eye of one who has looked long on great spaces. These were her conclusions, made while diligently reading her book. He, too, was busy reading in the same fashion, but, manlike, was slower in his deductions. By the time she had finished with his hair he had not got much

further than her charming ankles. Certainly, he had ascertained that she was a pretty woman before he took possession of his chair, but that was merely instinct, the fulfilling of a human law. Detail, like destruction, was to come after. He lingered over the first detail. They were such very pretty ankles. It did not seem right that they should be resting on the hard deck instead of on a canvas foot-rest. He remembered that his own chair had a foot-rest, but it was in his cabin. Should he go and fetch it? Dared he offer it to her? He was on hail-fellow-well-met terms with lions and tigers, as April had curiously divined, but having enjoyed fewer encounters with women, was slightly shy of them. However, being naturally courageous, he might presently have been observed emerging from a deck cabin with a canvas foot-rest in his hand, and it was only the natural sequence of events that while attempting to hitch it on his chair his guileless gaze should discover that April's feet were without support. He looked so shy and kind for such a sun-bitten, weather-hardened creature, that she had no heart to refuse the friendly offer, even had she felt the inclination. Besides, the advances made to her in the rôle of Lady Diana were very different to those she had so often been obliged to repulse as April Poole.

She felt, too, that here was a man not trying to make friends with any ulterior motive, but just because on this pleasant, delightful morning it was pleasant and delightful to talk to someone and share the pleasure.

Vereker Sarle had made the voyage to South Africa so many times that he had lost count of them, and knew Madeira so well that it bored him to go ashore there any more.

"We have the best of it from here, in spite of a little coal dust," he told her, for with a great deal of rattling, banging, and singing on the lower decks the ship was taking on her voyage ration of coal. "Still, you should go ashore and see it some time. It is worth a visit for the sake of the gardens, the breakfast of fresh fish at the hotel on the hilltop, and the bumping rush down again in the man-drawn sleighs."

He took it for granted that she was a woman travelling for pleasure and likely to be back this way soon. While she gave a little inward sigh, wondering whether she would ever have the money to return to England, or if it would be her fate to live in exile for ever.

Sarle presented her with one of his simple maxims of life.

"All good citizens of the world should do everything once and once only," he averred, with his frank and disarming smile. "If we stuck to that rule life would never go stale on us."

"I'm afraid it would hardly apply to everyday life and all the weary things we have to do over and over again."

"I was thinking of the big things," he said slowly. "Like potting your first elephant or falling in love. I don't know what equivalents women have for these things."

April could not forbear a little ripple of laughter.

"I believe they fall in love, too, sometimes," she said. But Sarle, with his sea-blue gaze on her, answered gravely:

"I know very little about them."

It was hard to decide whether he was an expert flirt with new methods, or really and truly a man with a heart as guileless as his eyes. But, at any rate, he was amusing, and April forgot her tears and anger completely in the pleasant hour they spent together until the passengers, recalled by the ship's siren, began to return from ashore.

Diana and her bodyguard were the last to arrive, the men laden with fruit, flowers, and numerous parcels, and the girl more openly careless of the rest of the world than before. They took possession of a group of chairs that did not belong to them, and scattered their possessions upon the deck. Pomegranates, nectarines, and bananas began to roll in every direction, to the inconvenience of the passers-by, but what did that matter? Diana lit a cigarette, declaring that it was too hot for words, and that she *must* have a John Collins. They all ordered John Collinses. The handsome man fanned Diana with a large palm leaf, and she looked at him with languorous eyes.

April grew hot inside her skin. Conversation interrupted by the noise around them, both she and Sarle had immersed themselves once more in their books. But April, at least, was profoundly conscious of everything said and done by the neighbouring group, and she longed to take Diana Vernilands by the shoulders and give her a sound shaking. As for the three men who were encouraging and abetting the little minx, it would have been a pleasure to push them separately

and singly overboard. She did not know how she could have managed to sit so still, except that Sarle was there reading by her side, silent and calm, apparently noticing nothing extraordinary in the behaviour of their neighbours.

A steward brought the John Collinses—four tall glasses of pale liquid and ice, some stuff red as blood floating on the top. No sooner had Diana tasted hers than she set up a loud wail that there was not enough Angostura in it. One of the men hurried away to have this grave defect remedied, and the moment he was out of sight Diana took up his as yet untouched glass, and with two long straws between her lips, skilfully sucked all the red stuff from the top of the drink and replaced the glass. Above the delighted laughter of her companions, April heard a woman's scornful remark further down the deck:

"It is only the April Fool!"

That was the little more that proved too much. The real April closed her book sharply and left her chair. Walking to the deck-rail, she stood leaning over, thinking hard, trying to decide how best to get hold of Diana Vernilands and tell her firmly that this folly must stop at once.

She felt very miserable. Madeira, fading in the wake of the ship, with already the blue haze of distance blurring its outlines, seemed to her like the dream she had lived in these last few days . . . the golden dream in which everyone liked and trusted her, and her beauty was a pleasure instead of a burden. Tomorrow she must return to her destiny of shabby clothes and second places, with the added bitterness of knowing her name made the byword of the ship! That was something she could never live down, if the voyage lasted a year. There would merely be two April fools instead of one, and she the wretched masquerader in borrowed plumes not the least of them! Slowly she turned away from the rail and went to her cabin. A line sent by a steward brought Diana there at the double-quick. She burst into the cabin, the open note in her hand.

"What do you mean? Is this the way you keep faith? . . . Trying to slither out of our bargain before it is a week old!"

"It is you who have broken faith," retorted April indignantly. "Surely it was in the bargain that you should behave with common decency and not make my name notorious!"

"Rot!" was the airy answer. "A few old pussy cats with their fur brushed the

wrong way, that's all. Who's going to mind what they say?"

"Do you realize that you are known from one end of the ship to the other as the April Fool?"

Diana burst out laughing.

"I know who started that . . . the poisonous asp I share my cabin with. Just because I have seen her putting on her transformation, and know how many kinds of paints she uses to build up her face! If it had been *you* it would have been just the same. You'd have been the April Fool instead, that's all. You ought to be jolly grateful, instead of bullying me."

She sat down on the lounge, smiling and sparkling, and took out a cigarette. April, in whom laughter was always near the surface, could have smiled herself had she not been nearer weeping. After all, Diana's pranks and antics were in no way vicious, but seemed merely the result of the lifelong drastic restraint hitherto exercised over her. Her vitality was breaking out like a fire that has been too long covered up. But there was no knowing where she would stop, and what would not be consumed in the merry blaze.

"Well, I'm *not* grateful," she said firmly, "and if you want to be talked about in future, it will have to be under your own name."

"Oh, April!" Diana's jauntiness left her instantly. "I beg of you, *don't* be unkind. I am having such a topping time. I've never been so happy in my life. If you only knew how dull I've been with old Aunt Grizel always hounding me to death. Don't go and spoil my first good time."

"It is you who are spoiling it. You forget that I have to earn my living and am dependent on the world's good opinion. Where shall I be at the end of the voyage with the frivolous reputation you are building up for me?"

"I won't do it any more. I'll be so good. You'll see how I'll change from now on."

"The mischief is already done, unfortunately."

"All the same, we can't possibly change now," pleaded Diana. "What good will it do us? . . . and you will get the worst of it, my dear. The world is a bundle of snobs, and the people on the ship thoroughly represent it. They will soon forgive

me, but your crime will be unpardonable. They will be simply furious with you for taking them in."

This was the tongue of truth, as April knew well. She looked at the other girl ruefully.

"How can I trust you any longer? I saw you with those men on deck . . . playing the fool . . . making yourself cheap. Oh, Diana, how can you? . . . under my name or any other, you are still a lady with certain rules to observe."

Diana flushed.

"You don't understand . . . I can't explain to you what it means to me to break loose from convention for a little while . . . it's something in my blood that has to come out. But, indeed, April, I swear to you if you will only go on I will behave. I really will. I can't help what is past, but there shall be nothing fresh for them to carp at in the future, anyhow. Do be a sport and consent, won't you?"

In the end, by pleading, beguiling, and piling promise on promise, she got her way, and thereafter the game went on—with a difference. They still called her the April Fool, because names like that stick; but as far as could be seen, she committed no fresh escapades to deserve the title. Yet the real April Poole sometimes wondered if the last phase of this folly was not worse than the first. She could not in justice deny that Diana was much quieter and more orderly, but it seemed a pity that her quietness should take the form of sitting for long hours at a time in rapt silence with a certain extremely handsome man. This was Captain the Hon. Geoffrey Bellew, on his way to South Africa as attaché to a Governor somewhere in the interior. He it was with whom Diana had been on such happy terms the day of landing at Madeira. The two other men had been cast forth like Gadarene swine. Bellew and Diana were sufficient unto themselves. Eternally together, sometimes they walked the deck, or threw quoits, or played two-handed card games; but ever they avoided large companionable games, and always they sought the dusky corner in which to sit undisturbed, gazing into each other's eyes. Strictly speaking, there was nothing to cavil at in this. Numbers of other couples were doing the same. These little games of two and two go forward all the time on voyages to the Cape (especially nearing the Equator), and are the joy of the genial-hearted. Even those who have no little games of their own are wont to look on sympathetically, or, better still, to turn away the understanding eye. The long, lazy, somnolent days and the magic

nights, star-spangled above and lit with phosphorescent seas below, lend themselves to the dangerous kind of flirtation that says little and looks much, and if there is any place in the world where Cupid is rampant and "Psyche may meet unblamed her Eros," it is on the deck of a liner in the tropics.

But either Diana was one of those unfortunate girls who cannot glance over the garden wall without being accused of stealing peaches, or else she had too thoroughly got people's backs up during the first week at sea, for everyone looked cold-eyed at her romance and called it unromantic names. There were continual little undercurrents of gossip going on about her beneath the otherwise pleasant surface of everyday life. April did not talk gossip nor listen to it, but she was vaguely aware of it. Except for this, she would have been the happiest girl in the world, and, indeed, she did not allow it to bother her too much, having made up her mind to cast care to the winds and enjoy herself while the sun shone. Destruction might come after—at Cape Town, perhaps, but if it did, *tant pis*!

Something of Diana's recklessness entered into her, only that it did not take the form of outraging the convenances, but just of enjoying life to the full with the permission and approval of the world. She loved the summer seas, and each blue and golden hour seemed all too short for the pleasure to be stuffed into it.

Everyone was delightful to her. Gone were the days when all women's hands were against her and her hand against all men. When she had time to think about it, she fully recognized that most of the admiration and kindness tendered to her by the other passengers was entirely worthless, and merely the result of snobbery.

But she had neither time nor inclination to go too deeply into the matter with herself. Her heart very ardently desired to believe that some at least of the people who made such a fuss over her liked her for herself alone, regardless of the rank and wealth she was supposed to possess. Sarle, for instance—Vereker Sarle, the shy man of wild places as she soon learned him to be, "the man who owned the largest and most up-to-date ranch—Northern Rhodesia," people informed her . . . surely to him she was a charming girl, as well, or before, she was Lady Diana Vernilands. She wanted to believe it, and she did believe it. Not a very difficult task to believe anything on sapphire seas decorated by golden dawns and rose-red sunsets. Cynical truths have no room to blossom in such surroundings. It was sheer joy to be alive, and she threw herself into the merry routine of the days with all the zest of youth. Her beautiful, athletic figure had been trained in many

gymnasiums, but never before had she known the delight of exercise in the wild, fresh air of the open sea, where her muscles felt like rippling music, and her blood seemed full of red roses. Her eyes had changed from their smoky sadness to the dewy radiance of hyacinths plucked at dawn, and her skin wore the satiny sheen, rose-tinted, of perfect well-being. She wished the voyage would last for ever.

Nothing succeeds like success. Because she was brilliant and happy, and apparently had everything she wanted, Luck smiled, and all good things came her way. She was acclaimed a champion at deck games, and unremittingly sought as a partner. In the evenings she never lacked companions to help her dance the soles off her shoes. She played auction like a fiend and always held the cards; won all the prizes in the sports for running, jumping, threading the needle, and holding eggs in spoons; bowled everyone at cricket. It seemed she could do nothing wrong or badly. Finally, at the fancy dress ball, when everyone turned out in wonderful garments planned and prepared long months before, she easily captured the votes of the crowd as the wearer of the most original and charming costume created on the spur of the moment.

There had been only one fancy dress in Diana's wardrobe, that of a Persian lady; and for once she showed herself greedy in the matter of clothes, and calmly commandeered it without consulting April. Yet the latter's fanciful imitation of a well-known poster, composed of inexpensive calicoes (bought from that emporium of all wants and wonders—the barber's shop), had triumphed over the gorgeous veils and jewels and silken trousers of the Persian houri and swept the unanimous vote of the ship into April's lap. Enough in all this to turn any girl's head, and though natural dignity and a certain attractive quality of humility that was hers kept April's heart sweet, she was sometimes in danger of becoming slightly *tête montée*. But she always pinched herself in time, with the reminder that it was all only a dream from which she must awaken very soon. For the nineteen halcyon days of the voyage were speeding by and coming to an end. Hot, hard blue skies gleamed overhead, and at night came the moon of Africa, pearl-white instead of amber-coloured, as it looks in Europe. Strange stars appeared, too, bigger, more lustrous, than the stars of cooler climes, and seeming to brood very low over the world. The "Milky Way" was a path of powdered silver. The "Coal Sack" showed itself full of brilliant jewels. And the Southern Cross! When April first saw it mystically scrolled across the heavens, like a device upon the shield azure of some celestial Galahad, its magic fell across her soul, and would not be lifted.

This is one of the first spells Africa puts upon those whom she means to make her own. Ever after, with the poignant memory of that Cross of straggling stars there is a thought of Africa, and the two cannot be torn apart. For April there was always to be a memory of Vereker Sarle, too, associated with it, for he it was who first picked out the Cross for her in the luminant heavens, and he it was who said to her on the night before they reached Cape Town:

"There seems to be some kind of blessing in that old Cross held out over us as we come trailing back."

After that first day at Madeira she had not seen a great deal of Vereker Sarle. He had dropped back quietly from the crowd that ringed her in, and become a looker-on, sometimes barely that, for he was a great poker-player, and spent much time in the smoke-room with one or two hard-looking citizens who were plainly not drawing-room ornaments. April had missed him, with a little pain in her heart, for instinct told her that he was one of the men who count in the world. Also, she had divined that his heart was as clear as his eyes. Though his face was so scarred and rugged as to inspire in the wit of the ship the jest that it had been chewed at by one of the lions he had hunted, there was yet something in it that suggested the gentleness of a child, and that knight-like chivalry that she had sought but never found in any man. So it hurt her a little when she thought of it in the night hours, that he should keep aloof from her, yet in a way she was glad, for she could not so ardently have enjoyed playing her rôle if Sarle had looked on too much with his innocent, yet keen gaze. It was by accident that he found her alone that night, between dinner and dancing, and they stayed looking at the stars and talking of the land they were to reach sometime within the next two days. He was not a great talker, and most of the information April gathered was in the form of half-scornful, half-wistful remarks. He spoke of Africa as a man might speak of some worthless woman, whom he yet loved above all peerless women. Of the lure and bane of her. How she was the home of lies and flies, the grave of reputation, the refuge of the remittance man and the bad egg; the land of the unexpected pest, but never the unexpected blessing; of sunstroke and fever; scandals and broken careers; snobbery, bobbery, and highway robbery. How, yet, when one had been away from her for a little while, sometimes for a few months only, one forgot all these things and remembered only with hunger and aching the pink-tipped hills of her, the crystal air, royal sunsets and tender dawns; the unforgettable friends she had given, the exquisite reveries her wild spaces had inspired; the valiant men who lie buried in her breast, the sweeping rivers and leagues and leagues of whispering grasses. How, suddenly, the nostalgia for the

burn and the bite of her bitter lips seizes upon the men who have known her too long and too well, dragging them from ease and comfort and the soft cushions of life, back across the seas to her gaunt and arid breast.

"And there seems to be some kind of blessing in that old Cross held over us as we come trailing back!"

His smile was scoffing and a little weary, but behind it April heard longing in his voice, and saw the searching of his eyes towards where land would soon appear. And what he was feeling strangely communicated itself to her. The subtle hand of Africa was laid upon her heart, and she trembled. In that moment she sickened suddenly of her false position. Why was she not coming to this watchful land frankly and with clean hands, instead of in the coils of a foolish pretence? She looked at the fine, open face of the man at her side and was ashamed. An impulse seized her to tell him the truth, but the thought of Diana drew her up sharply. Had she the right to disclose the secret before first consulting the other girl, or at least telling her what she meant to do? There had of late been something about Diana that called for this consideration. She had grown so quiet and pale. Her gay laughter was seldom heard, and though she still sat about with Bellew a great deal, no one ever heard them talking much. They seemed to revel in silence. It was not difficult to divine what spell was upon them, and April was more glad than she could tell.

For if it came to pass that Diana should get something out of this masquerade, something beyond mere frivolous enjoyment, then the means would have justified the end, and neither would have cause for reproach. How fitting, too, for Diana and Bellew, both of the same world and social position, to find each other in such a disinterested way. Really, it looked as if everything were for the best in the best of all possible worlds. It was only when Sarle's clear gaze was upon her that April's soul stirred with a sense of guilt and a longing to discontinue the deceit, harmless as it was. His simple, candid personality made it impossible to remain with him and not be sincere. A very panic of haste seized her to find Diana and arrange some plan of action. Abruptly she left him, and though dancing had begun and she saw her partner bearing down on her, she fled in the direction of the music saloon, where Diana and Bellew might most frequently be found. But they were nowhere in sight, and their dusky and palm-sheltered corner was in possession of Mrs. Stanislaw, who instantly pounced on April with a request for her autograph. Everyone was walking about with birthday and autograph books that night. Others were carrying about large

photographs of the ship and begging people to sign their names upon it, as a souvenir of the voyage. These things are done upon every trip to the Cape.

While April stood turning the pages of the autograph album and wondering what name to put down, she got one of the worst jolts of her life.

"I have found out two very interesting things," said Mrs. Stanislaw, in her soft and serpentine manner. "The woman whose children Miss Poole is going to governess at the Cape is Cora Janis, one of my most intimate friends. And . . ." she paused dramatically. April's fingers still fluttered the pages, but her heart took a bound and then stood still.

"How very interesting," she stammered, "and what else?"

"Captain Bellew is a married man!"

PART II

April closed the book and handed it back without writing anything.

"If that is true, I really do not see what it has to do with you—or me," she said coldly.

"Oh, I know it is true," said Mrs. Stanislaw, airily ignoring the rest of April's remark. "I had it from a lady who is travelling second-class because she has a bevy of children. She knows Mrs. Bellew quite well, and, curiously enough, is a friend also of Cora Janis, who wrote to her some time ago asking her to look out for Miss Poole on the voyage. Naturally, Cora thought her governess would also be travelling second." Mrs. Stanislaw smiled drily. "She little knows our April Fool."

The girl's fascinated eyes watched the line of her smile. It was like a thin curved knife, all the crueller for being artificially reddened.

"Why should you have such a down on her?"

The older woman's hard, handsome eyes took expression of surprise.

"A down on her? You are mistaken. I am only sorry that a girl should so cheapen herself and her sex generally."

April could have shaken her, but it seemed wiser to try propitiation instead. Her own career, as well as Diana's reputation, was at stake.

"After all, she has harmed no one but herself, Mrs. Stanislaw. As for Captain Bellew, I daresay he told her long ago about his being married. . . ."

"If you think so you think worse of her than I do," said Mrs. Stanislaw acidly, "and I could hardly suppose that!"

"I do not think badly of her at all," retorted April indignantly. "She is only a girl, and if she has been misled—well, it seems to me that the situation calls for a little human charity rather than condemnation."

"Of course," said the soft-voiced one. "I quite agree. Far be it from me to condemn. One has, however, certain duties to one's friends."

April saw clearly what she meant, and that it was as useless to try to divert her from her intention as to argue with an octopus. The very fact that she knew Mrs. Janis would probably put an extinguisher on April's career as a governess. Her impersonation of Lady Diana was bound to come out, and if Mrs. Janis was cut on the same pattern as her friend, she would be truly outraged by such an impertinence in a mere governess. There was little to do but keep a tight lip and hope for the best. For the moment, indeed, her troubles were swamped by a flood of pity for Diana. She felt sure that Diana was in love with Bellew, and feared that he had not told her the truth. On the other hand, he might honourably have done so, and Diana being the reckless scatterbrain she was, still chose to dally on the primrose path of danger. It was hard to know what to do.

On the main deck dancing was in full swing, and the first sight that met her eyes was Diana and Bellew scampering in a tango. Diana wore a satin gown of curious blue that gleamed and shone like the blue light of sulphurous flames, and as she danced she trilled a little French song that was often on her lips:

"Tout le mond
Au salon
On y tan-gue, on y tan-gue,
Tout le mond
Au salon
On y tan-gue, tout en rang."

It was a parody on an old South of France chanson, and everyone was singing it in Paris that year. Someone far down the deck, who had evidently read the original in Alphonse Daudet's *Lettres de Mon Moulin*, took up the refrain:

"Sur le pont
D'Avignon
On y dan-se, on y dan-se,
Sur le pont

D'Avignon
On y dan-se, tout en rond."

Small use trying to stop her and speak serious things to her in that mad frolic. April herself was whirled into the pool of music and movement, and did not emerge until the band, at a late hour, struck up the National Anthem. By special dispensation of the Captain, dancing had been prolonged because it was the last ball of the voyage. The next two nights were to be respectively devoted to a bridge-drive and a grand farewell concert. However, only a score or so of the most ardent dancers were left on deck when the final note of music sounded and the lights went out with a click. Figures became wraith-like in the moonlight, and April gave a sigh as her partner's arm fell from her waist and they drew up by the ship's rail, where Vereker Sarle stood watching them and smoking.

"And that's the end of the story," said she, laughing a little ruefully. Her partner went away to get her a cold drink, and she half expected Sarle to reproach her because it had been his dance and she had purposely avoided dancing with him. But he only said: "Africa is the beginning of many stories."

She shivered a little, though the night was warm.

"I am beginning to be afraid of her—this Africa of yours!"

"No need for you to be afraid anywhere," he smiled. "There will always be those who will stand between you and fear."

"How little you know!" she said abruptly. "I haven't a friend in the world."

There was a short silence, and they looked straight at each other, the slim, tall girl in her diaphanous tulles, the powerful, innocent-eyed man.

"You must be joking," he began. Then he saw the trouble in her eyes and her quivering mouth.

"But even in jest, never say that, while I am in the world," he added gently. She was so grateful for the chivalrous words that she dared not speak for fear the tears should rush out of her eyes. Impulsively she put out her hand, and his brown, firm one closed on it, and held it very close. Then he carried it to his lips. She heard him say one word, very softly: "Diana."

At that she tore her hand from his and sped away swiftly into the darkness. Once in her cabin she locked the door, turned out the lights, and flung herself on to the bed. For a long time she lay there, a rumpled heap of tulle and misery, weeping because life was a cruel brute who kept her gifts for the rich and wellborn or the old and indifferent, mockingly withholding from those who were young and eager and could better appreciate them.

"What is the use of youth and good looks when one is poor and lonely?" she sobbed. "They only mock one! It is like having a Paris hat put on your head while your feet are bare and bleeding and your stomach is empty."

She wished she had never begun this miserable game of Diana Vernilands, never tasted the power of rank and place, the joy of jewels and pretty clothes. She wished she had never left England, never seen Vereker Sarle, and, above all, she wished she were dead.

It was about two in the morning before she had finished wishing and sobbing. Youth began to assert itself then, and she thought of what a sight would be in the morning, with tangled hair and swollen eyes. Languidly at last she rose. The tulle dress was ruined, but little she recked. Rather she felt a fierce satisfaction in the thought that it was done for, and Diana could never wear it.

That wretched Diana! . . .

But when her flushed face was bathed and her hair brushed out she thought more kindly of Diana, remembering that she, too, was in trouble. Well, tomorrow there would have to be a great clean-up of all these miserable pretences and deceits; tonight, at least, she would try and sleep. Her hand was on the switch to turn out the lights when there came a knocking at the door. It was such a strange, peremptory knocking—such a careless outraging of the small hours, that for a moment she stood rooted with astonishment and apprehension, staring at herself in the mirror that composed the back of the door.

"Who is it?" she stammered at last.

"The Captain," said a stern voice, and in the glass she saw her cheeks and lips become pale. What on earth could be wrong? Was the ship on fire, or wrecked? Had their last hour come?

"I am sorry to bother you, but will you please open the door for a moment?"

By a great effort she composed herself and did as she was bid. A little group of people with strained faces and staring eyes presented themselves behind the Captain; she recognized several men, the stewardesses, and Mrs. Stanislaw; while in the shadows beyond them was whispering and much shuffling. The whole ship seemed to be afoot. Captain Carey gave one swift look round the cabin, then his eyes rested on her startled face, and he patted her arm gently and reassuringly.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear Lady Diana," he said, in his tender, Irish voice, from which all sternness had vanished. "It is only that we are looking for Miss Poole, and we thought that possibly she might be in here with you."

"Miss Poole!"

The girl's face stiffened and blanched. She put out a hand to support herself against the dressing-table. The Captain signed to a stewardess, and the little crowd moved away. There was loud knocking on another door.

"Why are they searching? . . ."

The stewardess patted her arm, even as the Captain had done, but being a simple woman, she spoke simply, and without waste of words.

"There is a fear that she is not on the ship."

"Not on the ship!" whispered April. "But where else could she be?
What other place? . . ."

Then she understood. There was no other place. . . . Her knees trembled, and the stewardess supported her to the sofa. She sat down with chattering teeth, smitten by a great and bitter cold. Diana—the sea . . . warm, merry, gay Diana in the cold sea!

"I don't believe it. It can't be true!"

"Mrs. Stanislaw had reason to think that she intended to commit suicide tonight . . . and when she did not come to bed by two o'clock, she thought it her duty to inform the Captain, who is, of course, bound to search the ship."

"It can't be true. . . . I don't believe it," repeated April mechanically; but all the

time her heart was in terror, remembering Diana's pale looks and the news she had heard tonight of Bellew's marriage. Had he told Diana, then . . . and was this the result? All at once it became impossible to sit still any longer. She must know the truth. She jumped up, searched feverishly for a cloak to put on, and pulling the stewardess with her, hurried on deck. But after a few steps they came to a standstill, for the crowd following the Captain had suddenly and curiously broken up and separated before the door of one of the deck cabins. Men and women who a moment before had been clustering and whispering agitatedly together were now hurrying past, each apparently intent on reaching their own cabins in the quickest time possible. For one horrible moment April thought it was some tragic discovery that was scattering them, but a moment later she realized that tragedy had gone from the air. The deck was flooded with electric light, and people's faces could plainly be seen. Many expressions were written there, but none of pity or sorrow. The men, for the most part, looked embarrassed; the women's expressions varied from frozen hauteur to scornful rage. They behaved like people who had been bitterly wronged by some lying tale. The one predominating emotion shared by all seemed to be an intense desire to escape from the scene. In less than two minutes not a soul was left on the deck save the dazed and astounded April. She remained, wondering what on earth it was all about; why without visible reason the search had come to such a sudden end, and what could be the meaning of the phrase Mrs. Stanislaw had flung at her as she passed.

"The April fool has surpassed herself!"

A sickening apprehension crept over the girl. That Diana was not overboard seemed certain; but what new folly had she committed? As if in answer to the gloomy query, the lights were once more switched out, and a strange vapoury greyness took possession of the ship. It was that still small hour when the yellowing East adds pallor to the night without dispersing its darkness.

Then two things happened. The door of that cabin before which the crowd had so mysteriously disintegrated opened very softly, and through the aperture stole forth a woman's figure. . . . For a swift moment the light from within rested on yellow hair and gleaming blue satin; then the door closed and the figure became part of the stealing dimness which was neither night nor morning. But April, who stood in her path, had seen and recognized.

"Diana!" she cried.

The other girl stood stock still. Her face showed ghostly in the greyness. She peered at April, clutching at her arm and whispering:

"For God's sake take me to your cabin!"

They crept down the deck like a pair of thieves, hardly breathing till they were behind the locked door. Without looking at her, April saw that there was trouble to meet. She remembered the faces of the other women, and the instinct to protect a fellow-creature against the mob rose in her.

"Tell me what it is. I'll help you fight it out."

But Diana had flung herself down with a defiant air on the sofa.

"Don't you know? Weren't you one of the hounds on my track?" she demanded, in a high-pitched whisper. April looked at her steadily.

"The whole thing is an absolute mystery to me. I know nothing except that first you were missing, and then apparently they found you——"

"Yes; in Geoffrey Bellew's cabin!"

The April fool had, indeed, surpassed herself! April blenched, but she took the blow standing. After all, she had been as great a fool as the girl sitting there, for she, too, had handed over her good name into the careless hands of another; had sold her reputation for a song—a song that had lasted seventeen days, but seemed now in the act of becoming a dirge.

"Do you mind telling me what happened, so that I know exactly where we stand and what there is to be done."

Diana laughed.

"There is nothing to be done."

April forgave her the laugh, because it was not composed of merriment nor any elements of joyousness.

"I went to Geoffrey's cabin because we had things to talk over, and it seemed the only place where we could get away from prying eyes. Somehow I stayed on and

on, not realizing it was so late . . . and then, and then . . ." She began to stammer; defiance left her . . . "then, that awful knocking . . . those faces staring in! . . . all those brutes of women!" She covered her eyes with her hands and broke down utterly. "My God! I am done for!"

April thought so, too. It seemed to her they were both done for, but there was not much help in saying so. Diana's confession horrified her, and she saw that her own future at the Cape was knocked as flat as a house of cards that is demolished by the wayward hand of a child. Yet at that moment her principal feeling was one of compassion for the girl on the sofa, who alternately laughed and covered her eyes, and now with a pitiful attempt at bravado was attempting to light a cigarette, with hands that shook like aspen leaves.

"I suppose it was that cat Stanislaw who started the search for me?"

"It appears that she got into a panic when you did not return to your cabin, and went and told the Captain she feared you were overboard."

"The she-fiend! Much she cared if I was at the bottom of the sea! She had pried out where I was, and that was her subtle way of advertising it to the whole ship."

"I believe you are right," said April slowly, "though it is hard to understand how any one could do a thing so studiedly cruel."

"Cruel! She is a fiend, I tell you," cried Diana. "One of those women who have nothing left in their natures but hatred for those who are still young and pretty. I realized long ago that she would ruin my reputation if she could, but I did not give her credit for so much cleverness."

"Well, at any rate, she is not so clever as she thinks," said April drily. "For she hasn't ruined your reputation, after all; only mine."

Diana started; terror came into her eyes.

"My God, April! You don't mean to give me away?"

April knew very well what she meant to do. She had tasted of "the triumph and the roses and the wine," and the bill had been presented. Even though it left her bankrupt and disgraced, she was going to honour that bill; but she could not resist finding out what point of view was held by Diana as to similar obligations.

"You think, then, it is *my* name that should be left with the smirch on it?" she asked dispassionately.

Diana grew crimson and then very pale.

"The scandal . . ." she stammered; "my people . . . you don't know what it would mean to have such a story attached to me."

"It would be better to have it attached to me, of course," April agreed, with an irony that was entirely wasted on Diana.

"You see that, don't you?" she said eagerly. "After all, nobody knows your name, and it will soon be forgotten. But mine——"

April could only smile. She saw that pity was entirely wasted here. Diana was so eminently able to look after herself when it came to the matter of self-preservation.

"And it will only be for another couple of days. After that we shall never see Mrs. Stanislaw or any of this rotten crew of women again."

"You are an optimist," was April's only comment. "After all, it is I who will have to bear the brunt of their insolence tomorrow, whatever name I go under," complained Diana.

"I'm afraid I cannot give you my face as well as my name to help you bear it," said April drily. Unexpectedly the retort pierced, for Diana suddenly burst into tears.

"I know you think me a beast. But I really *am* thinking more of my father than of myself. He is terribly proud. It would break his heart to hear this story of me being found in a man's cabin. Oh! How could I have done such an awful thing! You think I don't care, but I can tell you I could simply die of shame."

April was softened once more.

"Don't cry, Diana, and don't worry any further. Of course, your name shall never come out. That is quite settled. Come, now, and let me help you into bed. You had far better stay here than face that tigress Stanislaw in her den."

Nevertheless, when she had safely tucked the still weeping and collapsed Diana into her berth, she thought it advisable to make an excursion herself to the den of the tigress, ostensibly to fetch Diana's night-things; in reality to let her know where Diana was spending the night, and that the girl had one woman friend at least to stand by her. Even as she expected, Mrs. Stanislaw was awake and lying in wait, ready to spring. It must have been a disagreeable surprise to see April instead of the victim. The former's manner was all suavity.

"I am sorry to disturb you, but I have come for Miss Poole's things. She is not at all well, and I have persuaded her to spend the night with me." Tranquilly she began to collect night-wear, slippers, hair and tooth brushes. The tigress, being thoroughly taken back, could do nothing for the moment but breathe heavily and glare. April, with the wisdom of the serpent, made haste to escape before the feline creature regained the use of claw and fang.

But there were worse things to face in the morning. Even though Diana postponed the evil hour by pretending she was ill and having her breakfast in bed, she could not stay in the cabin for ever. Once the first days of seasickness are over there is a rule against people stopping in their berths all day except under doctor's orders, and the stewardesses are very rigid in enforcing this. Besides, the Captain and first officer inspect cabins between ten and eleven A.M., and Diana had no particular yearning to see them again just then.

April went down to breakfast as usual, outwardly composed, but with an eye secretly alert to spy out the land. It did not take her long to discover that all the women were in arms, with their stabbing knives ready for action. Mrs. Stanislaw had evidently not been idle, and the name of "Lady Diana" was already bracketed with that of the April Fool. To send her entirely to Coventry was rather too drastic treatment for an earl's daughter, but many a cold glance came her way.

"Birds of a feather nest together," was one of the tart observations that fell upon her ears as she passed a group of women who only yesterday were fawning upon her. Plainly it was considered a fresh outrage upon womanhood that she should have given the protection of her name and cabin to the heroine of last night's scandal.

She did not mind very much. With a clear conscience on this count at least, she was able to meet their displeasure imperturbably. But she could not help feeling

sorry for the real Diana.

That unfortunate creature, on venturing forth to her own cabin, was met by the sight of Mrs. Stanislaw dragging all her possessions into the corridor. It appeared that even for the few remaining days at sea the tigress could not lie down with the black sheep! A sweet and sympathetic soul, who also lived down the same alley and had the same horror of contaminating influence, had therefore offered to take her in. The picturesque incident was being witnessed and silently approved by women in the neighbouring cabins, who, curiously enough, all happened to be busy packing with their doors open, so as not to miss anything.

It must be remembered that most of these people had been persistently flouted, even insulted, by Diana during the voyage. Some of them, matrons with daughters of their own, were really shocked by the "bad example" her behaviour had established. So it was perhaps not to be wondered at that a sort of combined sniff of holiness and self-righteousness went up to Heaven when the culprit came barging down the passage, nose in air, and a defiant flush upon her cheek. Stumbling over the trunks and piles of clothes which littered the place, she managed to gain her room, and close the door behind her with a resounding bang to show how little she cared about any of them. But it was immediately reopened by Mrs. Stanislaw, come to fetch more of her things, and not averse to talking as long as possible over the business. By continually going backwards and forwards for small armfuls of articles, and always leaving the door open, she managed to deprive Diana of all privacy. The latter bore with it for as long as her patience lasted, which was about five minutes. Then she flung out of the room, hoping to find refuge elsewhere. But wherever she went it was the same. In the writing-room everyone bent suddenly over their blotting-pads, and the balmy morning air took on an arctic chill. Music and conversation faded away when she sauntered into the music saloon. On deck even the sailors looked at her curiously. The story of her indiscretion had penetrated to every corner of the vessel. The miserable girl fetched a book from the library and tried to hide herself behind it, seated in her deck-chair. She soon had that side of the ship to herself.

Later, it was discovered that a lady with whom she was engaged to play off a final in deck quoits had "scratched." The same thing happened with regard to the bridge-drive. The girl who was cast as her opponent in the opening round publicly withdrew her name from the competition. There it was, up on the games notice-board—a girl's name with a black pencil mark drawn through it. All who

ran might read, and a good many did run to read. Clearly the April Fool had become the object of the most unanimous taboo ever set in motion on a ship. Her name was mud. Even the men did not rally to her aid, though she had been popular enough with them before. There are few men who will not crumple up before a phalanx of women with daggers in their hands and feathers in their hair; even as the big-game hunter thinks it no shame to flee before a horde of singing ants! The only two who behaved with natural decency were Bellew and Sarle. The latter appeared utterly unconscious of anything unusual when he came and sat down by the two girls. There might have been a little more deference in his manner to Diana; that was all. As for Bellew, he had not been trained in the diplomatic service for nothing. He possessed to a marked degree the consummate sang-froid that is a natural attribute of aides-de-camp. Nothing could have been more cool than his manner when he joined the group and suggested a game of quoits. The whole world of the ship had its ears cocked to listen to these two, and was watching them acutely—with eyes that gazed at the horizon. If only Diana could have comported herself in a rational manner the situation might at least have been decently salvaged, if not carried with triumph. But she had lost her nerve. Intrepid throughout the voyage in committing every possible folly, now, when a little real courage was needed, she crumpled. The fierce white light of public disapproval withered her. It was pitiful to see the way she went to pieces—to hear her hysterical laughter and foolish remarks.

"For goodness' sake have the courage of your sins! Show some blood!" was the rebuke April longed to administer together with a sound shaking. But anger was futile, and rebuke out of the question. The only wise thing was to retreat in as good order as possible to the cabin of which Diana now enjoyed sole possession, and there reconsider the position.

"I can't bear it," she whimpered desperately. "I can't stand another two days of it. I tell you I shall go mad."

"Nonsense!" April responded, with a cheerfulness that found no echo in her heart. "You must take a pull on yourself, Diana. As you said last night, you owe these women nothing, and will probably never see them again."

But Diana's lay had changed tune.

"Oh! Won't I? . . . I feel they will haunt me all my days. What is that couplet?—

"He who hath a thousand friends hath not a friend to spare;
But he who hath one enemy shall meet him everywhere."

A man said to me yesterday that what is done on the voyage to the Cape is known at Cairo within a week if it is sufficiently scandalous." She wept.

"A blue look-out for me!" thought her listener, dismally imagining the name of April Poole flashing from one end of the great continent to another. Not only at the Cape would she be debarred from earning her living! This impression was confirmed by some of the remarks women made to her later in the day. They were all quite willing to be friendly as long as she was not in the company of the black sheep.

"She might just as well take ship back to England," one said. "No one will employ her as a governess after this. The story will be all over Cape Town within an hour of our arrival."

"You can't live these things down in Africa," said another. "Of course, she might get a job up-country, where people are not particular and only want a kind of servant to look after their children."

It was no use April protesting against the cruelty of condemning a girl for ever

because of one indiscretion. Her listeners only looked at her suspiciously. One old Englishwoman, who had lived many years in South Africa, put the case more cynically than kindly:

"Girls who earn their living are not allowed the luxury of indiscretion. If it had been *you*, now——"

"Do you mean that I should have been forgiven by reason of my position?"

"My dear," was the dry reply, "it is the same old snobbish world wherever you go. What constitutes a crime in one strata of society is only eccentricity in another."

April communicated the gist of this worldly wisdom to Diana, half hoping that it might give the latter courage to disclose herself and perhaps clear them both of any worse indictment than upon the count of foolishness. But it was a futile hope, and nothing came of it except more tears and another wild appeal not to be "given away." All sense of justice had left Diana, or been swamped by the newly-born fear for her family's honour.

Thus the miserable day wore to its close. A steward, no doubt heavily subsidized, spent most of the afternoon carrying notes backwards and forwards between Diana and Bellew. April stayed in her cabin as much as possible, and for the rest was careful to be always near other people, so that Sarle would find no opportunity of giving expression to the things to be seen in his eyes. It was a precarious joy to read those sweet things, but she dared not let him utter them. For when the debacle came at Cape Town, he must have nothing to regret. The moment they were quit of the ship and its scandal she would be relieved of her promise to Diana and able to tell him the truth. If he had spoken no word of love to her before then he would be free as air to go his way without speaking one, while she just slipped away and disappeared, to be seen of him no more. But if he chose not to go his ways——? If when he heard all he still wished to stay? Ah! what a sweet, perilous thought was that! She dared not dwell on it, and yet if she banished it utterly from her mind all the thrill went out of life, and every throb of the engine bringing them nearer land seemed a beat of her heart soon to be silenced for ever.

Evening came at last—an evening of dinner parties and best frocks, with an early commencement of the bridge-drive afterwards. Sarle, several days before, had

arranged to have a special small table for four with a special dinner, asking April to be his hostess and choose the other two guests. She, with an instinct that they would be left out in the cold by everyone else, had chosen Diana and Bellew. Now, at the last moment, Diana shirked the ordeal, and from behind her locked door announced in muffled tones that she had a headache and was going to bed. So April sent a message to Sarle, giving him the chance of filling the gap if he so wished. When she went down she found him waiting for her with Bellew and Dick Nichols, the old poker-playing, battle-scarred warrior of the smoke-room, whose acquaintance she was delighted to make. He was a little bit shy at first at sitting down in his worn though spotless white-duck slacks opposite the beautiful girl in black and silver, with straps of amethysts across her satiny shoulders. But she had that gift which is born rather than acquired of setting people at their ease, and she wanted to get the liking of this man who was Sarle's friend. So she beguiled him by the blue of her eyes and the eager interest of her smile, and he opened up like a book of strange stories and pictures under the hand of a child. Listening to the talk, she was transported to that strange region of bush and spaces that is far from being enchanted land and yet casts an everlasting spell. She heard lions roar and the shuffling steps of oxen plodding through dust; felt the brazen glare of the sun against her eyes; saw the rain swishing down on grass that grew taller than a man's head.

She remembered a verse of Percival Gibbon's about the veld:

There's a balm for crippled spirits
In the open view
Running from your very footsteps
Out into the blue,
Like a wagon track to heaven
Straight 'twixt God and you.

Both Sarle and Nichols knew that track, she was sure. They were oddly alike, these two veld men, with their gentle ways, their brown muscular hands, and their eyes full of distance. A very different type to the sleek and handsome Bellew, who sat so composed under the many blighting glances cast his way.

"They know about the guile of creatures, but he has made an art of beguiling human beings," thought April, and all the vexation of the day came surging over her, almost spoiling her dinner and the pleasure of the evening. Almost—not

quite! When you are "young and very sweet, with the jasmine in your hair," and have only to raise your eyes to see desire of you sitting unashamed in the eyes of the man you love, nothing can quite spoil your gladness of living. All the same, she stuck to the card-room the whole evening, and her resolution to give Sarle no chance of saying anything he might regret. He must have realized it after a time, when she had once or twice eluded his little plots to get her on deck, but he gave no sign. He was a hunter, and could bide his time with patience and serenity.

It was not in her plan that when they parted it should be just where the shadows of a funnel fell, nor that he should leave a swift kiss, in the palm of the hand she tendered him in bidding good-night; yet both of these things came to pass.

* * * * * *

The stewardess who brought her an early cup of tea handed her a letter with the remark:

"It was under your door, m'lady. And please would you like your big trunks from the hold brought here, or will you pack in the baggage-room?"

"Oh, here, I think, stewardess. It will be much more convenient."

"Of course it will," agreed the good woman. "But, there! how the baggage men do grumble at having to lug up big trunks like yours and Mr. Bellew's!"

"I am very sorry," said April "but I'm afraid I can't help it." She had reflected swiftly that as she and Diana had so many possessions to exchange before packing, it could only be done in the privacy of he cabin. She was very tired after a "white night" all too crowded with the black butterflies of unhappy thought, and when she looked at the superscription on the envelope and saw that it was in Diana's writing she sighed. All the worries of the coming day rose up before her like a menacing wall with broken glass on the top.

"Blow Diana! I wish she were at the bottom of the sea," she said to herself, with the irritability born of a bad night.

Leaning on her elbow, she sipped at the fragrant tea and reflected sorrowfully on what a happy creature she would have been that morning if she had never met Diana Vernilands and entered into the mad plan of exchanging identities! What a clear and straight road would have lain before her! . . . with the man whose kiss

still burnt the palm of her hand waiting for her at the end of it! But instead—what? She sighed again and tears came into her eyes as she lay back on the pillows and tore open the envelope. Then suddenly her body lying there so soft and delicate in the luxurious berth stiffened with horror. The tears froze in her eyes. The letter at which she was staring was composed of two loose and separate pages, on the first of which was scrawled a couple of brief sentences signed by a name:

"*I cannot bear it any longer. I am going to end my troubles in the sea.*

"APRIL POOLE."

Mechanically her clutch relaxed on this terrible first page, and she turned to the second. It was headed: "*absolutely private and confidential, to be destroyed immediately after reading,*" and the words heavily underscored; then came wild phrases meant for April's private eyes alone.

"I am leaving you to face it all. For God's sake forgive me and keep your promise. Never let any one on the ship or in Africa know the truth. Spare my poor father the agony of having his name dragged in the dust as well as losing his daughter. Do not do anything except under the counsel of *the other person* on this ship who knows the truth and who will advise you the exact course to take. But do not approach him in any way or speak of this to him until all the misery and excitement of my suicide is over. I have written to him, too, and he will advise you at the right time, but to drag him into this would only ruin his career, and earn my curse for ever. I trust you utterly in all this. Oh, April, do not betray my trust! Do not fail me! I beg and implore you with my last breath to do as I ask. Go on using my name, and money, and everything belonging to me until the moment that *he* advises you to either write my father the truth or return to England and break it to him personally. If he hears it in any other way it will kill him, and his blood be on your soul as well as mine. I pray, I beseech, I implore you, be faithful to your unhappy friend,

"DIANA."

It took a long time for April's stricken mind to absorb the meaning of it all. Over

and over she read the blurred tear-blistered sentences, sometimes weeping, sometimes painfully muttering them aloud to herself. When she had finished at last, her course was set, her mind made up. She knew the letter by heart, and sitting up in bed, white as a ghost, she slowly destroyed it into minutest atoms, putting them into a little purse that lay in the rack beside her. Then she rang the bell. To the stewardess who came she said calmly, but with pallid lips:

"If Miss Poole is in her cabin, ask her to come to me."

Then she whipped out of bed, flung on a wrapper, and arranged her hair. When the woman returned, she knew the answer before it was spoken.

"Miss Poole is not in her cabin. Her bed has not been slept in."

"Ask the Captain to come here."

In a few moments it was all over. The Captain had come and gone again, with the first page of Diana's letter in his hand. The procedure after that was much the same as it had been two nights before, except that the Captain went alone on his search, and the result, with the evidence he held in his hand, was a foregone conclusion from the first. All inquiry terminated in the same answer. No one had set eyes on "Miss Poole" since the previous evening. The last person to speak with her was the stewardess, who, on finding she did not intend going to dinner, had offered to bring her some, but had been refused. The rest was conjecture—a riddle that only the sea, lying as blue and flat and still as the sea in a gaudy oleograph, could answer. The story had flown round the ship like wildfire, and hardly a soul but felt as if he or she had taken part in a murder. Women reproached each other and themselves, and men went sombre-eyed to the smoke-room and ordered drinks that left them still dry-mouthed. The blue and golden day with the perfumes of Africa spicing its breath took on a brazen and arid look. It was as if old Mother Africa had already reached out her brazen hand and dealt a blow, just to remind everyone on the boat that she was there waiting for them, perhaps with a tragedy for each in her Pandora box. The Captain had not let it be known where and with whom Diana's last note had been found. With the remembrance of April's ashen face as she had handed it to him, he wished to spare the girl as much as possible.

As for her, the one clear thought in her mind was that she must obey Diana's last behest and keep silence. It was not hard to do that, for she had no words.

Throughout the day, in a kind of mental torpor, she helped the stewardess sort and pack all the costly clothes and possessions which were really Diana's, putting them into the trunks already labelled for a hotel in Cape Town; her own things were locked and sealed up in the abandoned cabin on the lower deck, and she would probably never see them again. She did not attempt to speak to Bellew, though she knew that an interview with him awaited her, for there could be no mistake about his being that *other person* referred to in Diana's letter. Neither did she see Vereker Sarle. He sent a note during the afternoon, a very sweet and friendly note, hoping that she was not ill, and begging her not to be too upset by the tragedy. And between the lines she read as he meant her to do.

"Why are you hiding from me? Come on deck. I want you."

She wanted him, too. She longed for the comfort of his presence, but did not dare meet him. A greater barrier than ever existed between them. The dead girl stood there with her finger on her lips. The truth could not now be told to Sarle, until, at any rate, it was known to that unhappy old man in England whose head must be bowed in sorrow to the grave. After that, who could tell?

Somehow she felt that all hope of personal happiness with Vereker Sarle was over. It was unfit that so clean-souled and upright a man should be involved in the tangle of lies and deceit and tragedy that she and Diana had between them encompassed. He would shrink from her when he knew all, of that she felt certain, and it made her shrink in turn to think of it. So she sent only a little formal line in answer to his note, making no reference to the likelihood of seeing him on deck or anywhere else. It looked cold and cruel enough to her, that note, like a little knife she was sending him; but it was a two-edged knife, with which she also wounded herself.

The stewardess brought her tea and toast, and she stayed in her room all day. Only in the cool of the evening, when everyone else was dining, she crept out for a few moments, and leaned upon the ship's rail, drinking in the air and staring at the moody line of land ahead that meant fresh experiences and trouble on the morrow! She was afraid to look at the sea!

No farewell concert took place that night. People whispered together in little groups for a while after dinner, but all the merriment of the last night at sea was lost in the sense of tragedy that hung about the ship. Almost everyone was oppressed by a feeling of guilty responsibility for what had happened. The

inherent decency of human nature asserted itself, and each one thought:

"Why did I not give the poor girl a helping hand instead of driving her to desperation?" It was remembered that "Lady Diana" had stood by her, and everyone yearned to absolve their souls by explanation to the person who (to her great regret) bore that rank and title. But she had put a barricade of stewardesses between her and them, and was invisible to callers. Some few of the younger and more resilient passengers, in an effort to shake off what seemed to them useless gloom, went and asked the Captain to allow the band to play on deck. He consented, stipulating only that there should be no dancing. Of course, no one wanted to dance, but as ships' bands specialize in dance music, the musicians struck at once into a tango, and it happened to be the one Diana had made her own by singing her little French rhyme to it:

"Tout le monde
Au salon
On y tan-gue, on y tan-gue."

It only needed that. Every mind instantly conjured up the picture of a vivid figure in a frock that gleamed blue as sulphurous flames. A hysterical woman sprang up screaming shrilly, and had to be taken away; a solitary sea gull, its plumage shining with a weird blueness in the electric light, chose this moment to fly low along the deck, crying its wailing cry. That was enough. Another woman began to scream; the music stopped, and there was almost a panic to get away from a spot that seemed haunted. In a little while the first-class deck was as deserted as the deck of a derelict, and the ship was wrapped in silence. The personality of the April Fool seemed more imposing in death than it had been in life!

By morning the *Clarendon Castle* had reached her destined port, and lay snugly berthed in Cape Town docks. April, venturing out at the tip of dawn to get a first glimpse of Africa, found that a great mountain wrapped in a mantle of mist stood in the way. It seemed almost as if by reaching out a hand she could touch the dark sides of it, so close it reared, and so bleak it brooded above her. Yet she knew this to be an illusion of the atmosphere, for between her and the mountain's base lay the streets and little white houses and gardens of Cape Town. It might have been some southern town on the shores of the Mediterranean except for that mountain, which made it unlike any other place in the world. The "Table of

the Mass," the Portuguese named it, and when, as now, silver mists unrolled themselves upon the flat top and streamed in veils down the gaunt sides, they said that the cloth was spread for the Sacred Feast.

April thought of all the great wanderers whose first sight of Africa must inevitably have been the same as hers—this mysterious mountain standing like a grey witch across the path! Drake sighted it from afar in 1580; Diaz was obliged to turn back from it by his mutinying sailors; Livingstone, Stanley, Cecil Rhodes, "Doctor Jim," all the great adventurers, and thousands of lesser ones, had looked upon it, and gone past it, to their sorrow. For if history be true, none can ever come out from behind that brooding witch untouched by sorrow. They may grow great, they may reap gold or laurels, or their heart's desire; but in the reaping and the gaining their souls will know grey sorrow. A rhyme of her childhood came unsolicited into April's mind:

How many miles to Banbury?
Three score and ten.
Will I be there by candlelight?
Yes, and back again:
Only—*mind the old witch by the way*!

She shivered, but the sun burst like a sudden glorious warrior upon the world, dispersing fear, and making her feel as though, after all, everything and everyone was young, and all life decked out in spring array. If only the burden of deceit had not been upon her, how blithe and strong in hope could she have set foot in this new land.

As she turned to go back to her cabin she found Geoffrey Bellew by her side. He appeared a little haggard, and some of his habitual self-assurance was missing. No doubt he had seen Table Mountain on former visits to Africa, yet he looked at it rather than into the eyes of the girl he addressed.

"Will you go to the Mount Nelson Hotel?" he said in a low tone. "I can meet you there, and we will talk matters over."

"When?" she said. Spring went out of her. "Where is the hotel?"

He reflected for a moment.

"Well, perhaps you had better give yourself into my charge. I will see you through the Customs, and drive you up afterwards, and make all arrangements—shall I?"

She consented. It seemed as good a plan as any for avoiding bother, and had the recommendation that it would keep off Vereker Sarle. So, later, when crowds began to surge and heave upon the ship, everyone mad with excitement at meeting their friends, and mountains of luggage barging in every direction, she stayed close by the side of this man she disliked intensely, yet whose smooth ability to deal with men and matters she could not but admire. Obstacles fell down like ninepins before him; stewards ran after him; officials waited upon him; his baggage, the heaviest and most cumbersome on the ship, was the first to go down the gangway, and April's with it. A few hurried farewells, and she found herself seated beside him in an open landau, driving behind a conveyance full of trunks towards the Customs House. A dull pain burned within her at the remembrance of Sarle's face. He had looked from her to Bellew with those steady eyes that saw so much and betrayed so little, merely remarking, as he took the hand she tendered lightly in farewell:

"One doesn't say good-bye in Africa, Lady Diana, only 'So long'—meaning that we may meet again tomorrow, perhaps even today."

He had not even looked after them as they left the ship. Yet April, because she loved him, was aware of his astonishment at this strange and sudden intimacy of hers with Bellew. Still, what was the use of caring? There were worse hurts in store for him, if, indeed, they met again as he predicted. She bit on the bullet and ignored the pain at her heart. Bellew did not waste any small talk on her; that was one comfort. He seemed to be more concerned about his luggage than about her, shouting out to the coloured men to be careful and to remove nothing from the van without his direction. At the Customs House, in fact, all his stuff was left assiduously alone. April's was opened and gone through rapidly by the officials; but the production of his papers and credentials as an attaché to the Governor of Zambeke, or some such outlandish place, gave Bellew instant immunity, and no single article of his belongings was unlocked. Within a few moments they were again *en route* for their hotel.

Their way took them by the main thoroughfare of the town, and April was astonished at the numbers of people flocking on the pavements, filling trams and rickshaws, drinking tea on the overhanging balconies and restaurants. The air

was sunny, yet with the fresh bite of the sea in it, and everyone seemed gay and careless. The whole of one side of the wide street was lined by Malays and natives offering flowers for sale. In front of the Bank a sort of floral bazaar was established, the bright head "dookies," silver bangles, and glowing dark eyes of the vendors making a brave show above the massed glory of colour in their baskets. Huge bunches of pink proteas, spiked lilies of every hue, bales of heather and waxen white chinckerichees filled the air with heavy perfume. The sellers came pressing to the passing carriages, soliciting custom in the soft clipped speech of the Cape native. Bellew, for all he was so distrait, had the graceful inspiration to stop and take on a load of colour and perfume, and April for a moment lost count of her troubles in sheer joy of the senses.

"But where do they come from?" she cried. "I have never seen such flowers in the world."

"There *are* no flowers in the world like those from Table Mountain," he said.

"That old bleak beast?" She gazed in astonishment at the grey mass still hovering above and about them. "She looks as though nothing would grow on her gaunt sides except sharp flints."

Bellew laughed.

"Those gaunt sides are covered with beauty, and hundreds of people make their living from them."

"Africa is wonderful," sighed April, and suddenly the weight of her burden returned.

"Africa's all right, if it weren't for the people in it," he retorted moodily.

The hotel proved to be a picturesque building perched on rising ground above lovely gardens. Some of its countless windows looked over the town to the sea; but most of them seemed to be peered into by the relentless granite eyes of the mountain. April's first act was to draw the blinds of her room.

"That mountain will sit upon my heart and crush me into my grave if I stay here long," she thought, and felt despairing. Bellew had engaged rooms for her, boldly inscribing the name of "Lady Diana Vernilands" in the big ledger, while she stood by, acquiescing in, if not contributing to the lie. Afterwards he went

away to superintend the unloading of his luggage. It appeared that his three immense trunks contained much valuable glass and china for the Governor's wife, and he was taking no risks concerning their safety.

Although making only a short stay, and in spite of the glum looks of the porters, he had everything carried carefully up to his room on the fourth floor. Glum looks were wasted on the bland Bellew, who lived by the motto "*Je m'en fiche de tout le monde*," and who on his own confession would have liked Africa to himself.

No word concerning the tragedy had yet passed between him and April, but she knew that something was impending, and that she would probably do as he told her, for he seemed in the strange circumstances to occupy the position of sole executor to Diana's will. On going down to lunch she found that he had engaged a small table for them both, but was not there himself. What pleased her less was that as regards company she might just as well have been back on board the *Clarendon Castle*. Almost every one of her fellow-passengers was scattered around the multiplicity of small tables. It would seem as if the "Mount Nelson" was the only hotel in the town, although she remembered quite a number of others in the Directory. Even Vereker Sarle was there. Far down the long room she saw him sitting with two other men: one of them, Dick Nichols, looking very much at home; the other a distinguished, saturnine man with an English air to him, in spite of being burnt as black as the ace of spades. She was aware that Sarle saw her, and had a trembling fear that he might join her. It was almost a relief when Bellew came in towards the end of the meal, for she knew he would prove an effective barrier. He looked hot and weary, and explained that he had been obliged to go back down town to attend to some business.

"I think you had better take up your quarters here for a time," he added. She flinched at the prospect.

"But why? It is so public! Everyone off the boat seems to be here, and I shall have to keep on telling lies just because I know them. It seems to me I can't open my mouth without telling a lie, and," she finished desperately, "it makes me sick."

He looked at her coldly. His fine brown eyes could be hard as flint.

"I thought it was a promise—some sort of a compact—to do what was best—*for*

her?" he remarked. A little cold wave of the sea seemed to creep over her soul, and she could see her hands trembling as she dealt with the fruit on her plate.

"Very well," she acquiesced tonelessly, at last; "if you think it best.
How long am I to stay?"

"Until next week's mail-boat sails," he said slowly. "I have been down to see if I could get you a berth on this week's, but she is full up."

"You want me to return to England?" There was desperate resistance in her voice now. She had not realized until that moment how much she wished to stay.

"It is not what *I* want: it is for her," he insisted ruthlessly. "You must go to her father and explain everything. Letters are no good."

She was silent, but her eyes were wretched. She wanted to stay in
Africa.

"After all, it is your share of the payment for folly," he pursued relentlessly. That was too much for her temper.

"And yours?" she flashed back.

His face did not change, but his voice became very gentle.

"Don't worry. I too am paying."

She would have given much to recall her fierce retort then, for after all, it was true that she was not the only one hit. This man too was suffering under his mask. He had loved Diana, and that his love was the direct cause of the tragedy must make his wretchedness the more acute. With an impulse of pity and understanding she put out her hand to him across the table, but instead of taking it he passed her a little dish of salted almonds. Mortified, she looked up in time to see Sarle and his friends going by, and was left wondering how much they had witnessed, and whether Bellew had meant to snub or spare her. The whole thing was a miserable mix-up, and it almost seemed to her as if Diana had as usual got the best of it, for at any rate she was out of the deceit and discomfort.

She thought so still more when the women surrounded her in the lounge, and drew her in among them to take coffee. They were all as merry as magpies, and

seemed to have clean forgotten the tragedy of the ship except in so far as it lent a thrill to conversation. Several who were going on the next day to different parts of the country pressed her to visit them at their homes. Mrs. Stanislaw came up with her claws sheathed in silk and a strange woman in tow, and murmuring: "I *must* introduce Mrs. Janis. She is anxious to know all you can tell her of poor Miss Poole," stood smiling with a feline delight in the encounter. April turned from her bitter face to the other woman, an elaborately-dressed shrew with a domineering hook to her nose, and had the thankful feeling of a mouse who has just missed by a hair's breadth the click of the trap on its nose.

"I'm afraid I can give you no more information than is already available," she said distantly.

"It seems to be a most shameful affair," complained Mrs. Janis; "and the wretched girl apparently has no relatives one can write to."

"None," stated April firmly and gratefully. She could well imagine how this lady with a grievance would treat the feelings of relations.

"Perhaps Captain Bellew might know of someone," purred Mrs. Stanislaw.

"You had better ask him." It was April's turn to smile, though wryly enough. "He will deal with you without the gloves," she thought, and turned away from them.

The lounge was a pleasant place, with French windows leading into the garden; deep chairs and palms were scattered everywhere, and it smelled fragrantly of coffee and cigars. Groups of men and women clustered about the small tables, smoking and talking. One corner was fenced off by a little counter, from behind which a distinguished-looking waiter dispensed cocktails and liqueurs with the air of a duke bestowing decorations. This was Léon, who knew the pet drinks and secret sins of everyone in South Africa, but whose discreet eyes told nothing. The knowledge he possessed of men, women, and things would have made a fascinating volume, but no one had been able to unseal his lips. He hardly ever spoke, simply mixing the drinks and indicating with his hand the tables to which they should be carried. April was in the presence of a personage without being aware of it. Neither did she know until much later that this pleasant lounge was one of the principal gossip centres of the country. In its smoky atmosphere many a fair reputation has withered away, many a great name been tarnished for ever. As for the baby scandals that are born there, have legs

and arms and wings stuck on to them and are sent anteloping or flying all over the country, their name is legion!

Bellew had left her immediately after lunch. He said that he had an appointment with an old friend of his mother's, and should be leaving to stay with her for several days before continuing his journey. April had, in fact, from her seat in the lounge seen him come out of the lift into the hall accompanied by a little bent old lady, and watched them drive away together in a taxi. Thereafter she breathed more freely, and a longing to be in the open air out of this smoke-laden atmosphere moved her to extricate herself from the chattering crowd of women and make her way to the veranda. It was cool and fresh there under the stone porticoes, with veils of green creepers hanging between her and the blazing sunshine and colour of the garden. She sat down, and, as is always the way with a woman in moments of silence and beauty, her thoughts immediately clustered about the image of the man she loved. What was Vereker Sarle thinking of her? Would he go from the Cape to his home up north without trying to see her again? While she pondered these things he walked out through one of the tall French windows and came towards her, followed by his dark, saturnine friend. They approached like men sure of a welcome, Sarle smiling in his disarmingly boyish fashion, the other man smiling too: but with a difference. There was some quality of sardonic amusement and curiosity in his glance that arrested April's instant attention.

"I warned you that it is hard to shake off your friends in this country," said Sarle gaily. "May we come and sit with you for a little while? Sir Ronald tells me that you and he are quite old friends."

Her heart gave a leap. Instantly she understood the sardonic amusement of the stranger's demeanour. If any other man than Sarle had been there she would have thrown up the sponge. But she could not bear to have the truth stripped and exposed there before him. It was too brutal. If he must know, he should know in a less cruel manner than that. She faced the new-comer squarely, her features frozen to an outward composure.

"This is a very pleasant surprise, Lady Di!" he said easily, while his eyes expressed the utmost amusement. "It must be nearly two years since we met?"

"Oh, surely much longer than that?" she answered, and her smile was almost as mocking as his. They stood taking each other's measure whilst Sarle dragged

forward some chairs. A faint admiration came into the man's face. She was a fraud, and he knew that she knew that he knew it, but he had also to acknowledge that there was fine metal in her even for an adventuress. As a duellist at least she seemed worthy of his steel. Besides, in her gown of faint lilac and her orchid-laden hat she was a very entrancing vision. The duel might be picturesque as well as piquant.

"I trust you left Lord Vernilands well?" he inquired politely. She dug desperately in her mind for a moment. It seemed foolishly important to be truthful, even though this man knew she was acting a lie.

"He is never very well in the winter," she answered, without any apparent interlude for thought. Sir Ronald was even more pleased with her.

"That is so," he agreed. "I remember when I left Bethwick that autumn he was just in for his annual bout of bronchitis."

The two men sat down, and, with her permission, smoked. Sarle had placed his chair where he could look full at her, missing no shade of expression on her face. His frank warm eyes enfolded her in a gaze of trust and devotion that was as patent to the other man as to her. There was no peace for her in that gaze; things were too desperate for that; but it nerved her resolution to fence to the death with this polished gamester. She had her back to the wall, and resolved to die fighting rather than make an ignominious surrender before the man she loved.

Sarle looked from one to the other contentedly. For once his far-seeing veld eyes played him false.

"I am so glad you two are friends," he said. Then, addressing April, "Odd that we shouldn't have discovered it before, for, you know, Kenna is my best friend, as well as my ranching partner."

PART III

They sat talking for close on two hours, and at the end of that time April rose with a laugh on her lips and many a light and airy reason why she could not stay. It was too hot, she must rest a little, she had unpacking to do. Even after rising from her chair she lingered as if regretful to go, but they could not persuade her to stay and have tea with them. Presently she sauntered off slowly, leaving a promise that she would dine with them that evening. She did not know why she promised. As she walked away, sauntering, because her feet seemed as lead-laden as her heart, she told herself that it would be better to go and dine with the sharks in Table Bay than sit down again with Ronald Kenna. In her room she lay exhausted and very still for a long time, with the feeling that she had escaped from a red-hot gridiron. She looked in her mirror on entering, expecting to see a vision of Medusa, hair hanging in streaks, eyes distraught, and deep ruts in the cheeks; but her face was charming and composed, and a fixed smile curved her mouth. She shuddered at her own image.

"Lies deform and obscure the soul," she thought, "yet my face bears no mark of the lies I have told this afternoon, nor the hell my spirit has passed through!"

Only when she removed her hat something strange arrested her attention, something that might have been a feather or a flake of snow lying on her luminous black hair just where it grew low in a widow's peak at the centre of her forehead. She made to brush it lightly away, but it stayed, for it was not a feather at all, but a lock of her own hair that had turned white. A little gift from Ronald Kenna!

He had played with her as a cat plays with a mouse before killing it. True, he had not killed her, nor (which would have been the same thing) exposed her mercilessly before Vereker Sarle's eyes. But he had made her pay for his clemency. Probably the cleverness with which she slipped out of the corners into which she was hedged, her skill in darting from under his menacing paw, roused

his admiration as well as his sporting instinct. It must have been a great game for him, but hers were the breathless emotions of the helpless mouse whose heart goes pit-a-pat in the fear of being gobbled up the next moment.

It was all very subtle. Sarle never suspected what was going on, so cool and sweet she looked under her shady hat, so unfailing was her composure. He was accustomed to the dry and biting flavour of Kenna's speech, and paid no great heed to it. He believed himself listening to the witty reminiscences of two people with many friends and interests in common, and nothing in the girl's manner as she lied and fenced and swiftly covered up mistakes with jests and laughter betrayed the agony of baiting she was enduring. Kenna was a friend he would have trusted with everything he had in the world; but he was aware of a twist in that friend's nature which made him look at women with sardonic eyes. It had not always been so. Some woman had given that cruel twist to a loyal and trusting nature; some loved hand had dealt the wound that festered in Ronald Kenna's heart; and Sarle, because he guessed this, forgave his friend much. But he would never have forgiven had he known what was passing there under his very eyes. The woman he loved was on the rack, and he never guessed it because she smiled instead of crying out.

And it was all to suffer again that evening. April knew that, as she dressed herself carefully for dinner. There was no mistaking Kenna's pressing request that they should be allowed to come to her table. Sarle had not had time to ask for himself alone. Kenna had forestalled him, and there was double craft in the action: he meant to keep his eye, or rather his claw, on her, while preventing her from being alone with Sarle. If she was in the fray to protect Sarle from the pain of finding her out, he was in it to protect Sarle from her. The situation might have been funny if it had not been grim. She could have laughed at it but for her fear of Kenna, but for an old man's pain and misery, but that the whole miserable structure of deceit rested on a girl's drowned body.

She put on a black gown. It seemed only fitting to absent herself awhile from the felicity of colour. Besides, all her joy in clothes had gone. How gladly would she now have donned her own shabby garments, if with them could have returned the old peace of mind! But even the plain little demi-toilette of black chiffon was peerlessly cut, and her whiteness glowed like a pearl through its filmy darkness. There was no way of dressing her hair that would hide the white feather on her forehead, and after trying once or twice she left it. It looked very remarkable, that touch of age above her young, flower-like face. She could not altogether

hate it, for it was a scar won bravely enough, and in desperate battle. Africa had not taken long to put its mark on her!

The men were waiting for her in the lounge; Sarle looking radiantly happy because he was sure of the society of the two people he cared for most in the world; Kenna with a fresh device to try her composure.

"I want to see if you can remember the ingredients of that cocktail I introduced to you at the 'Carlton' on a certain memorable evening when we escaped from Aunt Grizel," he said gaily. She looked at him reflectively. "As I've just been telling Sarle, you learned the recipe by heart, and swore that from henceforth you would use no other."

"Ah, yes," she drawled slowly. "But you take no account of time and my 'Winter-garment of Repentance.' I am a very different girl to the one you knew two years ago."

"I realize that, of course." He grinned with delight at her point. It seemed to him possible that the evening might be even more entertaining than the afternoon.

"*This* girl never drinks cocktails," she finished quaintly, and he liked her more and more.

Many glances followed them as they passed down the long room, full of rose-shaded candles and the heavy scent of flowers. Pretty women are not scarce in Cape Town, especially at the season when all Johannesburg crowds to the sea, but there was a haunting, almost tragic loveliness about April that night that set her apart from the other women, and drew every eye. Sarle felt his pulses thrill with the pride that stirs every man when the seal of public admiration is set upon the woman he loves. As he looked at her across the table he suddenly recalled some little verses he had found scrawled in Kenna's writing on an old book once when they were away together on the veld:

My love she is a lady fair,
  A lady fair and fine;
She is to eat the rarest meat
  And drink the reddest wine.

Her jewelled foot shall tread the ground
  Like a feather on the air;

Oh! and brighter than the sunset
The frocks my love shall wear!

If she be loyal men shall know
What beauty gilds my pride;
If she be false the more glad I,
For the world is always wide.

Poor Kenna! She had been false: that was why he had sought the wide world of the veld and renounced women. Sarle, certain of the innate truth and loyalty of the girl opposite him as of her pearl-like outer beauty, could pity his friend's fate from the bottom of his soul. But being a man, he did not linger too long with pity; hope is always a pleasanter companion, and hope was burning in him like a blue flame: the hope that within an hour or two he would hold this radiant girl in his arms and touch her lips. He thought of the garden outside, full of shadows and scented starlight, and looking at the curve of her lips, his eyes darkened, and strange bells rang in his ears. She had eluded him for many nights, although she knew he loved her. He had kissed her fingers and the palm of her hand, but tonight out in the starlit garden he meant to kiss her lips. The resolve was iron in him. He hardly heard what the other two were saying. He was living in a world of his own. April, weary of Kenna's cruel heckling, turned to him for a moment's relief, and what she saw in his eyes was wine and oil for her weariness, but it made her afraid, not only because of the perilous longing in her to give him all he asked, but because Kenna sat alert as a lynx for even a smile she might cast that way. It was very certain that no opportunity would be given them for being a moment together; and divining something of Sarle's resolute temper, she could not help miserably wondering what would happen when it came to a tussle of will between the two men.

However, even the careful plans of first-class lynxes go awry sometimes. A waiter came to the table to say that Kenna was wanted on the telephone.

"Tell them I'm engaged," was the curt answer.

"It's his Honour Judge Byng, sir," said the waiter in an awed manner, "and I have already told him you were at dinner. He says it is most important."

Kenna glared at the man, then at his companions. The latter appeared placidly indifferent. April sipped her wine, and her eyes roamed round the room whilst

she exchanged idle talk with Sarle. But the moment Kenna's back was turned indifference fell from them; they looked at each other eagerly like two school-children in a hurry to take advantage of the teacher's absence.

"Darn him!" muttered Sarle. "I wish Byng would keep him all night."

"He will be back directly," she said breathlessly. Sarle glanced at the plates. They were only at the fish.

"He's got to finish his dinner, I suppose," he said grudgingly. "But can't we escape afterwards? I want to show you the garden."

"He's sure to stay with us," she answered tragically.

"Oh—but to Halifax with him!" began Sarle.

"I know, but we mustn't offend him," she implored hastily. "He . . . he's such a good fellow."

"Of course I realize he is an old friend of yours, and likes to be with you, and all that," Sarle conceded. "But so do I. I want to show you the garden . . . by myself." He looked pleadingly and intently into her eyes until her lids fell and a soft flush suffused her cheeks. His glance drank in every detail of her fresh, sweet beauty.

"What's that funny little patch of white on your hair?" he asked suddenly. "I have been puzzling about it all the evening. Is it a new fashion?" She shook her head.

"He's coming back." From where she sat she could see Kenna the moment he entered the room.

"Promise you will come to the garden," he urged.

"Yes," she said softly.

"No matter how long it takes to get rid of him?"

"Yes."

"Even if we have to pretend to say good-night? . . . I shall be waiting for you . . .

you'll come?" She nodded; there was no time for more. Kenna was upon them, very cross at having his dinner interrupted, and with an eye cocked searchingly upon April. But neither she nor Sarle gave any sign of what had passed.

Later, when they were round their coffee in the lounge, the hall-porter brought her some letters on a salver. She saw Kenna looking at her satirically as she examined the superscriptions. All were addressed to Lady Diana Vernilands, and the problem of what she was to do about letters was one not yet considered.

"Don't let me keep you from your interesting correspondence," he remarked, and April started, to find that they were alone. Sarle had gone across to Leon to get some cigars.

"Oh, there's nothing that can't wait," she said hastily, and pushed them into her hand-bag.

"I agree"—he assumed a bright, conversational air—"that some things are even more interesting for being waited for; the explanation of your conduct, for instance!"

She looked at him steadily, though her heart was beating rapidly, for this moment had come upon her with sudden unexpectedness.

"You appear to suffer from curiosity?"

"Don't call it suffering." His tone was suave. "I am enjoying myself immensely."

"I shall try not to do anything to interfere with your amusement," she remarked, after a pause.

"That will be kind. The situation piques me. I should like to watch it to a finish without contributing to the *dénouement*; unless"—he looked at her significantly —"I am obliged to."

"I cannot believe anything or any one could oblige you to be disagreeable, Sir Ronald," she jeered softly. He meditated with an air of gravity.

"There *are* one or two things, though; friendship, for instance—I would do quite disagreeable things for the sake of a friend." She was silent.

"I might even vex a woman I admire as much as I do you, to save a friend from disaster."

Thus they sparred, the attention of each fixed on Sarle, so gay and debonair, buying cigars within a stone's throw of them. Having finished with Leon, he attempted to rejoin them, but the lounge was crowded, and at every few steps some old friend entangled him.

"There is nothing much to admire about me." In spite of herself a note of desolation crept into her voice. Kenna looked at her in surprise. This was a new side to the adventuress!

"*Au contraire*. Apart from the inestimable gifts of youth and beauty the gods have bestowed, you possess a quality that would draw admiration from the most unwilling—courage."

She bowed mockingly. Sarle was escaping from his many friends at last and returning. Kenna rapped out what he had to say sharply, though his voice was low.

"He is a good fellow, and I do not care to give him pain—unless you force me to."

He searched her face keenly, but found no trace there of anything except a courteous interest in his conversation. She did not mean him to guess how much Vereker Sarle's happiness meant to her.

"Anything else?" she dared him.

"Well, of course I should like to know where the real Lady Diana is," he said carelessly. That gave her a bad moment. Mercifully, the waiter created a diversion by knocking a coffee-cup over as he removed the tray, and Sarle, returning, had some news for Kenna of a mutual friend's success in some political campaign. This gave her a short space in which to recover. But she was badly shaken, and wondered desperately how she was going to get through the rest of the evening if Kenna clung. They sat talking in a desultory fashion, each restlessly watching the others. There was a clatter of conversation about them, and in the adjoining drawing-room a piano and violins had begun to play. The air was warm and heavy. For some reason April could not fathom the French windows had been closed, and there was a swishing, seething sound outside, as

though the sea was rushing in tides through the garden. She felt curiously unstrung. It was not only the nervous effect of having these two men so intent upon her every word and movement, but there was something extraordinarily disturbing in the atmospheric conditions that made the palms of her hands ache and her scalp prickle as from a thousand tiny thorns.

"I don't think I can bear this place much longer," she said suddenly, even to herself unexpectedly. "Wouldn't it be cooler out where we were sitting this afternoon?"

"I think so," said Sarle briskly. "Besides I want to show you the garden." He rose, but Kenna rose too.

"My dear fellow," he expostulated gently, "don't you realize there is a south-easter blowing? We can't subject Lady Di to the curse of the Cape tonight. It always affects new-comers most disagreeably. In fact, I think she is suffering from it already."

"Is that what is making me prickle all over and feel as though I want to commit murder?" she inquired, with rather a tremulous smile. "What is this new African horror?"

"Only our Cape 'mistral.'" Sarle looked at her anxiously. "It's blowing a bit hard in the trees outside, but——"

"I thought that was the sea. If it's only the wind I don't mind." She rose, half hesitating. "I love wind."

"I think it would be very unwise of you to go," said Kenna quietly. Sarle thought him infernally interfering, though he heard nothing in the words but friendly counsel. To April the remark contained a threat, and she gave way with as good a grace as she might, holding out her hand to say good-night to them.

"Perhaps I had better postpone acquaintance with your curse as long as possible." The words were for Kenna, her smile for Sarle.

"I will see you to the lift," the latter said. Kenna could hardly offer to come too, but as it was only just across the lounge to the hall, and within range of his eye, perhaps he thought it did not matter. He could not know that Sarle, sauntering with a careless air beside her, was saying very softly and only for her ear:

"It is quite early. If instead of taking the lift again you came down the main staircase, you would find a door almost opposite, leading into the garden. I think you promised?"

His voice was very pleading. She did not answer, nor even turn his way. But once safely in the lift, out of the range of Kenna's gimlet eyes, over the shoulders of the stunted brown lift-boy she let her glance rest in his, and so told him that he would have his wish.

There must have been some witchery in that south-east wind. She knew it was madness to go, that she was only entangling herself more closely in a mesh which could not be unravelled for many days. Yet within half an hour she was out there in the darkness, with the wind tearing at her hair and flickering her cloak about her like a silken sail. When she closed the door behind her and went forward it was like plunging into an unknown purple pool, full of dark objects swaying and swimming beside her in the fleeting darkness. Tendrils of flowering plants caught at her with twining fingers. A heavily scented waxen flower, pallid as the face of a lost soul, stooped and kissed her from a balcony as she passed. The young trees were like slim girls bowing to each other with fantastic grace; the big trees stood together "terrible as an army with banners," raging furiously in an uproar like the banging of a thousand breakers upon a brazen beach. The sky was full of wrack, with a snatch of moon flying across it, and a scattering of lost stars.

She felt more alive and vital than ever in her life before. The clamour of the storm seemed to be in her veins as well as in her ears. She was glad with a wild, exultant happiness of which she had never dreamed, when she found herself snatched by strong arms and held close, close. The maelstrom whirled about her, but she was clasped safe in a sheltered place. Sarle kissed her with long, silent kisses. There was no need for words, their lips told the tale to each other. It seemed to her that her nature expanded into the vastness of the sea and the wind and the stars, and became part with them. . . . But all the while she was conscious of being just a slight, trembling girl held close against a man's heart—the right man, and the right heart! She had come across the sea to find him, and Africa had given them to each other. She lost count of time and place and terror. The burden of her trouble mercifully left her. She remembered only that she and Vereker Sarle loved each other and were here alone together in this wind-wracked wilderness of perfumed darkness and mystery. Her ears and mind were closed to everything but his whispering words:

"My darling, my darling . . . I have waited for you all my life . . . women have been nothing to me because I knew you were somewhere in the world. I have crossed the veld and the seas a thousand times looking for you, and have found you at last! I will never let you go."

He kissed her throat and her eyes. More than ever her whiteness shone in the gloom with the luminousness of a pearl.

"Your beauty makes me tremble," he whispered in her hair. "Darling, say that you love me and will give yourself to me for ever."

"I love you, Vereker. . . ."

"Call me Kerry."

"I love you, Kerry. I give myself to you."

She rejoiced in her beauty, because it was a precious gift to him.

"You don't know what you mean to me, Diana—a star dropped out of heaven; the pure air of the veld I love; white lilies growing on a mountain top. Thank God you are all these things without any darkness in you anywhere. It is the crown of a man's life to love a woman like you."

"Let me go, Kerry," she said. "It is late. I must go."

He did not notice that her voice was broken with tears, for the wind swept her words up to the trees and the boiling wrack of clouds beyond. But he knew that it was time for her to go. That wild pool of love and wind and stars was too sweet and dangerous a place for lovers to linger in. He wrapped her cloak about her and sheltered her back to the door from which she had emerged.

"Tomorrow morning . . . I shall be waiting for you in the lounge. We will settle then how soon you will give yourself to me—it must be very soon, darling. I am forty-four, and can't wait a moment."

The light from the door fell on his face and showed it gay as a boy's. Her face was hidden, or he must have, recognized the misery stamped upon it.

* * * * * *

In the morning light it seemed to her that the finger of snow on her hair had broadened a little. It was five o'clock of an ice-green dawn, with the mountain like an ashen wraith outside, and the wind still raging. South-easters last for three days, Kenna had said, and she shuddered to look at that unseen power whipping the leaves from the trees, beating down the beauty of the garden, tearing the mists from the mountain's side, only to pile them higher upon the summit. It took courage to go out in that wind, but it took greater courage to stay and meet Vereker Sarle. So she was dressed and hatted, with a small suit-case in her hand, and starting on a journey to the Paarl. She did not know what "the Paarl" was, nor where! Her first introduction to that strange name was at midnight, when she found it on one of the letters addressed to Diana. All the other letters were of no consequence, but the Paarl letter seemed to solve for her the pressing and immediate problem of how to escape from the terror of exposure by Kenna before the loved eyes of Sarle. It was from the parson's daughter, that eccentric painter who lived somewhere on the veld, and whose home was to have been Diana's destination. "Clive Connal" she signed herself, and said she hoped Diana would take the morning train, as it was the coolest one to travel by, and arrive at the Paarl by 8.30, where a mule-cart would be waiting to take her to Ho-la-lé-la.[1] So April meant to follow instructions and trust to luck to see her through. Whatever happened, it could not be more terrible than to read disgust and disillusion in Vereker Sarle's eyes.

She stole down the stairs like a shadow, and found a sleepy clerk in the booking-office. It was simple to explain to him that she was going away for a few days, but wished her room kept on, and everything left as it was. She would send a wire to say at what date she would be returning. There was no difficulty about the bill, for, fortunately, Bellew had supplied her with plenty of money, saying it was Diana's, and that she would have wished it to be used. It was too early for a taxi to be got, even by telephoning, but the porter caught a stray rickshaw that chanced to be passing, and April had her first experience of flying downhill behind a muscular black man with feathers in his hair and bangles on his feet. Before she reached the station her veil and hair were in streamers, and her scalp was almost torn from her head, but the *serpent jaune* which had gnawed her vitals all night had ceased from troubling, and joy of living glowed in her once more. She could not help it; there was something in the air and the wind and the blaze of Africa that made for life, and thrust out despair. It swept away misery as the south-easter had swept the skies, leaving them blue and clear as a flawless turquoise.

She caught her train, and in fate's good hour reached the Paarl, which proved to be a town of one long street, decked with stately oaks, and mellowed old Dutch homes. The mule-cart was waiting for her, and on the driver's seat a woman with the austere features and blue, pure, visionary eyes of Galahad, the stainless knight. But she was dressed in breeches and a slouch hat, a cigarette hung from the corner of her mouth, and she beckoned April gladsomely with an immense cowthong whip.

"Come on! I was afraid you'd shirk the early train, but I see you're the stuff. Hop in!"

April did her best, but hopping into a Cape cart that has both steps missing takes some practice. The mules did most of the hopping; she scrambled, climbed, sprawled, and sprained herself all over before she reached the vacant seat, already encumbered with many parcels. With a blithe crack of the whip and a string of strange words flung like a challenge at her mules, Miss Connal got under way.

The farm was six miles off, but ere they had gone two April knew the painter as well as if they had been twin sisters. Clive Connal hadn't a secret or a shilling she would not share with the whole world. She used the vocabulary of a horse-dealer and the slang of a schoolboy, but her mind was as fragrant as a field that the Lord hath blessed, and her heart was the heart of a child. It was shameful to deceive such a creature, and April's nature revolted from the act. Before they reached the farm she had confessed her identity—explaining how the change had come about, and why it was important to go on with the deception. Too much explanation was not necessary with a person of Clive's wide understanding. No vagaries of behaviour seemed to shock or astonish her large human soul. She merely, during the relation of Diana's tragedy, muttered once or twice to herself:

"The poor thing! Oh! the poor thing!" and looked at April as though she too were "a poor thing," instead of a fraud and an adventuress to be abjured and cast out. For the first time since her mother's death the girl felt herself sheltering in the warmth of womanly sympathy, and the comfort of it was very sweet.

"Don't worry too much," said Clive cheerfully.

"*Tout s'arrange*: that's my motto. Everything comes straight if you leave it alone."

A cheerful motto indeed, and one seeming to fit well with the picture of the old farmhouse lying in the morning sunshine. Low-roofed and white-walled, it was tucked under the shelter of the Qua-Qua mountains, with apricot orchards stretching away on either side. Six immense oaks spread their untrimmed branches above the high stoep, and before the house, where patches of yellow-green grass grew ragged as a vagabond's hair, a Kerry cow was pegged out and half a dozen black babies disported themselves amongst the acorns. Dozens of old paraffin tins stained with rust, and sawed-off barrels bulging asunder lined the edge of the stoep, all filled with geraniums, begonias, cacti, red lilies, and feathery bamboos. Every plant had a flower, and every flower was a brilliant, vital thing. Other decorations were a chopping-block, an oak chest, blistered and curled by the sun, several wooden beds with the bedding rolled up on them, and two women, who smiled a welcome. These were Ghostie, and *belle* Helène—the only names April ever knew them by.

"Welcome to the home for derelicts, broken china, and old crocks," they said. "You may think you are none of these things, but there must be something the matter with you or you wouldn't be here."

"Too true!" thought April, but smilingly answered, "There doesn't seem much wrong with you!"

"Oh, there is, though. Ghostie is a journalist, recovering from having the soul trampled out of her by Johannesburg Jews. I am a singer with a sore throat and a chronic pain in my right kidney that I am trying to wash away with the juice of Clive's apricots and the milk from Clive's cows."

"Nuff sed," interposed Clive. "Let's think about some grub. I've brought back sausages for breakfast."

Meekie, the mother of the black babies, had fetched in the parcels from the cart, and already there was a fizzling sound in the kitchen. The rest of the household proudly conducted April to the guest-chamber. There was nothing in it except a packing-case and a bed, but the walls were covered by noble studies of mountains, Clive pointed out some large holes in the floor, warning April not to get her foot twisted in them.

"I don't think there are any snakes here," she said carelessly. "There is an old cobra under the dining-room floor, and we often hear her hissing to herself, but

she never does any harm."

"It is better to sleep on the stoep at night," Ghostie recommended. "We all do."

Before the afternoon April had settled down among them as if she had lived there always. Sarle and his kisses seemed like a lost dream; the menace of Kenna was forgotten. For the first time in her existence she let herself drift with the tide, taking no thought for the morrow nor the ultimate port at which her boat would "swing to." It was lotus-eating in a sense, yet none of the dwellers at Ho-la-lé-la idled. It is true that Ghostie and *belle* Helène were crocks, but they worked at the business of repairing their bodies to tackle the battle of life once more. April soon discovered that they were only two of the many of Clive's comrades who came broken to the farm and went away healed. Clive was a Theosophist: all men were her brothers, and all women her sisters; but those especially among art-workers who fell by the wayside might share her bread and blanket. They called her Old Mother Sphinx, because of her inscrutable eyes, and the tenderness of her mothering.

She herself never stopped working, and her body was hard as iron from long discipline. She rose in the dawn to work on her lands, hoeing, digging her orchards, and tending her cattle in company with her coloured labourers. It was only at odd moments or during the heat of the day that she painted, and all the money she made with paint was swallowed up by the farm, which did not pay, but which was the very core of her heart.

Impossible for April to be in such company and not work too, even if her thoughts had not demanded occupation. So, first she mended the clothes of everybody, including Meekie's ragged piccanins; then she went to the Paarl, bought a pot of green paint, and spent days of sheer forgetfulness smartening up the rusty paraffin tins and barrels, and all the bleared and blistered shutters and doors and sills of the farm, that had not known paint for many years.

At mid-day they bathed in a tree-shaded pool that had formed in the bed of a stream running across the farm. They had no bathing frocks but their skins, and sometimes Clive, sitting stark on the bank, palette in hand, painted the others as they tumbled in the dark brown water, sporting and splashing like a lot of schoolboys. Afterwards they would mooch home through the shimmering noontide heat, deliciously tired, wrapped in reflection and their towels. Ghostie

provided a perpetual jest by wearing a smart Paris hat with a high cerise crown. She said it had once belonged to the fastest woman in South Africa, who had given it to her as a joke, but she did not mention the lady's name, nor say in what her "fastness" consisted. This was characteristic of visitors at Ho-la-lé-la: they sometimes stated facts, but never talked scandal. When April asked them to call her by her own name, instead of "Diana," they did so without comment, accepting her as one of themselves, and asking no questions about England, the voyage, or the Cape. The scandalous tragedy of the April Fool had never reached them, and if it had they would have taken little interest except to be sorry for the girl.

In the evenings when work was put away Clive played to them on the 'cello.

"I was determined to have music in my life," she told April. "And as you can't lug a piano and musician all over the shop with you, I saw no way of getting it but to darn well teach myself."

And very well she had done it, though why she had chosen a 'cello, which also needed some lugging, no one knew but herself. Sitting with it between her heavy boots and breeched legs, the eternal cigarette drooping from her mouth, she looked more than ever like Galahad, her blue austere gaze seeming to search beyond the noble mountain tops of her own pictures for some Holy Grail she would never find. No complicated music was hers, just grand, simple things like Handel's "Largo," Van Biene's "Broken Melody," "Ave Maria," or some of Squire's sweet airs.

Sometimes at night they went out and climbed upon a huge rock that stood in the apricot orchard. It was big enough to build a house on, and called by Clive her Counsel Rock, because there she took counsel with the stars when things went wrong with the farm. Lying flat on their backs they could feel the warmth of the day still in the stone as they gazed at the purple and silver panoply of heaven spread above them, and Clive would commune with blue-rayed Sirius and his dark companion; the Gemini, those radiant twins; Orion's belt in the centre sky preciously gemmed with celestial diamonds; Canopus, a calm, pale yellow star, the largest in our universe; Mars, gleaming red as a madman's eye; Venus springing from the horizon, the Pleiades slinking below it. The "galloping star" she claimed as her own on account of its presumed horsiness.

"It's a funny thing," she said. "My mother and father were gentle, bookish creatures with no understanding of animals. Even if a pony had to be bought for us children, every male thing of the family—uncles, nephews, tenth cousins—was summoned from every corner of England for his advice and experience. Yet these unsophisticated beings have a daughter like me—born into the world a full-blown horse-dealer! To say nothing of mules. You can believe me or believe me not," she added bragfully, "but there is *no one* in this land of swindles who knows more about mules than I do."

They chose to believe her, especially after hearing her haggling and bartering with some of the itinerant dealers who visited the farm from time to time.

"I don't know vy ve can't do pizness today! I got no profit in anyting. I just been here for a friend"—thus the dealer.

"Ah! I know who your friend is," Clive would jeer from the stoep. "You keep him under your own hat. But don't come here expecting to swop a beautiful mule that cost me 20 pounds for that skew-eyed crock that will go thin as a rake after three weeks on the sour veld, a 10 pound note thrown in, and taking me for a fool into the bargain. Your horse is worth 15 pounds, and not a bean more."

"I also must lif!"—the whine of the Jew.

"I don't see the necessity." Clive shamelessly plagiarized Wilde,
Plato, or the holy prophets when it suited her.

"Vot, you know! You can't do pizness with a womans!" The dealer would weep

tears of blood, but Clive made the bargain.

A week slid past, and April barely noticed its passing. No word came from the outer world. It was not the custom to read newspapers at Ho-la-lé-la, and all letters were stuffed unopened into a drawer, in case they might be bills. Close friends were wise enough to communicate by telegram, or, better still, dump themselves in person upon the doorstep. The only reason that April had been expected and fetched was that a "home letter" had heralded the likely advent of Lady Diana, and given the date and hotel at which she would be staying. Home letters were never stuffed away unopened.

Late one afternoon, however, there was an unexpected announcement. The *boch-ma-keer-ie* bird began to cry in the orchard, and Clive said it was a surer sign of visitors than any that came from the telegraph office.

"Tomorrow is Sunday. We'll have visitors, sure as a gun," she prophesied.

April quailed. She could not bear the peaceful drifting to end, and wished for no reminder of that outer world where Bellew, the mail-boat for England, and the dreary task of breaking an old man's heart awaited her. Sometimes in spite of herself she was obliged to consider these things, and the considering threw shadows under her eyes and hollowed her cheeks. Sarle, too, though he was a dream by day, became very real at night when she should have been dreaming. She knew now that she could never escape from the memory of him, and the thought that he was suffering from her silence and defection tortured her. What must he think of her, slinking guiltily away without a word of explanation or farewell? Doubtless Kenna would set him right! "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," she thought bitterly. Better far and braver to have done the explaining and setting right herself, if only she could have found some way of releasing herself from the compact of silence made with Diana and Bellew.

Sunday, morning dawned very perfectly. They were all sleeping on the stoep, their beds in line against the wall, Clive upon the oak chest, which her austere self-discipline commanded. At three o'clock, though a few stars lingered, the sky was already tinting itself with the lovely lustre of a pink pearl. No sound broke the stillness but the breathing of the sleepers and the soft perpetual dropping of acorns from the branches overhead.

The peace and beauty of it smote April to the heart. She pressed her fingers over

her eyes and tears oozed through them, trickling down her face. When at last she looked again the stars were gone and the sky was blue as a thrush's egg, with a fluff of rose-red clouds knitted together overhead and a few crimson rags scudding across the Qua-Quas. A dove suddenly cried, "Choo-coo, choo-coo," and others took up the refrain, until in the hills and woods hundreds of doves were greeting the morning with their soft, thrilling cries. Fowls straying from a barn near by started scratching in the sand. The first streak of sunshine shot across the hills and struck a bush of pomegranates blossoming scarlet by the gate.

Presently the farm workers began to come from their huts and file past the stoep towards the outhouses. Julie, the Cape foreman, with a right leg longer than the left, was the first to stagger by.

"Moorer, Missis!" he said, with a pull of his cap and a swift respectful glance at the stoep. Clive, awake by now on her oak chest, responded absently without raising her head from the pillow.

"Moorer, Julie!"

Next, Isaac, whose legs were so formed that when he stood still they described a circle, and when he moved the circle became a triangle.

"Moorer, Missis!" said he.

"Moorer, Isaac!"

Jim, the cowherd, had a hare-lip and no roof to his mouth, and was so modest that he turned his head away when he lisped his salutation to the stoep.

"Moor-ler, Mithis!"

"Moorer, Jim!"

After a few moment's silence a voice from one of the beds was heard.

"Is the file-past of the Decrepits over? May one now sleep for a while?"

"This place ought to be called *des Invalides*," grumbled another.

Clive laughed her large, blithe laugh.

"At any rate, there's nothing wrong with me," she proclaimed, and sprang with one leap into her top-boots. Passing April's bed she touched the girl's eyelids tenderly, and her finger-tips came away wet.

"Nor with our little April, I hope—except a passing shower! You had better come up the lands with me this morning, and plant trees."

That was Clive's cure for all ills of the body and soul: to plant trees that would grow up and benefit Africa long after the planters were dead and forgotten. No one ever left Ho-la-lé-la without having had a dose of this medicine, and many an incipient forest lay along the valleys and down the sides of the Qua-Quas. So behold April an hour or two later, faring forth with a pick and a basket full of saplings, followed by Clive leading the Kerry cow, who was sick and needed exercise.

They lunched in the open, resting from their labours and savouring the sweetness of food earned by physical labour. Care was stuffed out of sight, dreams and ghosts faded in the clear sun-beaten air, and again April realized what life could mean in this wonderful land, given the right companionship, and a clean heart. But Clive, with arms clasped about her knees, sat munching apricots and staring with a strange sadness at her forests of baby trees. There was an unfulfilled look on her face, spite of living her own life, and following her star. Neither Africa nor life had given her all she needed.

Later they wended their way back full of the happy weariness engendered by honest toil. But nearing home Clive lifted her nose, and sniffing the breeze like a wild ass of the desert sensing unfamiliar things scowled bitterly.

"Petrol!" she ejaculated. "One of those stinking motor-cars! Why can't people use horses, like gentlemen? What's the matter with a nice mule, even?"

As they slouched warily round the house and came in view of the stoep she emitted a staccato whistle of dismay. Tethered out upon the vagabondish grass was—not one motor-car, but three! An opulent thing of blinking brass and crimson leather arrogated to itself the exclusive shade of the largest tree; a long grey torpedo affair of two seats occupied the pasturage of the Kerry cow; and blistering in the sunshine, with several fowls perched upon it, was an ancient Ford wearing the roystering air of a scallywag come home for good.

"That old *boch-ma-keer-ie* bird knew something!" muttered the painter. "I don't like the look of this!"

They paused to take counsel of each other, then presently advanced, Clive approaching her own front door with the stealthy glide of a pickpocket, April tip-toeing behind her. The idea was to get indoors without being seen, listen in the hall to discover whether the visitors were agreeable ones, and if not, to take refuge in the kitchen until they had departed. Unfortunately one of them came out of the front door to shake his pipe on the stoep as Clive and April reached the steps.

"Why, it's old Kerry Sarle!" cried Clive heartily, and stealth fell from her. She beamed with happiness, and shook his hand unceasingly, pouring forth questions like water.

"When did you get back? Why didn't you come before? What did you bring a crowd for? Who have you got with you?"

"Only Kenna. The crowd doesn't belong to me. They've come to buy pictures or something, and are in your studio. I haven't seen them. We are in the dining-room."

His speech was disjointed and halting, his amazed gaze fixed upon the girl standing thunderstruck at the foot of the steps. Clive forged on into the house with a gloomy eye; she hated to sell pictures, even when she needed the money. April and Sarle were left together, and in a moment he was down the step by her side. They stood looking at each other with the memory of their last kiss kindling between them. He had been bitterly hurt, but he loved and trusted her beyond all things that were, and could not conceal the happiness in his eyes. Only for the open studio windows and the round-eyed piccannins, he would have gathered her to his heart; as it was he gathered her hands instead and held them where they could feel its beating.

"Darling! Thank God I have found you."

Kenna had not betrayed her, then. The blow was still to fall. She managed to smile a little, but she had turned very pale, and there was something in her silence chilling even to his ardent spirit.

"You don't think I tracked you down? We motored out here with no idea but to

see Clive Connal——"

"Of course not." She strove to speak casually. "I couldn't expect to have a friend like Clive all to myself, but I never dreamed you knew her."

"She has been my friend for twelve years or more."

"Yes," said Kenna's voice from the stoep, "we are all old friends together here."

He had come out with *belle* Helène, and stood smiling upon them. The old malice was there, with some new element of strain that made him look more sardonic, yet strangely pathetic to the girl who feared him.

"Who'd have thought to find you here, Lady Di?" he sneered softly.
"Life is full of pleasant surprises!"

They all went into the dining-room, where tea was laid, and Clive brought in her picture-dealers, who proved to be two globe-trotters anxious to acquire specimens of South African art. Someone had told them that Clive Connal stood top of the tree amongst Cape painters, so they had spent about seven pounds ten on a car from Cape Town in the hope of getting some rare gem for a couple of guineas. One was a fat and pompous ass, the other a withered monkey of a fellow who hopped about peering through his monocle at the pictures on the walls, uttering deprecating criticism in the hope of bringing down prices.

"This sketch of Victoria Falls is not bad," he piped, gazing at a thing of tender mists and spraying water above a titanic rock-bound gorge. "The left foreground wants breaking up a bit, though!"

"I think you want breaking up a bit," muttered Clive, who had already made up her mind to sell him nothing, and looking longingly at her sjambok lying on the sideboard. "Where are Ghostie and the others?" she demanded.

"They had tea by themselves in Ghostie's room." *Belle* Helène proffered the statement rather hesitatingly, and no wonder, in a house where "*les amies de mes amis sont mes amies*" was the rule. It took more than that to offend Clive, but she looked astonished.

"Oh, all right, then, let's have ours," she said, and sitting at the head of her table held the loaf of home-made brown bread firmly to her breast, carving hefty

slices and passing them on the point of the knife to *belle* Helène, who jammed them from a tin. Customs were simple and the fare frugal at Ho-la-lé-la. There were only two teaspoons between six, as Ghostie had the other two in her bedroom. The jam unfortunately gave out before the globe-trotters got theirs, but there was some good dripping—if they had only happened to like dripping. They seemed pained before the end of the meal, and one was heard to murmur to the other as they went out:

"Would you believe that her father was a clergyman? Bread and dripping! and jam scratched out of a tin! This comes of living in the wilds of Africa, I suppose. An entire loss of culture!"

The daughter of the clergyman must have surprised them a good deal by her unexpected spurt of holiness in refusing to sell pictures on a Sunday. They wound up their old taxi and went away very much annoyed at having come so far for nothing.

"Whose then is the Babylonian litter with trappings of scarlet and gold?" asked Clive, as the Ford rattled off. "You don't mean to say you fellows came in a thing like that?"

They denied it until seventy times seven. The grey torpedo was Sarle's. Kenna was of opinion that the owners of the crimson caravan must be Johannesburgers, and "dripping with it."

"Not Johannesburgers," disputed Clive, with a wry lip. "No; they're too exclusive for that."

Something must have gone very wrong indeed with the atmosphere for Clive to start sneering. In truth some jangling element unnatural to the sweet accord of Ho-la-lé-la had been introduced, and did not leave with the strangers.

They settled down to smoke in the studio, but there was more smoke about than tranquillity. Sarle seemed distrait. *Belle* Helène sometimes cast an uneasy glance at April, who, still very pale, sat by herself on the lounge. Only Clive and Kenna talked racily, but in jerks, of cattle, fruit-blight, mules, and white ants. But presently all subjects of conversation seemed to peter out, leaving a dark pool of silence to form between them in the room. Kenna it was who threw the stone disturbing those still waters.

"Has any one told you, Miss Connal, about the girl who committed suicide on the *Clarendon Castle*?"

For a full moment not a word was spoken. Sarle, staring, made a movement with his hand over his mat of hair. April's lids fell over her eyes as though afflicted by a deadly weariness. Clive changed her cigarette from one corner of her mouth to the other before answering briefly:

"Yes; I know all about it." Which seemed to astonish Kenna.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "I wish I did!"

It was Sarle's turn to look astonished.

"Why, Kenna, I told you everything there was to know. Besides, it was in the papers."

"No, Kerry. You told me something . . . and the papers told me something. *Everything* can only be related by one person." Dramatically he fixed his glance upon that person. There was no mistaking the challenge. April found courage to return his glance, but her eyes looked like the eyes of a drowning girl. At the sight of them two people were moved to action. *Belle* Helène rose and slipped from the room. Sarle also rose, but it was to seat himself again by April's side on the lounge.

"I don't understand what all this is about," he said quietly, "but it seems a good time for you to know, Kenna, and you, Clive, that we"—he took April's hand in his—"are engaged, and going to be married as soon as possible."

Kenna looked at him with pity and tenderness.

"You had better let her speak, old man. It is time you were undeceived."

"Be careful, Kenna."

"My dear Kerry, do you suppose that it gives me any pleasure to cause you pain, or to distress this charming lady? Only my friendship for you——"

"I can dispense with it," Sarle curtly interrupted.

"Ah! That's the way when a woman steps in." Kenna's lips twisted in a bitter grin. Sarle turned to April.

"Diana . . ."

"That is the very crux of the matter," rapped out, Kenna. "*She is not* Diana."

"What in God's name——?" began Sarle.

"What I want to know," pursued Kenna sombrely, "is—why, if Diana Vernilands jumped overboard, does this girl go masquerading under her title?"

"Are you mad?" Sarle stared from one to the other. "Haven't you known her all your life? Did you not meet as old friends?"

Kenna shrugged. "I never set eyes on her until that day at the 'Mount Nelson.' She was a friend of yours and chose to call herself by the name of a friend of mine, and . . . I humoured her . . . and you. But the thing has gone too far. After inquiries among other passengers I have realized the truth—that it was Diana who . . ." A spasm of pain flickered across his melancholy eyes. Sarle, in grave wonder and hurt, turned to April.

"It is true," she cried bitterly, pierced to the heart by his look. "Diana is drowned. I am a masquerader." Even if she had been nothing to him he could not have remained unmoved by the desperate pleading of her eyes. But he happened to love her with the love that casts out fear, and distrust, and all misunderstanding.

"I am the real April Poole," she said, broken, but resolute that at least there should be no further mistake. He gave her one long look, then lifted her hand, and held it closer. The gesture was for all the world to see. But Kenna had not finished with her.

"You will allow a natural curiosity in me to demand why you should wear the name and retain the possessions of my friend Lady Diana Vernilands?" he asked, dangerously suave.

Then Clive sprang full-armed to the fray.

"And you will allow a natural curiosity in me to demand why you should harry my friend like this—browbeat her for a girlish folly entered into mutually by two

girls and ending in tragedy through no fault of April's?" The painter's eyes burned with a blue fire bleak as her own mountain tops. It was as though Joan of Arc had come to the rescue and was sweeping the room with valiant sword. Even Kenna was partially intimidated.

"That is her story," he muttered.

"You fool, Ronald Kenna," she said gently. "Can't you look in her face and see there is no touch of treachery or darkness there? Thank God, Kerry is not so blind."

There was a deep silence. Then she said:

"Listen, then, to my story," and repeated the facts April had told her, but as April could never have told them, so profound was her understanding of the motives of the two girls in exchanging identities, so tender her treatment of the wayward Diana. Truly this "unfulfilled woman" was greater in the width and depth of her soul than many of those to whom life has given fulfilment of their dreams.

Daylight faded, and shadows stole through the open windows. In the large, low-ceiled room clustered with saddles and harness and exquisite pictures, everything grew dim, except their white faces, and the glistening of tears as they dripped from April's lids.

"I must ask to be forgiven," said Kenna very humbly, at last. "My only plea is that my friendship for Kerry blinded me. And . . ." he halted an instant before the confession of his trouble. "I once loved that little wayward girl."

So it was Diana Vernilands who had proved false and sent him into the wilds! Somehow that explained much to them all: much for forgiveness, but very much more for pity and sympathy.

Suddenly the peace of eventide was rudely shattered by the jarring clank of a motor being geared-up for starting. Evidently Ghostie's friends were departing in the same aloof spirit with which they had held apart all the afternoon. No one in the studio stirred to speed the parting guests. It did not seem fitting to obtrude upon the pride of the great. A woman's voice bade good-bye, and Ghostie was heard warning them of a large rock fifty yards up the lane. A man called good-night, and they were off.

"By Jove! I know that fellow's voice," puzzled Sarle. April thought she did too, but she was in a kind of happy trance where voices did not matter. The next episode was Ghostie at the studio window blotting out the evening skies.

"They have gone," she timidly announced.

"Ah! Joy go with them," remarked Clive, more in relief than regret.

"But there is still one of them in my room."

"*What?*"

"She has been waiting to speak to you all the afternoon; they all have, but they could not face the crowd."

"Pore fellers," said Clive, with cutting irony.

"The one in my room's—a girl," said Ghostie—"a friend of yours."

"She has strange ways," commented Clive glumly. "But ask her to come in. These also are my friends."

Ghostie disappeared. Simultaneously the two men arose; remarking that they must be going—they had stayed too late, and it was getting dark. Clive easily shut them up.

"Of course you can't go. Stay to supper and go back by the light of the moon. We've got to have some music and sit on the Counsel Rock, and eat—apricots and all sorts of things yet. And afterwards we'll come a bit of the way with you."

They did not need much persuasion to settle down again. Clive handed round smokes.

"We won't spoil the best hour of the day by lighting the lamp," she said. They waited. In a minute or so they heard the strange girl approaching. The house consisted of a number of rooms built in the form of a square round a little back courtyard. Each room led into the other, but had also an outer door. Ghostie's room was third from the studio, with one between, unused because of huge holes in the floor. It was through this dilapidated chamber that the girl could now be heard approaching, clicking her high heels and picking her way delicately by the

aid of a candle whose beams showed under the door and flicked across the courtyard at the back. In spite of its light she caught one of her high heels in a hole, and a faint but distinctly naughty word was heard, followed by a giggle. As she reached the door she blew out the candle. They heard the puff of her breath, as plainly as they had heard the naughty word. Then she stood in the open doorway, visible only because she wore a white dress.

"Come in," said Clive with politeness, but irony not quite gone from her voice. The figure did not stir or speak. For some reason unknown to her, April felt the hair on her scalp stir as though a chill wind had blown through it. And the same wind sent a thrill down her backbone. Clive repeated the invitation, somewhat sharply, and then the girl spoke.

"I'm ashamed to come in."

The voice was timid, and very low, but it was enough to make April give a broken cry and hide her face in Sarle's shoulder. Kenna leapt to his feet, and next moment the yellow spurt of a lighted match in his hand revealed the drooping face of the girl in the doorway.

"My God! Diana!"

"Yes; isn't it awful!" she said mournfully. "I know I ought to be dead, but I'm not. How do you do, Ronny?"

She passed him and came slowly across the room to the girl who was trembling violently against Sarle's shoulder. The strain of the day, ending in this, was almost more than April Poole could bear.

"Don't be frightened, April." She was genuinely concerned. "It is really me and not my ghost. You see, I never jumped overboard at all, but simply hid in one of Geoffrey Bellew's big packing-cases. I really could not face those enraged beasts and Philistines any longer."

There was an amazed and gasping silence, but Diana in the middle of the limelight was in her element, and rapidly regained her spirits. She tripped to Clive and shook her warmly by the hand.

"So pleased to see you. I should have come out here long ago, but I got so knocked about in the packing-case that I had to go to bed and be nursed by

Geoff's old aunt at Wynberg. Everything perfectly proper, so don't be alarmed. She chaperoned us out here this afternoon, you know, and would have liked to see you, but really it was rather awkward with Ronny and Major Sarle turning up immediately afterwards. We didn't expect to find April here either—naturally. That was a nasty bang in the eye. I begged Ghostie to hide me in her room, and we waited and waited, but these terrible men seem to have taken root here." She twinkled at them gaily, but no one appeared to have recovered sufficiently from shock to reciprocate her pert amusement.

"So at last, of course, I had to bundle them off and face the music alone. Especially as *belle* Helène told me there was some sort of trouble boiling up in here for poor April."

"I suppose you never realized that trouble has been boiling up for her ever since you disappeared?" said Clive.

"Oh, but of course; and I've been dreadfully sorry, and worrying myself to ribbons."

"It doesn't seem to have interfered with your health," was Clive's only rejoinder. "May one ask what you intended to do to put things straight?"

Diana had the grace to look slightly abashed—only slightly.

"There was nothing for it but to come out here to you and sit tight until the scandal had blown over, while April returned to England. Once she got on board she would have found a letter telling her it was all right, and that I was not dead at all."

"Very charming and considerate too!" commented Ronald Kenna acidly. "A few other people, including Sarle and myself, might have been dead in the meantime, but what would that have mattered?"

It was no use being acid with Diana, however. She was riotously pleased with herself, and bubbling over with pride in her cleverness, and joy in her escape from seclusion. Infection from her light-heartedness was almost impossible, and once the shock had passed, April easily forgave her the cruel and thoughtless part she had played, the hours of anguish she had given. Sarle and Kenna exchanged one grim glance, but it ended in a smile. The deep-rooted friendships of men do not hurry to such short and poor conclusions. Besides, Sarle had come

that day to the attainment of his heart's desire, and was not inclined to fall out with either Fate or friends. As for Kenna, looking at the gilt-haired minx who held his heart-strings, he saw as in a vision that days of peaceful loneliness on the veld were passing, and the future held more uneasiness and folly than the mere month of April could cover. He would need all the friends he had to see him through.

[1] Basuto for "Far away over there."

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