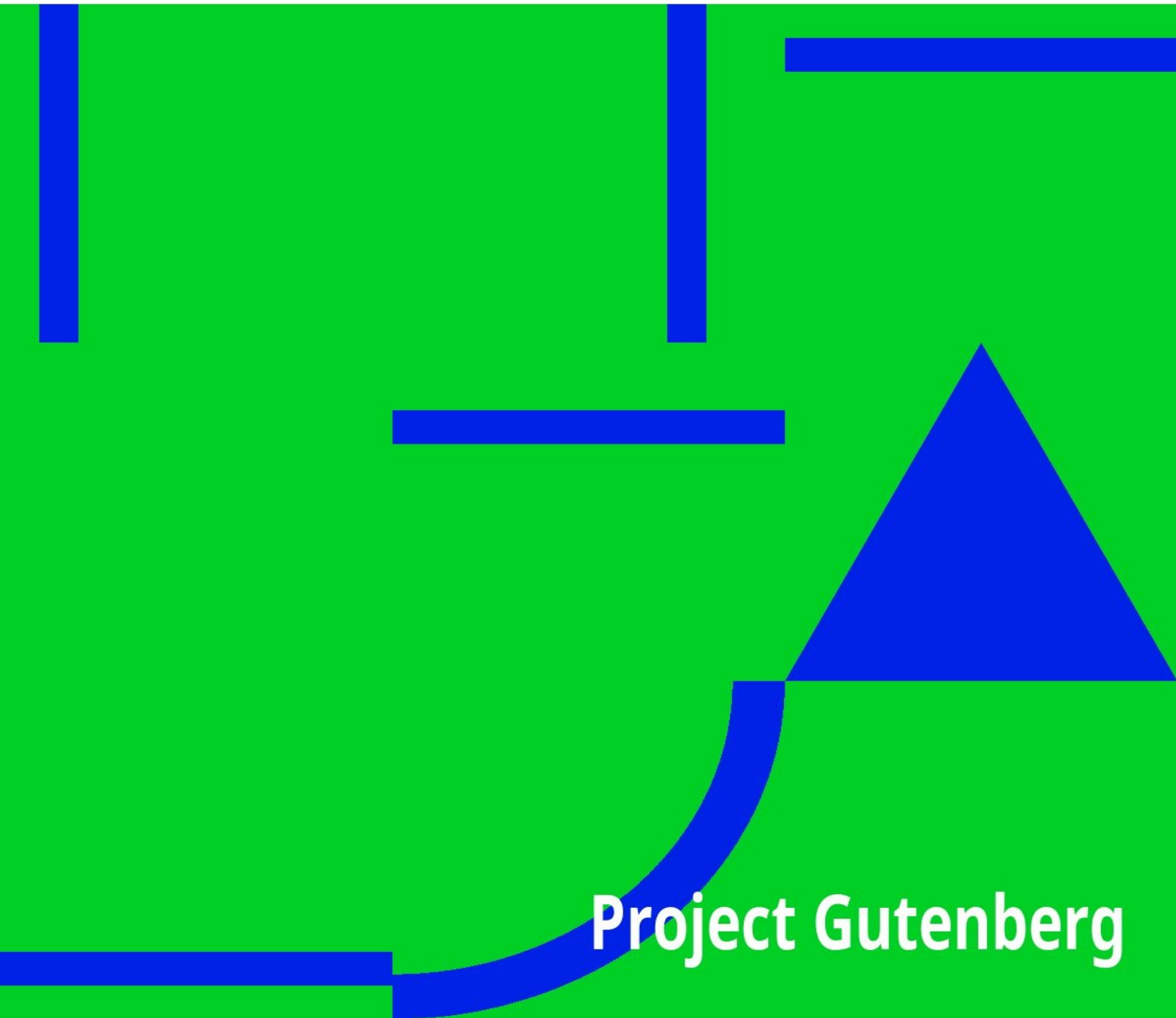
The Dark Tower

Phyllis Bottome



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THE DARK TOWER

BY PHYLLIS BOTTOME

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
J. H. GARDNER SOPER

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Dauntless the slughorn to my lips I set,
and blew "Child Roland to the dark tower came."

—Robert Browning

TO

W. W. D. H.

"God forbid that I should do this thing.

If our time be come, let us die manfully for our brethren
And let us not stain our honour."

I Maccabees, ix, 10.

"I shall never be dangerous for you, Miss Rivers," he said gently

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THE DARK TOWER

PART I

CHAPTER I

Winn Staines respected God, the royal family, and his regiment; but even his respect for these three things was in many ways academic: he respected nothing else.

His father, Admiral Sir Peter Staines, had never respected anything; he went to church, however, because his wife didn't. They were that kind of family.

Lady Staines had had twelve children. Seven of them died as promptly as their constitutions allowed; the five survivors, shouted at, quarreled over, and soundly thrashed, tore themselves through a violent childhood into a rackety youth. They were never vicious, for they never reflected over or considered anything that they did.

Winn got drunk occasionally, assaulted policemen frequently, and could carry a small pony under each arm. Charles and James, who were in the navy, followed in the footsteps of Sir Peter; that is to say, they explored all possible accidents on sea or ashore, and sought for a fight as if it were a mislaid crown jewel.

Dolores and Isabella had to content themselves with minor feats and to be known merely as the terrors of the neighborhood, though ultimately Dolores succeeded in making a handsome splash by running away with a prize-fighting groom. She made him an excellent wife, and though Lady Staines never mentioned her name again, it was rumored that Sir Peter met her surreptitiously at Tattersall's and took her advice upon his horses.

Isabella, shocked and outraged by this sisterly mischance, married, in the face of all probability, a reluctant curate. He subsided into a family living given to him by Sir Peter, and tried to die of consumption.

Isabella took entire control of the parish, which she ruled as if it were a quarter-deck. She did not use her father's language, but she inherited his voice. It rang over boys' clubs and into mothers' meetings with the penetration and volume of a megaphone.

Lady Staines heartily disliked both her daughters, and she appeared not to care very deeply for her sons, but of the three she had a decided preference for Winn.

Winn had a wicked temper, an unshakable nerve, and had inherited the strength of Sir Peter's muscles and the sledge-hammer weight of Lady Staines's wit. He had been expelled from his private school for unparalleled insolence to the head master; a repetition of his summing up of that gentleman's life and conduct delighted his mother, though she assisted Sir Peter in thrashing him for the result.

It may have contributed to his mother's affection for him that Winn had left England at nineteen, and had reached thirty-five with only two small intervals at home.

His first leave had kept them all busy with what the Staines considered a wholly unprovoked lawsuit; a man whom Winn had most unfortunately felt it his duty to fling from a bus into the street, having the weak-minded debility to break his leg had the further audacity to claim enormous damages. The Staines fought the case *en bloc* with splendid zeal, and fiery eloquence. It would probably have resulted better for their interests if they had not defied their own counsel, outraged the respectable minds of the jury, and insulted the learned judge. Under these circumstances they lost their case, and the rest of Winn's leave was taken up in the Family's congenial pursuit of laying the blame on each other.

The second and more fatal visit heralded Winn's marriage. He had not had time to marry before. It would not be true to say that women had played no part in his experiences, but the part they had played was neither exalted nor durable. They figured in his imagination as an inferior type of game, tiresome when captured. His life had been spent mainly in pursuit of larger objects. He had been sent straight from Sandhurst to South Africa, where he had fought with violence and satisfaction for two years, winning the D. S. O., a broken nose, and a cut across the face. When the fighting was over, he obtained leave for a two-years' exploring expedition into the heart of West Africa. Ten men had gone on this expedition, and two survived. Winn never talked of these experiences, but he once admitted to a friend that the early study of his sisters' characters had saved him in many awkward moments. He had known how to appeal to female savages with the unerring touch of experience.

From West Africa he was called to the Indian frontier, where he put in seven years in variegated and extremely useful service. He received his majority early, and disappeared for two years into Tibet, Manchuria, and China. After that he came back to England for polo, and met Estelle Fanshawe. She was lovely, gentle, intensely vain, and not very truthful.

Lady Staines disposed of her at once as "a mincing ninny." The phrase aggravated Winn, and his fancy deepened. It was stimulated by the fact that Estelle was the belle of the neighborhood and had a large supply of ardent admirers. It was almost like running a race with the odds against you. Winn was not a conceited man, and perhaps he thought the odds more against him than they actually were. He was the second son of a man who was immensely rich, (though Sir Peter was reported stingy to his children). Everybody knew who the Staines were, while the Fanshawes after every effort and with nearly every attraction had not become a part of public knowledge. Besides, Estelle had been made love to for some time, and Winn's way was undeniably different from that of her other admirers.

He met her at a dance, and insisted upon dancing with her the whole evening. He took her card away from her, and scored off all her indignant partners. In the interval of these decisive actions he made love to her in a steady, definite way that was difficult to laugh at and impossible to turn aside.

When he said good-night to her he told her that he would probably come and see her soon. She went away in a flutter, for his words, though casual, had had a sharply significant sound; besides, he had very nearly kissed her; if she had been more truthful, she would have said quite.

She didn't, in thinking it over, know at all how this had happened, and she generally knew precisely how these things happened.

Lady Staines told her son at breakfast a few mornings later what she thought of Miss Fanshawe.

"She's a girl," she observed, knocking the top off her egg, "who will develop into a nervous invalid or an advanced coquette, and it entirely depends upon how much admiration she gets which she does. I hear she's religious, too, in a silly, egotistical way. She ought to have her neck wrung."

Sir Peter disagreed; they heard him in the servants' hall.

"Certainly not!" he roared; "certainly not! I don't think so at all! The girl's a damned pretty piece, and the man's one of my best tenants. He's only just come, and he's done wonders to the place already. And I won't have the boy crabbed for fancying a neighbor! It's very natural he should. You never have a woman in the house fit to look at. Who the devil do you expect your boys to marry? Negresses or bar-maids?"

"Gentlewomen," said Lady Staines, firmly, "unless their father's behavior prevents them from being accepted."

Winn said nothing. He got up and began cutting ham at the sideboard. His mother hesitated a moment; but as she had only roused one of her men, she made a further effort in the direction of the other.

"The girl's a mean-spirited little liar," she observed. "I wouldn't take her as a housemaid."

"You may have to take her as a daughter-in-law, though," Winn remarked without turning round from the sideboard.

"You may have to take her as a daughter-in-law, though," Winn remarked without turning round from the sideboard

Sir Peter grunted. He didn't like this at all, but he couldn't very well say so without appearing to agree with his wife, a thing he had carefully avoided doing for thirty years.

Lady Staines rose and gathered up her letters.

"You're of age," she said to her son, "and you've had about as much experience of civilized women as a European baby has of crocodiles, and you'll be just about as safe and clever with them. As for you, Peter, pray don't trouble to tell me what you think of the Fanshawes in a year's time. You've never had a tenant you haven't had a lawsuit with yet, and this time you'll be adding Winn's divorce proceedings to your other troubles. I should think you might begin to save toward the damages now."

Sir Peter's oaths accompanied his wife across the dining-room to the door, which her son opened ceremoniously for her. Their eyes crossed like swords.

"If I get that girl, you'll be nice to her," Winn said in a low voice.

"As long as you are," replied Lady Staines, with a grim smile. He did not bang

the door after her, as she had hoped; instead, he went to see the girl.

CHAPTER II

It was eleven o'clock when Winn arrived at the Fanshawes. Estelle was barely dressed, she always slept late, had her breakfast in bed, and gave as much trouble as possible to the servants.

However, when she heard who had called to see her, she sent for a basket and some roses, and five minutes later strolled into the drawing-room, with her hat on, and the flowers in her hands.

Her mother stayed in the garden and nervously thought out the lunch.

Winn seized the basket out of Estelle's hands, took her by the wrists, and drew her to the window.

She wasn't frightened of him, but she pretended to be. She said, "Oh, Major Staines!" She looked as soft and innocent as a cream-fed kitten. Winn cleared his throat. It made him feel rather religious to look at her. He did not of course see her as a kitten; he saw her approximately as an angel.

"Look here," he said, "my name's Winn."

"You're hurting my wrists," she murmured. He dropped them. "Winn," she said under her breath.

"I say," he said after a moment's pause, "would you mind marrying me?"

Estelle lifted her fine China blue eyes to his. They weren't soft, but they could sometimes look very mysterious.

"Oh," she said, "but, Winn—it's so sudden—so soon!"

"Leave's short," Winn explained, "and besides, I knew the moment I looked at you, I wanted you. I don't know how you feel, of course; but—well—I'm sure you aren't the kind of girl to let a fellow kiss you, are you, and mean nothing?"

Estelle's long lashes swept her cheeks; she behaved exquisitely. She was, of course, exactly that kind of girl.

"Ah," she said, with a little tremble in her voice, "if I do marry you—will you be

kind to me?"

Winn trembled, too; he flushed very red, and suddenly he did the funniest, most unlikely thing in the world: he got down on his knees beside her, and taking both her hands in his, he kissed them.

"I'll be like this as much as ever you'll let me," he said gravely.

He had a great craving for sweetness, delicacy, and gentleness; he began to tell her in little short, abrupt sentences how unworthy he was of her, not fit to touch her really—he was afraid he'd been horribly rough—and done lots of things she would have hated (he forgot to mention that he'd ever done anything worth doing as well); he explained that he didn't know any women a bit like her; there weren't any, of course, *really* like—but she knew what he meant. So that he expected she'd have to teach him a lot—would she—if she didn't mind, and overlook his being stupid?

Estelle listened thoughtfully for a few minutes, then she asked him if he didn't think eight bridesmaids would be better than four?

He got up from his knees then.

He didn't like discussing the wedding, and he got bored very soon and went away, so that Mrs. Fanshawe didn't need to have the special lunch she had ordered, after all.

They were to have a very short engagement, and Estelle decided on four bridesmaids and four pages; she was so small herself that children would look prettier and more innocent.

There was something particularly charming about a young wedding, and they were to have a celebration first—Estelle was most particular about that—and a wedding breakfast afterwards of course. Winn was extraordinarily kind to her; he let her settle everything she liked and gave her exactly the ring she wanted—an immense emerald set with diamonds. He wasn't in the least particular about where they spent the honeymoon, after making a very silly suggestion, which Estelle promptly over-ruled, that they might go to the East Coast and make a study of fortifications.

He agreed that London would do just as well, with theaters, and he could look up a man he knew at the War Office. Certainly they should go to the Ritz if Estelle liked it; but it was rather noisy.

The one point he did make was to have a young officer he liked, who had been with him in China, Lionel Drummond, as his best man, instead of his cousin Lord Arlington. His brothers were out of the question, as he couldn't have one without having a row with the other. Estelle wanted Lord Arlington, but when she pressed the point, Winn gave her a most extraordinary sharp look and said, "I thought I told you I wanted that boy Drummond?" It was a most peculiar and disconcerting look, well known in the Staines family. Trouble usually followed very quickly upon its heels. Estelle shivered and gave in and was rewarded by a diamond brooch.

This showed her how important shivering was going to be in her married life.

The only really disagreeable time Estelle had during her engagement was the short half hour in which Lady Staines fulfilled her maternal duties.

It was a rainy day and Lady Staines had walked two miles across the fields in what looked like a cricket cap, and a waterproof.

She cleaned her boots as carefully as she could in the hall. They were square-toed and hob-nailed and most unsuitable for a drawing-room.

Mrs. Fanshawe literally quailed before them. "You shouldn't have parquet floors," Lady Staines remarked, holding out her hand; "in the country, it's the ruin of them unless you wear paper soles," she glanced searchingly at Mrs. Fanshawe's and Estelle's feet. "And that of course is the ruin of your feet. Probably you've lived in London all your lives?"

Mrs. Fanshawe found herself in the position of apologizing for what had hitherto been her proudest boast. Lady Staines looked tolerantly around her. "London's a poor place," she observed, "and very shoddy. When my friends the Malverns lived here, they had old oak and rather nice chintzes. I see you go in for color schemes and nicknacks. I hope Estelle won't find Staines uncomfortable; however, she probably won't be with us often."

She turned to her future daughter-in-law. "You are Estelle, my dear, ain't you?" she demanded. "And I dare say you can't speak a word of French in spite of your fine name. Can you?"

Estelle hesitated and blushed. "Not very much, I'm afraid," she truthfully murmured. It flashed through her mind that with Lady Staines you must be truthful if there was any possible chance of your being found out.

"Hum!" said Lady Staines thoughtfully. "I can't see what people spend so much on education for nowadays. I really can't! And you're going to marry my second son, ain't you?" she demanded. "Well, I'm sure it's very kind of you. All the Staines have tempers, but Winn's is quite the worst. I don't want to exaggerate, but I really don't think you could match it in this world. He generally keeps it, too! He was a nasty, murderous, little boy. I assure you I've often beaten him till he was black and blue and never got a word out of him."

Mrs. Fanshawe looked horrified. "But my dear Lady Staines," she urged, "surely you tried kindness?"

Lady Staines shook her head. "No," she said, "I don't think so, I don't think I am kind—very. But he's turned out well, don't you think? He's the only one of my sons who's got honors—a 'D.S.O.' for South Africa, and a C.B. for something or other, I never know what, in China; and he got his Majority extraordinarily young for special services—or he wouldn't have been able to marry you, my dear, for his father won't help him. He doesn't get drunk as often as the other two boys, either; in fact, on the whole, I should call him satisfactory. And now he's chosen you, and I'm sure we're all very grateful to you for taking him in hand."

Mrs. Fanshawe offered her visitor tea; she was profoundly shocked, but she thought that tea would help. Lady Staines refused it. "No, thank you very much," she said. "I must be getting back to give Sir Peter his. I shall be late as it is, and I shall probably hear him swearing all down the drive. We shall all be seeing more than enough of each other before long. But there's no use making a fuss about it, is there? We're a most disagreeable family, and I'm sure it'll be worse for you than for us."

Estelle accompanied her future mother-in-law to the door. She had not been as much shocked as her mother.

Lady Staines laid her small neat hand on the girl's arm. She looked at her very hard, but there was a spark of some kind, behind the hardness; if the eyes hadn't been those of Lady Staines, they might almost have been said to plead.

"I wonder if you like him?" she said slowly.

Estelle said, "Oh, dear Lady Staines, believe me—with all my heart!"

Lady Staines didn't believe her, but she smiled good-humoredly. "Yes, yes, my dear, I know!" she said. "But how much heart have you got? You see his

happiness and yours depend on that. The woman who marries a Staines ought to have a good deal of heart and all of it ought to be his."

Estelle put on an air of pretty dignity. "I have never loved any one before," she asserted with serene untruthfulness (she felt sure this fact couldn't be proved against her), "and Winn believes in my heart."

"Does he?" said his mother. "I wonder. He believes in your pretty face! Well, it is pretty, I acknowledge that. Keep it as pretty as you can."

She didn't kiss her future daughter-in-law, but she tapped her lightly on the shoulder and trudged back with head erect through the rain.

"It's a bad business," she said to herself thoughtfully. "He's rushed his fence and there's a ditch on the other side of it, deep enough to drown him!"

CHAPTER III

Winn wanted, if possible, a home without rows. He knew very little of homes, and nothing which had made him suppose this ideal likely to be realized.

Still he went on having it, hiding it, and hoping for it.

Once he had come across it. It was the time when he had decided to undertake a mission to Tibet without a government mandate. He wanted young Drummond to go with him. The job was an awkward and dangerous one. Certain authorities had warned Winn that though, if the results were satisfactory, it would certainly be counted in his favor, should anything go wrong no help could be sent to him, and he would be held personally responsible; that is he would be held responsible if he were not dead, which was the most likely outcome of the whole business.

It is easy to test a man on the Indian frontier, and Winn had had his eye on Lionel Drummond for two years. He was a cool-headed, reliable boy, and in some occult and wholly unexpressed way Winn was conscious that he was strongly drawn to him. Winn offered him the job, and even consented, when he was on leave, to visit the Drummonds and talk the matter over with the boy's parents. It was then that he discovered that people really could have a quiet home.

Mrs. Drummond was a woman of a great deal of character, very great gentleness, and equal courage. She neither cried nor made fusses, and no one could even have imagined her making a noise.

It was she who virtually settled, after a private talk with Winn, that Lionel might accompany him. The extraordinary thing that Mrs. Drummond said to Winn was, "You see, I feel quite sure that you'll look after Lionel, whatever happens."

Winn had replied coldly, "I should never dream of taking a man who couldn't look after himself."

Mrs. Drummond said nothing. She just smiled at Winn as if he had agreed that he would look after Lionel. General Drummond was non-committal. He knew the boy would get on without the mission, but he also seemed to be influenced

by some absurd idea that Winn was to be indefinitely trusted, so that he would say nothing to stop them. Lionel himself was wild with delight, and the whole affair was managed without suspicion, resentment, or hostility.

The expedition was quite as hard as the authorities had intimated, and at one point it very nearly proved fatal. A bad attack of dysentery and snow blindness brought Lionel down at a very inconvenient spot, crossing the mountains of Tibet during a blizzard. The rest of the party said with some truth that they must go forward or perish. Winn sent them on to the next settlement, keeping back a few stores and plenty of cartridges. He said that he would rejoin them with Drummond when Drummond was better, and if he did not arrive before a certain date they were to push on without him.

They were alone together for six weeks, and during these six weeks Winn discovered that he was quite a new kind of person; for one thing he developed into a first-rate nurse, and he could be just like a mother, and say the silliest, gentlest things. No one was there to see or hear him, and the boy was so ill that he wouldn't be likely to remember afterwards. He did remember, however, he remembered all his life. The stores ran out and they were dependent on Winn's rifle for food. They melted snow water to drink, and there were days when their chances looked practically invisible.

Somehow or other they got out of it, the boy grew better, the weather improved, and Winn managed, though the exact means were never specified, to drag Lionel on a sledge to the nearest settlement, where the rest of the party were still awaiting them.

After that the expedition was successful and the friendship between the two men final. Winn didn't like to think what Mrs. Drummond would say to him when they got back to England, but she let him down quite easily; she gave him no thanks, she only looked at him with Lionel's steady eyes and said, smiling a little, "I always knew you'd bring him back to me."

Winn did not ask Lionel to stay at Staines Court until the wedding. None of the Staines went in much for making friends, and he didn't want his mother to see that he was fond of any one.

The night before the wedding, however, Lionel arrived in the midst of an altercation as to who had ordered the motor to meet the wrong train.

This lasted a long time because all the Staines, except Dolores, were gathered

together, and it expanded unexpectedly into an attack on Charles, the eldest son, whose name had been coupled with that of a lady whose professional aptitudes were described as those of a manicurist. There was a moment when murder of a particularly atrocious and internecine character seemed the only possible outcome to the discussion—then Charles in a white fury found the door.

Before he had gone out of earshot Sir Peter asked Lionel what his father would do if presented with a possible daughter-in-law so markedly frail? Sir Peter seemed to be laboring under the delusion that he had been weakly favorable to his son's inclinations, and that any other father would have expressed himself more forcibly. Lionel was saved from the awkwardness of disagreeing with him by an unexpected remark from Lady Staines.

"A girl from some kind of a chemist's shop," she observed musingly. "I fancy she's too good for Charles."

Sir Peter, who was fond of Charles, said the girl was probably not from a chemist's shop; and described to the horror of the butler, who had entered to prepare the tea-table, just what kind of a place she probably was from.

Lady Staines looked at Winn, and said she didn't see that it was much worse to marry a manicure girl than one who looked like a manequin. They were neither of them types likely to do credit to the family. Winn replied that, as far as that went, bad clothes and good morals did not always go together. He was prepared apparently with an apt illustration, when Isabella's husband, the Rev. Mr. Betchley, asked feebly if he might go up-stairs to rest.

It was quite obvious to everybody that he needed it.

The next morning at breakfast the manicure girl was again discussed, but in a veiled way so as not really to upset Charles before the wedding.

Winn escaped immediately afterwards with Lionel. They went for a walk, most of which was conducted in silence; finally, however, they found a log, took out their pipes, and made themselves comfortable.

Lionel said, "I wish I'd seen Miss Fanshawe; it must be awfully jolly for you, Winn."

Winn was silent for a minute or two, then he began, slowly gathering impetus as he went on: "Well—yes, of course, in a sense it is. I mean, I know I'm awfully lucky and all that, only—you see, old chap, I'm frightfully ignorant of women. I

know one sort of course—a jolly sight better than you do—but girls! Hang it all, I don't know girls. That's what worries me—she's such a little thing." He paused a moment. "I hope it's all right," he said, "marrying her. It seems pretty rough on them sometimes, I think—don't you—I fancy she's delicate and all that." Lionel nodded. "It does seem rather beastly," he admitted, "their having to have a hard time, I mean—but if they care for you—I suppose it works out all right." Winn paid no attention to this fruitless optimism. He went on with his study of Estelle. "She's—she's religious too, you know, that's why we're to have that other service first. Rather nice idea, I think, don't you, what? Makes it a bit of a strain for her though I'm afraid, but she'd never think of that. I'm sure she's plucky." Lionel also was quite sure Estelle must be plucky.

"Fancy you getting married," Lionel said suddenly. "I can't see it somehow."

"I feel it funny myself," Winn admitted. "You see, it's so damned long, and I never have seen much of women. I hope she won't expect me to talk a lot or anything of that kind. Her people, you know, chatter like so many magpies—just oozes out of 'em."

"We must be off," Lionel said.

They stood up, knocked the ashes out of their pipes, and prepared to walk on.

It was a mild June day, small vague hills stretched behind them, and before them soft, lawn-like fields fell away to the river's edge.

Everywhere the green of trees in a hundred tones of color and with delicate, innumerable leaf shadows, laid upon the landscape, the fragrance and lightness of the spring.

They were in a temperate land, every yard of it was cultivated and civilized, immensely lived on and understood. None of it had been neglected or was dangerous or strange to the eye of man.

Simultaneously the thought flashed between them of other lands and of sharper vicissitudes; they saw again bleak passes which were cruel death traps, and above them untrodden alien heights; they felt the solemn vastness of the interminable, flawless snows. They kept their eyes away from each other—but they knew what each other was feeling, adventure and danger were calling to them—the old sting and thrill of an unending trail; and then from a little hollow in the guarded hills rang out the wedding bells.

Lionel looked a little shyly at his chief. "I wonder," he said, as Winn made no response, "if we can ever do things—things together again, I mean—I should like to think we could." Winn gave him a quick look and moved hastily ahead over the field path toward the church. "Why the devil shouldn't we?" he threw back at Lionel over his shoulder.

CHAPTER IV

Estelle's wedding was a great success, but this was not surprising when one realized how many years had been spent in preparation for it. Estelle was only twenty-three, but for the last ten years she had known that she would marry, and she had thought out every detail of the ceremony except the bridegroom. You could have any kind of a bridegroom—men were essentially imperfect—but you need have only one kind of ceremony, and that could be ideal.

Estelle had visualized everything from the last pot of lilies—always Annunciation ones, not Arum, which look pagan—at the altar to the red cloth at the door. There were to be rose-leaves instead of rice; the wedding was to be in June, with a tent in the garden and strawberries.

If possible, she would be married by a bishop; if not, by a dean. The bishop having proved too remote, the dean had to do. But he was a fine-looking man, and would be made a bishop soon, so Estelle did not really mind. The great thing was to have gaiters on the lawn afterward.

The day was perfect. Estelle woke at her usual hour in the morning, her heart was beating a little faster than it generally did, and then she remembered with a pang of joy the perfect fit of her wedding-gown hanging in the wardrobe. She murmured to herself:

"One love, one life." She was not thinking of Winn, but she had always meant to say that on her wedding morning.

Then she had early tea. Her mother came in and kissed her, and Estelle implored her not to fuss, and above all not to get red in the face before going to church, where she was to wear a mauve hat.

It was difficult for Mrs. Fanshawe not to fuss, Estelle was the most expensive of her children and in a way the most important; for if she wasn't pleased it was always so dreadful. There were half a dozen younger children and any of them might do something tiresome.

Estelle arrived at the church five minutes late, on her father's arm, followed by four little bridesmaids in pink and white, and four little pages in blue and white.

The effect was charming.

The village church was comfortably full, and with her eyes modestly cast down Estelle managed to see that all the right people were there, including the clergyman's daughters, whom she had always hated.

The Fanshawes and her mother's relations the Arnots had come down from town. They all looked very prosperous people with good dressmakers and tailors, and most of them had given her handsome silver wedding presents or checks.

They were on one side of the church just as Estelle had always pictured them, and on the other were the Staines and their relations. The Staines had very few friends, and those they had were hard riding, hunting people, who never look their best in satin. There was no doubt that the Staines sitting in the front seat were a blot on the whole affair.

You couldn't tell everybody that they were a county family, and they didn't look like it. They were too large and coarse, and took up far too much room. There they sat, six big creatures in one pew, all restless, all with big chins, hard eyes, jutting eyebrows, and a dreadful look as if they were buccaneering. As a matter of fact they all felt rather timid and flat, and meant to behave beautifully, though Sir Peter needn't have blown his nose like a trumpet and stamped simultaneously just as Estelle entered.

At the top of the aisle Winn waited for his bride; and his boots were dusty. Standing behind him was the handsomest man that Estelle had ever seen; and not only that, but the very kind of man she had always wished to see. It made Estelle feel for a moment like a good housekeeper, who has not been told that a distinguished guest was coming to dinner. If she had known, she would have ordered something different. She felt in a flash that he was the kind of bridegroom who would have suited the ceremony.

He was several inches taller than Winn, slim, with a small athletic head and perfectly cut Greek features; his face would have been a shade too regular and too handsome if he had not had the very same hard-bitten look in his young gray eyes that Winn had in his bright, hawk-like brown ones. Lionel was looking at Estelle as she came up the aisle in a tender, protective, admiring way, as if she were a very beautiful flower. This was most satisfactory, but at least Winn might have done the same. Instead of looking as if he were waiting for his bride, he looked exactly as if he were holding a narrow pass against an enemy. His very figure had a peculiarly stern and rock-like expression. His broad shoulders were

set, his rather heavy head erect, and when he did look at Estelle, it was an inconceivably sharp look as if he were trying to see through her.

She didn't know, of course, that on his way to church he had thought every little white cloud in the blue sky was like her, and every lily in a cottage garden. There was a drop of sardonic blood in him, that made him challenge her even at the moment of achieved surrender.

"By Jove," he thought to himself, "can she be as beautiful as she looks?"

Then the service began, and they had the celebration first, and afterward the usual ceremony, perfectly conducted, and including the rather over-exercised "Voice that Breathed o'er Eden." The dean gave them an excellent, short and evasive address about their married duties, a great deal nicer than anything in the Prayer Book, and the March from Lohengrin took them to the vestry. In the vestry Winn began to be tiresome. The vicar said:

"Kiss the bride," and Winn replied:

"No, thanks; not at present," looking like a stone wall, and sticking his hands in his pockets. The vicar, who had known him from a boy, did not press the point; but of course the dean looked surprised. Any dean would.

The reception afterwards would have been perfect but for the Staines, who tramped through everything. Estelle perpetually saw them bursting into places where they weren't wanted, and shouting remarks which sounded abusive but were meant to be cordial to cowering Fanshawes and Arnots. It was really not necessary for Sir Peter to say in the middle of the lawn that what Mr. Fanshawe wanted was more manure.

It seemed to Estelle that wherever she went she heard Sir Peter's resonant voice talking about manure.

Lady Staines was much quieter; still she needn't have remarked to Estelle's mother, "Well—I'm glad to see you have seven children, *that* looks promising at any rate." It made two unmarried ladies of uncertain age walk into a flower-bed.

Winn behaved abominably. He took the youngest Fanshawe child and disappeared with him into the stable yard.

Even Charles and James behaved better than that. They hurled well-chosen incomprehensible jokes at the clergyman's daughters—dreadful girls who played

hockey and had known the Staines all their lives—and these ladies returned their missiles with interest.

It caused a good deal of noise, but it sounded hearty.

Isabella, being a clergyman's wife, talked to the Dean, who soon looked more astonished than ever.

At last it was all comfortably over. Estelle, leaning on her father's arm in pale blue, kissed her mother. Mrs. Fanshawe looked at the end rather tactlessly cheerful. (She had cried throughout the ceremony, just when she had worn the mauve hat and Estelle had hoped she wouldn't.)

Mr. Fanshawe behaved much more suitably; he said to Winn with a trembling voice, "Take care of my little girl," and Winn, who might have said something graceful in reply, merely shook his father-in-law's hand with such force that Mr. Fanshawe, red with pain, hastily retreated.

Lionel Drummond was charming and much appreciated everywhere; he retrieved Winn from the stable yard when no one could guess where he was, and was the first person to call Estelle, Mrs. Staines; he wound up the affair with a white satin slipper.

When they drove off, Estelle turned toward Winn with shining eyes and quivering lips. It was the moment for a judicious amount of love-making, and all Winn said was:

"Look here, you know, those high-heeled things on your feet are absolutely murderous. They might give you a bad tumble. Don't let me see you in 'em again. Are you sure you're quite comfortable, and all that?"

He made the same absurd fuss about Estelle's comfort in the railway carriage; but it was one of the last occasions on which he did it, because he discovered almost immediately that however many things you could think of for Estelle's comfort, she could think of more for herself, and no matter how much care or attention was lavished upon her, it could never quite equal her unerring instinct for her own requirements.

After this he was prepared to be ardent, but Estelle didn't care for ardor in a railway train, so she soon stopped it. One of the funny things she discovered about Winn was that it was the easiest possible thing to stop his ardor, and this was really odd, because it was not from lack of strength in his emotion. She

never quite discovered what it did come from, because it didn't occur to her that Winn would very much rather have died than offend or tire the woman he loved.

She thought that Winn was rather coarse, but he wasn't as coarse as that!

Estelle had a great deal that she wanted to talk over about the wedding. The whole occasion flamed out at her—a perfect project, perfectly carried out. She explained to Winn at length who everybody was and how there had been some people there who had had to be taken down, and others who had had to be pushed forward, and her mother explained to, and her father checked, and the children (it was too dreadful how they'd let Bobby run after Winn), kept as much out of the way as possible.

Winn listened hard and tried to follow intelligently all the family histories she evolved for him. At last after a rather prolonged pause on his part, just at a point when he should have expressed admiration of her guidance of a delicate affair, Estelle glanced at him and discovered that he was asleep! They hadn't been married for three hours, and he could go to sleep in the middle of their first real talk! She was sure Lionel Drummond wouldn't have done any such thing. But Winn was old—he was thirty-five—and she could see quite plainly now that the hair round the tops of his ears was gray. She looked at him scornfully, but he didn't wake up.

When he woke up he laughed.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I believe I've been to sleep!" but he didn't apologize. He began instead to tell her some things that might interest her, about what Drummond, his best man, and he, had done in Manchuria, just as if nothing had happened; but naturally Estelle wouldn't be interested. She was first polite, then bored, then captious. Winn looked at her rather hard. "Are you trying to pay me back for falling asleep?" he asked with a queer little laugh. "Is that what you're up to?" Estelle stiffened.

"Certainly not," she said. "I simply wasn't very interested. I don't think I like Chinese stories, and Manchuria is just the same, of course."

Winn leaned over her, with a wicked light in his eyes, like a naughty school boy. "Own up!" he said, laying his rough hand very gently on her shoulder. "Own up, old lady!"

But has anybody ever owned up when they were being spiteful?

Estelle didn't. She looked at Winn's hand till he withdrew it, and then she remarked that she was feeling faint from want of food.

After she had had seven chicken sandwiches, pâté de foie gras, half a melon, and some champagne, she began to be agreeable.

Winn was delighted at this change in her and quite inclined to think that their little "breeze" had been entirely due to his own awkwardness. Still, he wished she had owned up.

CHAPTER V

It took Winn a month to realize that he had paid his money, had his shy, and knocked down an empty cocoanut.

He couldn't get his money back, and he must spend the rest of his life carrying the cocoanut about with him.

It never occurred to him to shirk the institution of marriage. The church, the law, and the army stood in his mind for good, indelible things. Estelle was his wife as much as his handkerchief was his handkerchief. This meant that they were to be faithful to each other, go out to dinner together, and that he was to pay her bills. He knew the great thing in any tight corner was never under any circumstances to let go. All the dangers he had ever been in, had yielded, only because he hadn't.

It was true he had not been married before, but the same rule no doubt held good of marriage. If he held on to it, something more bearable would come of it. Then one could be out of the house a good deal, and there was the regiment. He began to see his way through marriage as a man sees his way through a gap in an awkward fence. The unfortunate part of it was that he couldn't get through the gap unless Estelle shared his insight.

He would have liked to put it to her, but he didn't know how; he never had had a great gift of expression, and something had brought him up very short in his communications with his wife.

It was so slight a thing that Estelle herself had forgotten all about it, but to a Staines it was absolutely final. She had told the gardener that Winn wanted hyacinths planted in the front bed. Winn hadn't wanted a garden at all, and he had let her have her way in everything else; but he had said quite plainly that he wouldn't on any account have hyacinths. The expression he used about them was excessively coarse, and it certainly should have remained in Estelle's memory. He had said, that the bally things stank. Nevertheless, Estelle had told the gardener that the master wanted hyacinths, and the gardener had told Winn. Winn gazed at the gardener in a way which made him wish that he had never been a gardener, but had taken up any other profession in which he was unlikely to meet a glance so "nasty." Then Winn said quietly:

"You are perfectly sure, Parsons, that Mrs. Staines told you it was *my* wish to have the hyacinths?" And the gardener had said:

"Yes, sir. She *did* say, sir, as 'ow you 'ad a particler fancy for them." And Winn had gone into the house and asked Estelle what the devil she meant? Estelle immediately denied the hyacinths and the gardener. People like that, she said, always misunderstand what one said to them.

"Very well, then," Winn replied. "He has lied to me, and must go. I'll dismiss him at once. He told me distinctly that you had said I liked them."

Estelle fidgeted. She didn't want the gardener to go. She really couldn't remember what she'd said and what she hadn't said to him. And Winn was absurd, and how could it matter, and the people next door had hyacinths, and they'd always had them at home!

Winn listened in silence. He didn't say anything more about the gardener having lied, and he didn't countermand the hyacinths; only from that moment he ceased to believe a single word his wife said to him. This is discouraging to conversation and was very unfair to Estelle; for she might have told the truth more often if she had not discovered that it made no difference to her husband whether she told it to him or not.

Estelle knew that her heart was broken, but on the whole she did not find that she was greatly inconvenienced.

In an unhappy marriage the woman generally scores unless she is in love with her husband. Estelle never had been in love with Winn; she had had an agreeable feeling about him, and now she had a disagreeable feeling about him, but neither of these emotions could be compared with beaten-brass hot-water jugs, which she had always meant to have when she was married.

If Winn had remained deeply in love with her, besides making things more comfortable at meals it would have been a feather in her cap. Still his cruelty could be turned into another almost more becoming feather.

She said to herself and a little later to the nearest clergyman, "I must make an offering of my sorrow." She offered it a good deal, almost to every person she met. Even the cook was aware of it; but, like all servants, she unhesitatingly sided with the master. He might be in the wrong, but he was seldom if ever in the kitchen.

They had to have a house and servants, because Estelle felt that marriage without a house was hardly legal; and Winn had given way about it, as he was apt to do about things Estelle wanted. His very cruelty made him particularly generous about money.

But Estelle was never for a moment taken in by his generosity; she saw that it was his way of getting out of being in love with her. Winn was a bad man and had ruined her life—this forced her to supplement her trousseau.

Later on when he put down one of his hunters and sold a polo pony so that she could have a maid, she began to wonder if she had at all found out how bad he really was?

There was one point he never yielded; he firmly intended to rejoin his regiment in March.

The station to which they would have to go was five thousand feet up, lonely, healthy, and quite unfashionable. Winn had tried to make it seem jolly to her and had mentioned as a recommendation apparently that it was the kind of place in which you needn't wear gloves. It was close to the border, and women had to be a little careful where they rode.

Estelle had every intention of being careful; she would, she thought, be too careful ever to go to the Indian frontier at all. She had often heard of the tragic separations of Anglo-Indian marriages; it was true that they were generally caused by illness and children, but there must be other methods of obtaining the same immunities.

She had never had any difficulty with the doctor at home; she relied on him entirely, and he had invariably ordered her what she wanted, after a nice quiet talk.

Travers, the regimental doctor, was different, he looked exactly like a vet, and only understood things you had actually broken. Still Estelle put her trust in Providence; no self-respecting higher Power could wish a woman of her type to be wasted on a hill station. Something would happen to help her, and if not, she would be given grace to help herself.

One day Winn came down to breakfast with a particularly disagreeable expression. He said "good-morning" into his newspaper as usual without noticing her pathetic little smile.

He only unburied himself to take his second cup of coffee, then he said, without looking at her,

"It's a beastly nuisance, the War Office want me to extend my leave—hanged if I do."

Estelle thanked Heaven in a flash and passed him the marmalade. She had never dreamed the War Office could be so efficient.

"That shows," she said gracefully, "what they think of you!"

Winn turned his sardonic eyes towards her. "Thanks," he drawled, "I dare say it's the kind of thing you'd like. They propose that I should stay on here at the Staff College for another year and write 'em a damned red tape report on Tibet." His irony, dropped from him. "If it was a job," he said in a low voice, "I'd go like a shot."

"Mightn't it mean promotion?" she asked a little nervously. Winn shrugged his shoulders. "I can write anything they want out there," he said gloomily. "All I want is ink! What I know I've got in my head, you see. I'd take that with me."

"But you couldn't talk things over with them or answer their questions, could you?" Estelle intelligently ventured. She had an intelligence which ripened along the line of her desires.

"I could tell them anything they want to know in ten minutes!" said Winn impatiently. "They don't want information, they want a straight swift kick! They know what I think—they just want me to string out a lot of excuses for them not to act! Besides the chief thing is—they'd have to send for me, if there was a row—I know the ground and the other chaps don't. I wish to God there'd be a row!"

Estelle sighed and gazed pathetically out of the window. Her eyes rested on the bed where the hyacinths were planted, and beyond it to gorse bushes and a corrugated iron shed.

They were at Aldershot, which was really rather a good place for meeting suitable people. "What do you intend to do?" she asked, trembling a little. Winn was at his worst when questioned as to his intentions; he preferred to let them explode like fire-crackers.

"Do!" he snorted, "Write and tell 'em when they've got any kind of job on the size of six-pence I'll be in it! And if not Tibet's about as useful to draw up a

report on—as ice in the hunting season—and I'm off in March—and that's that!"

A tear rolled down Estelle's cheek and splashed on the tablecloth; she trembled harder until her teaspoon rattled.

Winn looked at her. "What's up?" he asked irritably. "Anything wrong?"

"I suppose," she said, prolonging a small sob, "you don't care what I feel about going to India?"

"But you knew we were always going out in March didn't you?" he asked, as if that had anything to do with it! The absurd face value that he gave to facts was enough to madden any woman. Estelle sobbed harder.

"I never knew I should be so unhappy!" she moaned. Winn looked extremely foolish and rather conscience-stricken; he even made a movement to rise, but thought better of it.

"I'm sure I'm awfully sorry," he said apologetically. "I suppose you mean you're a bit sick of me, don't you?" Estelle wiped her eyes, and returned to her toast. "Can't you see," she asked bitterly, "that our life together is the most awful tragedy?"

"Oh, come now," said Winn, who associated tragedy solely with police courts and theaters. "It's not so bad as all that, is it? We can rub along, you know. I dare say I've been rather a brute, but I shall be a lot better company when I'm back in the regiment. We must buck up, that's all! I don't like to bother you about it, but I think you'd see things differently if we had a kid. I do really. I've seen heaps of scratch marriages turn out jolly well—when the kids began to come!"

"How can you be so disgustingly coarse!" shuddered Estelle. "Besides, I'm far too delicate! Not that you would care if I died! You'd just marry again!"

"Oh, no! I shouldn't do that," said Winn in his horrid quiet way which might mean anything. He got up and walked to the window. "You wouldn't die," he observed with his back turned to her. "You'd be a jolly sight stronger all the rest of your life! I asked Travers!"

"Oh!" she cried, "you don't mean to tell me that you talked me over with that disgusting red-faced man!"

"I don't talk people over," said Winn without turning round. "He's a doctor. I

asked his opinion!"

"Well," she said, "I think it was horrible of you—and—and most ungentlemanly. If I'd wanted to know, I'd have found out for myself. I haven't the slightest confidence in regimental doctors."

Winn said nothing. One of the things Estelle most disliked in him was the way in which it seemed as if he had some curious sense of delicacy of his own. She wanted to think of Winn as a man impervious to all refinement, born to outrage the nicer susceptibility of her own mind, but there were moments when it seemed as if he didn't think the susceptibilities of her mind were nice at all. He was not awed by her purity.

He didn't say anything of course, but he let certain subjects prematurely drop.

Suddenly he turned round from the window and fixed his eyes on hers. She thought he was going to be very violent, but he wasn't, he talked quite quietly, only something hard and bright in his eyes warned her to be careful.

"Look here," he said, "I've thought of something, a kind of bargain! I'll give in to you about this job, if you'll give in to me about the other! It's no use fighting over things, is it?

"If you'll have a kid, I'll stay on here for a year more; if you won't, I'll clear out in March and you'll have to come with me, for I can't afford two establishments. I don't see what else to offer you unless you want to go straight back to your people. You'd hardly care to go to mine, if they'd have you.

"But if you do what I ask about the child—I'll meet you all the way round—I swear to—you shan't forget it! Only you must ride straight. If you play me any monkey tricks over it—you'll never set eyes on me again; and I'm afraid you'll have to have Travers, because I trust him, not some slippery old woman who'd let you play him like a fish! D'you understand?"

Estelle stared aghast at this mixture of brutality and cunning. Her mind flew round and round like a squirrel in a cage.

She could have managed beautifully if it hadn't been for Travers. Travers would be as impervious to handling as a battery mule. She really wouldn't be able to do anything with Travers. He looked as if he drank; but he didn't.

Of course having a baby was simply horrid; lots of women got out of it

nowadays who were quite happily married.

It was disgusting of Winn to suggest it when he didn't even love her.

But once she had one, if she really did give way, a good deal might be done with it.

Maternity was sacred; being a wife on the other hand was "forever climbing up the climbing wave," there was nothing final about it as there was in being able to say, "I am the mother of your child!"

Her wistful blue eyes expanded. She saw her own way spreading out before her like a promised land. "I can't," she said touchingly, "decide all this in a minute."

He could stay on for two years at the War Office, and Estelle meant him to stay without inconvenience to herself. He tried bargaining with her; but her idea of a bargain was one-sided.

"I sometimes feel as if you kept me out of everything," she said at last.

Estelle was feeling her way; she thought she might collect a few extras to add to her side of the bargain.

Apparently she was right. Winn was all eagerness to meet her. "How do you mean?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh," she said contemplatively, "such heaps of things! One thing, I don't expect you've ever noticed that you never ask your friends to stay here. I've had all mine; you've never even asked your mother! It's as if you were ashamed of me."

"I'll ask her like a shot if you like," he said eagerly. Estelle was not anxious for a visit from Lady Staines, but she thought it sounded better to begin with her. She let her pass.

"It's not only your relations," she went on; "it's your friends. What must they think of a wife they are never allowed to see?"

"But they're such a bachelor crew," he objected. "It never occurred to me you'd care for them—just ordinary soldier chaps like me, not a bit clever or amusing."

Estelle did not say that crews of bachelors are seldom out of place in the drawing-room of a young and pretty woman. She looked past her husband to where in fancy she beheld the aisle of a church and the young Adonis, who had

been his best man, with eyes full of reverence and awe gazing at her approaching figure.

"I thought," she said indifferently, "you liked that man you insisted on having instead of Lord Arlington at the wedding?"

"I do," said Winn. "He's my best friend. I meet him sometimes in town, you know."

"He must think it awfully funny," said Estelle, sadly, "our never having him down here."

"He's not that sort," said Winn. "He was my sub, you know. He wouldn't think anything funny unless I told him to. We know each other rather well."

"That makes it funnier still," said Estelle, relentlessly.

"Oh, all right," said Winn, after a moment's pause. "Have him down here if you like. Shall I write to him or will you?"

"He's your friend," said Estelle, politely.

"Yes," said Winn, "but it's your idea." There was a peculiar look in his eyes, as if he wanted to warn her about something. He went to the door and then glanced back at her, apparently hoping that she had changed her mind.

Estelle hadn't the faintest intention of changing her mind. She had already decided to put sweet peas in Lionel's room and a marked copy of "The Road Mender."

"You may as well ask him yourself," said Winn, "if you really want him to come."

CHAPTER VI

It was time, Estelle felt, that the real things of life should come back to her. She had had them before marriage—these real things—light, swift, contacts with chosen spirits; friendships not untinged with a liability to become something less capable of definition. But since her marriage she had been forced into a world of secondary experiences. Winn, to begin with, had stood very much in the way, and when he had ceased to block the paths of sentiment she had not found a substitute. At Aldershot, where they lived, there was an unspoken rule that brides should be left alone. Women called, and men were polite, but when Estelle began those delicate personal conversations which led the way to deeper spiritual contacts she discovered that nothing followed. She could not say that she found the men elusive; stone walls are not elusive, but they do not lend themselves to an easy way across country. As to women, theoretically Estelle desired their friendship just as much as that of men; but in practice she generally found them unsympathetic, and incapable of the finest type of intimacy. They did not seem to know what the word devotion meant. Men did, especially young men, though the older ones talked more about it. Estelle had already seen herself after marriage as a confidante to Winn's young brother officers. She would help them as only a good woman can. (She foresaw particularly how she would help to extricate them from the influences of bad women. It was extraordinary how many women who influenced men at all were bad!) Estelle never had any two opinions about being a good woman herself. She couldn't be anything else. Good women held all the cards, but there was no reason why they shouldn't be attractive; it was their failure to grasp this potentiality, which gave bad women their temporary sway.

It was really necessary in the missionary career open to young and attractive married women, to be magnetic. Up to a certain point men must be led on, because if they didn't care for you in the right way you couldn't do anything with them at all. After that point, they must be gently and firmly stopped, or else they might become tiresome, and that would be bad both for them and for you. Especially with a husband like Winn, who seemed incapable of grasping fine shades, and far too capable of dealing roughly and brutally with whatever he did grasp. There had been a dress, for instance, that he simply refused to let Estelle wear—remarking that it was a bit too thick—though that was really the last

quality it had possessed.

The question of congenial friendship was therefore likely to be a difficulty, but Estelle had never forgotten Lionel Drummond. When she stopped thinking about Winn except as an annoyance, it became necessary for her to think of somebody else, and her mind fixed itself at once upon her husband's friend. It seemed to her that in Lionel Drummond she would find a perfect spiritual counterpart. She dreamed of a friendship with him too deep for mere friendliness, too late for accepted love; and it seemed to her exactly the kind of thing she wanted. Hand in hand they would tread the path of duty together, surrounded by a rosy mist.

They might even lead Winn to higher things; but at this point Estelle's imagination balked. She could not see Winn being led—he was too truculent—and he had never in his tenderest moments evinced the slightest taste for higher things. It would be better perhaps if they simply set him a good example. He would be certain not to follow it.

She and Lionel would have terrible moments, of course. Estelle thrilled at the thought of these moments, and from time to time she slightly stretched the elastic of the path of duty to meet them. They would still keep on it, of course; they would never go any further than Petrarch and Laura. These historic philanderers should be their limit, and when the worst came to the worst, Estelle would softly murmur to Lionel, "Petrarch and Laura have borne it, and we must bear it too."

She became impatient for Lionel's arrival and bought a new and exquisitely becoming blue chiffon dress. Both she and her maid were so struck by her appearance that when Estelle heard Winn banging about at the last moment in his dressing room, she knocked at his door. Even the lowest type of man can be used as a superior form of looking glass. He shouted "Come in!" and stared at her while he fumbled at his collar stud; then he lifted his eyebrows and said "War-paint—eh?"

"I only wanted to remind you, dear," said Estelle patiently, "that the key of the wine cellar is in my bureau drawer."

Lionel arrived before Winn had finished dressing. Estelle greeted him with outstretched hands. "I am so very glad to see you at last," she said in her softest, friendliest voice. "I think it will do Winn good to have you here."

Lionel laughed shyly.

"I shouldn't have thought," he said, "that Winn would need much more good."

"Ah, my dear fellow!" said Winn's voice behind him, "you don't know how great my needs are. Sorry I couldn't meet you."

Estelle's beautiful, wavering eyes rested for a moment on her husband. She had never known a man to dress so quickly, and it seemed to her an unnecessary quality.

The dinner was a great success. Both men were absurdly gay. Winn told good stories, laughed at Lionel, and rallied his young wife. She had never seen him like this before, and she put it down to the way one man sets off another.

Estelle felt that she was being a great success, and it warmed her heart. The two men talked for her and listened to her; she had a moment when she thought that perhaps, after all, she needn't relegate Winn to a lower world.

They accepted with enthusiasm her offer to sing to them after dinner and then they kept her waiting in the drawing-room for an hour and a half.

She sat there opposite a tall Italian mirror, quivering with her power, her beauty, her ability to charm, and with nothing before her but the empty coffee-cups.

She played a little, she even sang a little (the house was small) to recall them to a sense of her presence, but inexplicably they clung to their talk. Winn who at ordinary times seemed incapable of more than disconnected fragments of speech was (she could hear him now and then quite distinctly) talking like a cataract; and Lionel was, if anything, worse. Her impatience turned into suspicion. Probably Winn was poisoning his friend's mind against her. Perhaps he was drinking too much, Sir Peter did, and people often took after their fathers. That would have to be another point for Lionel and her to tackle. At last they came in, and Lionel said without any attempt at an apology:

"We should love some music, Mrs. Winn."

Winn said nothing. He stuck his hands into his pockets, and stood in front of the fireplace in a horribly British manner while she turned over her songs. Estelle sang rather prettily. She preferred songs of a type that dealt with bitter regret over unexplained partings. She sang them with a great deal of expression and a slight difficulty in letting go of the top notes. After she had sung two or three, Lionel said:

"Now, Winn, you sing."

Estelle started. She had never before heard of this accomplishment of her husband's. It occurred to her now that Lionel would think it very strange she hadn't, but he need never know unless Winn gave her away. She need not have been afraid. Winn said quietly, as if he said it to her every evening, "D'you mind playing for me, Estelle?" Then he dragged out from under her music a big black book in which he had painstakingly copied and collected his selection of songs.

He had a high, clear baritone, very true and strangely impressive; it filled the little room. When he had finished, Lionel forgot to ask Estelle to sing again. Winn excused himself; he said he had a letter or two to write and left them.

"It's jolly, your both singing," Lionel said, looking at her with the same admiring friendliness he had shown her before. She guessed then that Winn had said nothing against her. After all, at the bottom of her heart she had known he wouldn't. You can't live with a man for five months and not know where you are safe.

Estelle smiled prettily.

"Yes," she said gently, "music is a great bond," and then she began to talk to Lionel about himself.

She had a theory that all men liked to talk exclusively about themselves, and it is certain that most men enjoyed their conversation with her; but in this particular instance she made a mistake. Lionel did not like talking about himself, and above all he disliked sympathetic admiration. He was not a conceited man, and it had not occurred to him that he was a suitable subject for admiration. Nor did he see why he should receive sympathy. He had had an admirably free and happy life with parents who were his dearest friends, and with a friend who was to him a hero beyond the need of definition.

Still, he wouldn't have shrunk from talking about Winn with Estelle. It was her right to talk about him, her splendid, perfect privilege. He supposed that she was a little shy, because she seemed to slip away from their obvious great topic; but he wished, if she wasn't going to talk about Winn, she would leave his people alone.

She tried to sympathize with him about his home difficulties, and when she discovered that he hadn't any, her sympathy veered to the horrible distance he

had to be away from it.

"Oh, well," said Lionel, "it's my father's old regiment, you know; that makes it awfully different. They know as much about my life as I do myself, and when I don't get leave, they often come out to me for a month or two. They're good travelers."

"They must be simply wonderful!" Estelle said ecstatically. Lionel said nothing. He looked slightly amazed. It seemed so funny that Winn, who hadn't much use for ecstasy, should have married a so easily ecstatic wife.

"I do envy you," she said pathetically, "all that background of home companionship. We were brought up so differently. It was not my parents' fault of course—" she added rather quickly. Something in Lionel's expression warned her that he would be unsympathetic to confidences against parents.

"Well, you've got Winn," he said, looking at her with his steadfast encouraging eyes, "you've got your background now." He was prepared to put up with a little ecstasy on this subject, but Estelle looked away from him, her great eyes strangely wistful and absorbed. She was an extraordinary exquisite and pretty little person, like a fairy on a Christmas tree, or a Dresden china shepherdess, not a bit, somehow, like a wife.

"Yes," she said, twisting her wedding ring round her tiny manicured finger. "But sometimes I am a little anxious about him—I know it's silly of me."

Lionel's shyness fell away from him with disconcerting suddenness. "Why are you anxious?" he demanded. "What do you mean, Mrs. Winn?"

Estelle hesitated, she hadn't meant to say exactly what her fear was, she only wanted to arouse the young man's chivalry and to talk in some way that approached intimacy.

Everything must have a beginning, even Petrarch and Laura.

She found Lionel's eyes fixed upon her with a piercing quality difficult to meet. He obviously wouldn't understand if she didn't mean anything—and she hardly knew him well enough to touch on her real difficulties with Winn, those would have to come later.

But she must be anxious about something—she was forced into the rather meager track of her husband's state of health.

"I don't quite know," she mused, "of course he seems perfectly strong—but I sometimes wonder if he is as strong as he looks."

Lionel brushed her wonder aside. "Please tell me exactly what you've noticed," he said, as if he were a police sergeant and she were some reluctant and slightly prevaricating witness.

She hadn't, as a matter of fact, noticed anything. "He sometimes looks terribly tired," she said a little uncertainly, "but I dare say it's all my foolishness, Mr. Drummond. I am afraid I am inclined to be nervous about other people's health —" Estelle sighed softly. She often accused herself of faults which no one had discovered in her. "Winn, I am sure, would be the first to laugh at me."

"Yes, I dare say he would," said Lionel quietly. "But I never will, Mrs. Winn." She raised her eyes gratefully to him—at last she had succeeded in touching him.

"You see," Lionel explained, "I care too much for him myself."

Her eyes dropped. She had a feeling that Petrarch and Laura had hardly begun like that.

The next few days were very puzzling to Estelle; nobody behaved as she expected them to behave, including herself. She found Lionel always ready to accept her advances with open-hearted cordiality, but she had to make the advances. She had not meant to do this. Her idea had been to be a magnet, and magnets keep quite still; needles do all the moving. But this particular needle (except that it didn't appear at all soft) might have been made of cotton wool.

And Winn wouldn't behave at a disadvantage; he was neither tyrannical nor jealous. He left her a great deal to Lionel, and treated her with good-natured tolerance in private and with correct attention before his friend.

In theory Estelle had always stated her belief in platonic friendship, but she had never been inconvenienced by having to carry it out. One thing had always led to another. She had imagined that Lionel (in his relations with her) would be a happy mixture of Lancelot and Galahad. The Galahad side of him would appear when Lancelot became inconvenient—and the Lancelot side of him would be there to fall back upon when Galahad got too dull. But in their actual relation there seemed to be some important ingredient left out. Of course Lancelot was guilty and Estelle had never for a moment intended Lionel to be guilty, but on the other hand Lancelot was in love with the Queen.

This quality was really essential.

Lancelot had had a great affection for the King of course, but that had been subsidiary; and this was what puzzled Estelle most, was Lionel's feeling for her subsidiary to his feeling for Winn?

Lionel was delightful to her; he waited on her hand and foot; he studied all her tastes and remembered everything she told him. Could playing polo with Winn, going out for walks in the rain, and helping to make saddles in Winn's musty, smelling den appeal to him with greater force than her society? He wasn't in love with any one else, and if men weren't in love with any one else, they were usually in love with Estelle. But with Lionel everything stopped short. They conversed confidentially, they used each other's Christian names, but she was left with the sensation of having come up against an invisible barrier. There was no impact, and there was no curtness; there was simply empty space. She was not even sure that Lionel would have liked her at all if she hadn't been Winn's wife. As it was, he certainly wanted her friendship and took pains to win it. It must be added that he won more than he took pains to win. Estelle for the first time in her life stumbled waveringly into a little love.

The visit prolonged itself from a week to a fortnight. Estelle did not sleep the night before Lionel went. She tossed feverishly to and fro, planning their parting. Surely he would not leave her without a word? Surely there must be some touch of sentiment to this separation, horrible and inevitable, that lay before them?

She remembered afterwards that as she lay in the dark and foresaw her loneliness she wondered if she wouldn't after all risk the Indian frontier to be near him? She was subsequently glad she had decided that she wouldn't.

It was a very wet morning, and Lionel was to leave before lunch. Winn went as usual into his study to play with his eternal experiments in leather. Lionel went with him. She heard the two men laughing together down the passage. Could real friends have laughed if they had minded parting with each other?

She sat at her desk in the drawing-room biting nervously at her pen. He was going; was it possible that there would be no farewell?

Just some terrible flat hand-shake at the door under Winn's penetrating eyes.

But after a time she heard steps returning. Lionel came by himself.

"Are you busy?" he asked. "Shall I bother you if we talk a little?"

"No," she said softly. "I hoped you would come back."

Lionel did not answer for a moment. For the first time in their acquaintance he was really a little stirred. He moved about the room restlessly, he wouldn't sit down, though half unconsciously she had put her hand on the chair beside her.

"Do you know," he said at last, "I've got something to say to you, and I'm awfully afraid it may annoy you."

Was it really coming, the place at which he would have to be stopped, after all her fruitless endeavors to get him to move in any direction at all? It looked like it; he was very obviously embarrassed and flushed; he did not even try to meet her eyes.

"The fact is," he went on, "I simply can't go without saying it, and you've been so awfully good to me—you've let me feel we're friends." He paused, and Estelle leaned forward, her eyes melting with encouragement.

"I am so glad you feel like that, Lionel," she murmured. "Do please say anything —anything you like. I shall always understand and forgive, if it is necessary for me to forgive."

"You're awfully generous," he said gratefully. She smiled, and put out her hand again toward the chair. This time he sat down in it, but he turned it to face her.

He was a big man and he seemed to fill the room in which they sat. His blue-gray eyes fixed themselves on hers intently, his whole being seemed absorbed in what he was about to say.

"You see," he began, "I think you may be making a big mistake. Naturally Winn's awfully fond of you and all that and you've just started life, and you like to live in your own country, surrounded by jolly little things, and perhaps India seems frightening and far away." Estelle shrank back a little; he put his hand on the back of her chair soothingly. "Of course it must be hard," he said. "Only I want to explain it to you. Winn's heart is yours, I know, but it's in his work, too, as a man's must be, and his work's out there; it's not here at all.

"When I came here and looked about me, and saw the house and the garden and the country, where we've had such jolly walks and talks—it all seemed temporary somehow, made up—not quite natural, I can't explain what I mean but not a bit like Winn. I needn't tell you what he is, I dare say you think it's cheek of me to talk about him at all, I can quite understand it if you do, only perhaps

there's a side of him I've seen more of, and which makes me want to say what I know he isn't—what I don't think even love can make him be—he isn't tame!"

He stopped abruptly; Estelle's eyes had hardened and grown very cold.

"I don't know what you mean," she said. "Has he complained of my keeping him here?"

Lionel pushed back his chair.

"Ah, Mrs. Winn! Mrs. Winn!" he exclaimed half laughingly, and half reproachfully; "you know he wouldn't complain. He only told me that he wasn't coming back just yet, and I—well, I thought I saw why he wasn't."

"Then," she said, turning careful eyes away from him, "if he hasn't complained, I hardly see why you should attack me like this. I suppose you think I am as unnatural and—and temporary as our surroundings?"

Lionel stood up and looked down at her in a puzzled way.

"Oh, I say, you know," he ventured, "you're not playing very fair, are you? Of course I'm not attacking you. I thought we were friends, and I wanted to help you."

"Friends!" she said. Her voice broke suddenly into a hard little laugh. "Well, what else have you to suggest to me about my husband—out of your friendship for me?"

"You're not forgiving me," he reminded her gently, not dreaming what it was she had been prepared to forgive. "But perhaps I'd better go on and get it all out while I'm about it. You know it isn't only that I think he won't care for staying on here, but I think it's a bit of a risk. I don't want to frighten you, but after a man's had black water fever twice, he's apt to be a little groggy, especially about the lungs. England isn't honestly a very good winter place for him for a year or two —"

Estelle flung up her head.

"If he was going to be an invalid," she said, "he oughtn't to have married me!"

The silence that followed her speech crept into every corner of the room. Lionel did not look puzzled any more. He stood up very straight and stiff; only his eyes changed. He could not look at her; they were filled with contempt. He gave her a

moment or two to disavow her words; he would have given his right hand to hear her do it.

"I beg your pardon," he said at last. "I have overstated the case if you imagine your husband is an invalid. I think, if you don't mind," he added, "I'll see if my things are ready."

"Please do," she said, groping in her mind for something left to hurt him with. "And another time perhaps you will know better than to say for my husband what he is perfectly competent to say for himself."

"You are quite right," Lionel said quietly; "another time I shall know better." The rain against the windows sounded again; she had not heard it before.

He did not come back to say good-by. She heard him talking to Winn in the hall, the dogcart drove up, and then she saw him for the last time, his fine, clear-cut profile, his cap dragged over his forehead, his eyes hard, as they were when he had looked at her. He must have known she stood there at the window watching, but he never looked back. She had expected a terrible parting, but never a parting as terrible as this. Mercifully she had kept her head; it was all she had kept.

CHAPTER VII

It was shortly after Lionel's departure that Estelle realized there was nothing between her and the Indian frontier except the drawing-room sofa. She fixed herself as firmly on this shelter as a limpet takes hold upon a rock. People were extremely kind and sympathetic, and Winn himself turned over a new leaf. He was gentle and considerate to her, and offered to read aloud to her in the evenings.

Nothing shook her out of this condition. The baby arrived, unavailingly as an incentive to health, and not at all the kind of baby Estelle had pictured. He was almost from his first moments a thorough Staines. He was never very kissable, and was anxious as soon as possible to get on to his own feet. At eight months he crawled rapidly across the carpet with a large musical-box suspended from his mouth by its handle; at ten he could walk. He tore all his lawn frocks on Winn's spurs, screamed with joy at his father's footsteps, and always preferred knees to laps.

His general attitude towards women was hostility, he looked upon them as unfortunate obstacles in the path of adventure, and howled dismally when they caressed him. He had more tolerance for his mother who seemed to him an object provided by Providence in connection with a sofa, on purpose for him to climb over.

Her maternal instinct went so far as to allow him to climb over it twice a day for short intervals. After all he had gained her two years.

Estelle lay on the sofa one autumn afternoon at four o'clock, with her eyes firmly shut. She was aware that Winn had come in, and was very inconsiderately tramping to and fro in heavy boots. He seldom entered the drawing-room at this hour, and if he did, he went out again as soon as he saw that her eyes were shut.

Probably he meant to say something horrible about India; she had been expecting it for some time. The report on Tibet was finished, and he could let his staff work go when he liked.

He stood at the foot of her couch and looked at her curiously. Estelle could feel his eyes on her; she wondered if he noticed how thin she was, and how

transparent her eyelids were. Every fiber in her body was aware of her desire to impress him with her frailty. She held it before him like a banner.

"Estelle," he said. When he spoke she winced.

"Yes, dear," she murmured hardly above a whisper.

"Would you mind opening your eyes?" he suggested. "I've got something I want to talk over with you, and I really can't talk to a door banged in my face."

"I'm so sorry," she said meekly; "I'm afraid I'm almost too exhausted to talk, but I'll try to listen to what you have to say."

"Thanks," said Winn. He paused as if, after all, it wasn't easy to begin, even in the face of this responsiveness. She thought he looked rather odd. His eyes had a queer, dazed look, as if he had been drinking heavily or as if somebody had kicked him.

"Well," she asked at last, "what is it you want to talk about? Suspense of any kind, you know, is very bad for my heart."

"I beg your pardon," he said. "It was only that I thought I'd better mention I am going to Davos."

"Davos!" She opened her eyes wide now and stared at him. "That snow place?" she asked, "full of consumptives? What a curious idea! I never have been able to understand how people can care to go there for sport. It seems to me rather cruel; but, then, I know I am specially sensitive about that kind of thing. Other people's pain weighs so on me."

"I didn't say I was going there for sport," Winn answered in the same peculiar manner. He sat down and began to play with a paper-cutter on his knee. "As a matter of fact, I'm not," he went on. "I've crocked one of my lungs. They seem to think I've got to go. It's a great nuisance."

It was curious the way he kept looking at her, as if he expected something. He couldn't have told exactly what he expected himself. He was face to face with a new situation; he wasn't exactly frightened, but he had a feeling that he would like very much to know how he ought to meet it. He had often been close to death—but he had never somehow thought of dying, he wasn't close to death now but at the end of something which might be very horrible there would be the long affair of dying. He hoped he would get through it all right and not make a

fuss or be a bother to anybody. It had all come with a curious suddenness. He had gone to Travers one day because when Polly pulled he had an odd pain in his chest. He had had a toss the week before, and it had occurred to him that a rib might be broken; but Travers said it wasn't that.

Travers had tapped him all over and looked grave, uncommonly grave, and said some very uncomfortable things. He had insisted on dragging Winn up to town to see a big man, and the big man had said, "Davos, and don't lose any time about it." He hadn't said much else, only when Winn had remarked, "But, damn it all, you know I'm as strong as a horse," he had answered, "You'll need every bit of strength you've got," and all the way home Travers had talked to him like a Dutch uncle.

It was really funny when you came to think of it, because there wasn't anything to see or even feel—except a little cough—and getting rather hot in the evenings, but after Travers had finished pitching into him Winn had written to Lionel and made his will and had rather wondered what Estelle would feel about it. He hadn't wanted to upset her. He hadn't upset her. She stared at him for a moment; then she said:

"How odd! You look perfectly all right. I never have believed in Travers."

Winn mentioned the name of the big man.

"It does sound rather rot," he added apologetically. He still waited. Estelle moved restlessly on the sofa.

"Well," she said, "what on earth am I to do? It's really horribly inconvenient. I suppose I shall have to go back to my people for the winter unless you can afford to let me take a flat in London."

"I'm afraid I can't afford that," said Winn. "I think it would be best for you to go to your people for the winter, unless, of course, you'd rather go to mine. I'm going down there to-morrow; I've written to tell them. I must get my father to let me have some money as it is. It's really an infernal nuisance from the expense point of view."

"I couldn't go to your people," said Estelle, stiffly. "They have never been nice to me; besides, they would be sure to teach baby how to swear." Then she added, "I suppose this puts an end to your going to India."

Winn dropped his eyes.

"Yes," he said, "this puts an end to my going back to India for the present. I've been up before the board; they're quite agreeable. In fact, they've been rather decent to me."

Estelle gave a long sigh of relief and gratitude. It was really extraordinary how she had been helped to avoid India. She couldn't think what made Winn go on sitting there, just playing with the paper-knife.

He sat there for a long time, but he didn't say any more. At last he got up and went to the door.

"Well," he said, "I think I'll just run up and have a look at the kid."

"Poor dear," said Estelle, "I'm frightfully sorry for you, of course, though I don't believe it's at all painful—and by the way, Winn, don't forget that consumption is infectious."

He stopped short as if someone had struck him. After all, he didn't go to the nursery; she heard him go down the passage to the smoking-room instead.

CHAPTER VIII

Sir Peter was having his annual attack of gout. Staines Court appeared at these times like a ship battened down and running before a storm.

Figures of pale and frightened maids flickered through the long passage-ways. The portly butler violently ejected from the dining-room had been seen passing swiftly through the hall, with the ungainly movement of a prehistoric animal startled from its lair.

The room in which Sir Peter sat burned with his language. Eddies of blasphemous sound rushed out and buffeted the landings like a rising gale.

Sir Peter sat in a big arm chair in the center of the room. His figure gave the impression of a fortressed island in the middle of an empty sea. His foot was rolled in bandages and placed on a low stool before him; within reach of his hand was a knobbed blackthorn stick, a bell and a copy of the "Times" newspaper.

Fortunately Lady Staines was impervious to sound and acclimatized to fury. When Sir Peter was well she frequently raised storms, but when he had gout she let him raise them for himself. He was raising one now on the subject of Winn's letter.

"What's that he says? What's that he says?" roared Sir Peter. "Something the matter with his lungs! That's the first time a Staines has ever spoken of his lungs. The boy's mad. I don't admit it! I don't believe it for a moment, all a damned piece of doctors' rubbish, the chap's a fool to listen to 'em! When has he ever seen me catering to hearse-conducting, pocket-filling asses!"

Charles was home on a twenty-four hours' leave—he stood by the mantelpiece and regarded his parent with undutiful and critical eyes. "I should say you send for 'em," he observed, "whenever you've got a pain; why they're always hangin' about. Look at that table chock full of medicines. 'Nuff to kill a horse—where do they come from?"

"Hold your infernal tongue, Sir!" shouted Sir Peter. "What do I have 'em for? I have 'em here to expose them! That's why—I just let them try it on, and then

hold them up to ridicule! Do you find I ever pay the least attention to 'em, Sarah?" he demanded from his wife.

"Not as a rule," Lady Staines admitted, "unless you're very bad indeed, and then you do as you like directly the pain has stopped."

"Well, why shouldn't I!" said Sir Peter triumphantly. "Once I get rid of the pain I can do as I like. When I've got red hot needles eating into my toes, am I likely to like anything? Of course not, you may just as well take medicine then as anything else, but as to taking orders from a pack of ill-bred bumpkins, full of witch magic as a dog of fleas, I see myself! Don't stand grinning there, Charles, like a dirty, shock-headed barmaid's dropped hair pin! I won't stand it! I can't see why all my sons should have thin legs, neither you nor I, Sarah, ever went about like a couple of spilikin's. I call it indecent! Why don't you get something inside 'em, Charles, eh? No stamina, that's what it is! Everybody going to the dogs in motor cars with manicure girls out of their parents' pockets—! Why don't you answer me, Charles, when I speak to you?"

"Nobody can answer you when you keep roaring like a deuced megaphone," said Charles wearily. "Let's hear what the chap's got to say for himself, Mater."

Lady Staines read Winn's letter out loud in a dry voice without expression; it might have been an account of a new lawn mower which she held beneath it.

> "I've managed to crock one of my lungs somehow, but they say I've got a chance if I go straight out to Davos for six months. Ask the guv'nor if he'll let me have some money. I shall want it badly. My wife and the kid will go to her people. You might run across and have a look at him sometimes. He's rather a jolly little chap. I shall come down for the week-end to-morrow unless I hear from you to the contrary.
>
> "Your affectionate son,
> "WINN."

"I think that's all," said his mother.

"What!" shouted Sir Peter. He had never shouted quite like this before. Charles groaned and buried his head in his hands. Even Lady Staines looked up from the lawn mower's letter, which she had placed on the top of Winn's; the medicine bottles sprang from the table and fell back again sufficiently shaken for the next

dose.

"Do you mean to tell me!" cried Sir Peter in a quieter voice, "that that little piece of dandelion fluff—that baggage—that city fellow's half baked, peeled onion of a minx is going to desert her husband? That's what I call it—desertion! What does she want to go back to her people for? She must go with him! She must go to Davos! She shall go to Davos! if I have to take her there by the hair! I never heard of anything so outrageous in my life! What becomes of domesticity? where's family life? That's what I want to know! and is Winn such a milk and water noodle that he's going to sit down under it and say 'Thank you!' Not that I think he needs to go to Davos for a moment, mind you. Let him come here and have a nice quiet time with me, that's what he wants."

"That's all very well, Father," said Charles. "But what you mean is you don't want to fork out! If the chap's told to go to Davos, he's got to go to Davos, and it's his own look-out whether he takes his wife with him or not. Consumption isn't a joke, and I tell you plainly that if you don't help him when he's got a chance, you needn't expect *me* to come to the funeral. No flowers and coffins and beloved sons on tombstones, are going to make me move an inch. It'll be just the same to me as if you'd shoved him under with your own hand, and that's all I've got to say, and it's no use blowing the roof off about it!"

"You'd better go now, Charles," said Lady Staines quietly.

When Sir Peter had finished saying what he thought of Charles and what he intended to do to the entail, Lady Staines gave him his medicine.

"Look here, Peter," she said, "this is a bad business about our boy."

Sir Peter met her eyes and nodded.

"Yes," he agreed, "a damned bad business!"

"We'd better get him off," she added after a moment's pause.

"It's all nonsense," grumbled Sir Peter, "and I told you from the first you ought never to have let him marry that girl. Her father's the poorest tenant I ever had, soft-headed, London vermin! He doesn't know anything about manure—and he'll never learn. I shall cut down all his trees as soon as I'm about again. As for the girl, keep her out of my sight or I'll wring her neck. I ought to have done it long ago. How much does he want?"

"Let's make it three hundred," Lady Staines said. "He may as well be comfortable."

"Pouring money into a sieve," grumbled Sir Peter. "Send for the doctor and bring me the medical dictionary. I may as well see what it says about consumption, and don't mention the word when Winn's about. I *will* have tact! If you'd used common or garden tact in this house before, that marriage would never have taken place. I sit here simmering with it day in and day out and everybody else goes about giving the whole show away! If it hadn't been for my tact Charles would have married that manicure girl years ago. Bring me my check-book. It's nothing but a school-boy's lark, this going to Davos. Why consumption's a pin-prick compared to gout! No pain—use of both legs—sanguine disposition. Where the hell's that medical dictionary? Ah, it's there, is it—then why the devil didn't you give it me before?"

Sir Peter read solemnly for a few minutes, and then flung the book on the floor.

"Bosh!" he cried angrily. "All old woman's nonsense. Can't tell what's going on inside a pair of bellows—can they? Then why make condemned asses of themselves, and say they can! Don't tell Charles I've written this check—he's the most uncivil rascal we've got."

CHAPTER IX

It was odd how Winn looked forward to seeing Staines; he couldn't remember ever having paid much attention to the scenery before; he had always liked the bare backs of the downs behind the house where he used to exercise the horses, and the turf was short and smelt of thyme; and of course the shooting was good and the house stood well; but he hadn't thought about it till now, any more than he thought about his braces.

He decided to walk up from the station. There was a short cut through the fields and then you came on the Court suddenly, over-looking a sheet of water.

It was a still November day, colorless and sodden. The big elms were as dark as wet haystacks and the woods huddled dispiritedly in a vague mist.

The trees broke to the right of the Court and the house rose up like a gigantic silver ghost.

It was a battered old Tudor building with an air of not having been properly cleaned; blackened and weather-soaked, unconscionably averse from change, it had held its own for four hundred years.

The stones looked as if they were made out of old moonlight and thin December sunshine. A copse of small golden trees, aspen and silver birches made a pale screen of light beside the house and at its feet, the white water stretched like a gleaming eye.

There wasn't a tree Winn hadn't climbed or an inch he hadn't explored, fought over and played on. He wanted quite horribly to come back to it again, it was as if there were roots from the very soil in him tugging at his menaced life.

His mother advanced across the lawn to meet him. She wore a very old blue serge dress and a black and white check cap which looked as if it had been discarded by a jockey.

In one hand she held a trowel and in the other a parcel of spring bulbs. She gave Winn the side of her hard brown cheek to kiss and remarked, "You've just come in time to help me with these bulbs. Every one of them must be got in this afternoon. Philip has left us—your father threw a watering can at him. I can't

think what's happened to the men nowadays, they don't seem to be able to stand anything, and I've sent Davis into the village to buy ducks. He ought to have been back long ago if it was only ducks, but probably it's a girl at the mill as well."

Winn looked at the bulbs with deep distaste. "Hang it all, Mother," he objected, "it's such a messy day for planting bulbs!" "Nonsense," said Lady Staines firmly, "I presume you wash your hands before dinner, don't you, you can get the dirt off then? It's a perfect day for bulbs as you'd know if you had the ghost of country sense in you. There's another trowel in the small greenhouse, get it and begin." Winn strode off to the greenhouse smiling; he had had an instinctive desire to get home, he wanted hard sharp talk that he could answer as if it were a Punch and Judy show.

In his married life he had had to put aside the free expression of his thoughts; you couldn't hit out all round if the other person wouldn't hit back and started whining. Every member of the Staines family had been brought up on the tradition of combative speech, the bleakest of personalities found its nest there. Sometimes, of course, you got too much of it. Sir Peter and Charles were noisy and James and Dolores were apt to be brutally rough. They were all vehement but there were different shades in their ability. Winn got through the joints in their armor as easily as milk slips into a glass. It was Lady Staines and Winn who were the deadly fighters.

They fought the others with careless ease, but they fought each other watchfully with fixed eyes and ready implacable brains.

It was difficult to say what they fought for but it was a magnificent spectacle to see them fight, and they had for each other a regard which, if it was never tender, had every element of respect.

They worked now for some time in silence. Suddenly Lady Staines cocked a wintry blue eye in her son's direction and remarked, "Why ain't your wife going with you to Davos?" Winn hurled a bulb into the small hole prepared for it before answering, then he said:

"She's too delicate to stand the cold."

"Is there anything the matter with her?" asked his mother.

Winn preferred to consider this question in the light of rhetoric and made no

reply. He wasn't going to give Estelle away by saying there was nothing the matter with her, and on the other hand a lie would have been pounced upon and torn to pieces. "Marriage don't seem to have agreed with either of you particularly well," observed Lady Staines with a grim smile.

"We haven't got your constitution," replied her son. "If either you or Father had married any one else—they'd have been dead within six months."

"Humph!" said his mother. "That only shows our sound judgment; we took what we could stomach! It's her look-out of course, but I suppose she knows she's running you into the Divorce Court, letting you go out there by yourself? All those snow places bristle with grass widows and girls who have outstayed their market and have to get a hustle on! Sending a man out there alone is like driving a new-born lamb into a pack of wolves!" Lady Staines with her eye on the heavily built and rather leathery lamb beside her gave a sardonic chuckle. Winn ignored her illustration.

"You needn't be afraid," he replied. "I'm done with women; they tempt me about as much as stale sponge cakes."

"Ah!" said his mother, "I've heard that tale before. A man who says he's done with women simply means one of them's done with him. Besides, you're to be an invalid, I understand! An invalid man is as exposed to women as a young chicken to rats. You won't stand a ghost of a chance. Look at your father, if I left him alone when he was having an attack of gout with a gray-haired matron of a reformatory, he'd be on his knees to her before I could get back."

"You can take it from me," said Winn, "that even if I *should* need such a thing as a petticoat, I'd try a kind that won't affect marriage. I'll never look at another good woman again—the other sort will do for me if I can't stick it without."

"Don't racket too much," said Lady Staines, planting her last bulb with scientific skill. "They say keeping women's very expensive up there—on account of the Russian Princes."

"By the by," said Winn, "thanks for the money. Had any difficulty in extracting it?"

"Not much," said Lady Staines, withdrawing to the lawn. "Charles got rather in the way."

"Silly ass," observed Winn. "Didn't want me to have it, I suppose?"

"No, he did want you to have it," replied Lady Staines, "but he needn't have been such a fool as to have said so. It nearly upset everything. His idea was, you see, that if his father gave you something—he and James would have to be bought off. So they were in the end, but they'd have had more if he'd played his hand better."

Winn laughed. "Jolly to be home again," he remarked. "Dinner as usual?"

"Yes," said Lady Staines, "and don't forget one of the footmen's a Plymouth Brother and mustn't be shocked. It's so difficult to get any one nowadays, one mustn't be too particular. He said he could stand your father by constant prayer, but he gave notice over Charles. Charles ought to have waited till dessert to let himself go."

The dinner passed off well. Sir Peter and Winn had one never failing bone of contention, the rival merits of the sister services. Sir Peter expressed on every possible occasion in his son's presence, a bitter contempt for the army, and Winn never let an opportunity pass without pointing out the gorged and pampered state of the British Navy.

"If we'd had half the money spent on us, Sir, that you keep guzzling over," Winn cheerfully threw out, "we could knock spots out of Europe. The trouble with England is—she treats her sailors as if they were the proud sisters—and we are shoved out like Cinderella into the scullery to do all the dirty work."

"Pooh!" said Sir Peter, "work! Is that what you call it—takin' a horse out for an hour or two, and shoutin' at a few men on a parade ground. What's an army good for—even when it's big enough to be seen with the naked eye and capable of attacking a few black savages with their antiquated weapons. Why you're *safe*, that's what you are—dead safe! Land's beneath you—immovable—you can get anywhere you want to as easy as sliding down banisters! Targets keep still too! It's nothing to hit a thing you can stand to fire at while *it* stands still to *be* fired at! Child's play, that's what it is. Look at us, something up all the time, peace or war. We've got the sea to fight—wind too—and thick weather. We've got our pace to mind and if we ever did clinch up we'd have to do our fighting at a rate that'd make an express train giddy—and running after a target goin' as hard as we do! That's what I call something of a service. No! No! The Army's played out. You're for ornament now, meant to go round Buckingham Palace and talk to nurse-maids in the Park."

"Not many nurse-maids in the Kyber Pass," his son observed.

"Frontiers—yes, I dare say," snorted Sir Peter. "A few black rag dolls behind trees popping at you to keep your circulation going, and you with Maxims and all, going picnics in the hills and burning down villages as easy as pulling fire-crackers—and half the time you want help from us! Look at South Africa!"

They looked at South Africa for some time till the dessert came and the Plymouth Brother thankfully withdrew. After that Winn allowed himself some margin and Lady Staines leaned back in her chair, ate grapes and enjoyed her coffee.

The conversation became pungent, savage and enlivened on Sir Peter's part by strange oaths.

Winn kept to sudden thrusts of irony impossible to foresee and difficult to parry.

They drank velvety ripe old port. Sir Peter was for the moment out of pain and anxious to assert his freedom from doctors. The conversation shifted to submarines. Sir Peter thought them an underhand and decadent development suited to James, who was in command of one of them.

As to aëroplanes he said that as we'd now succeeded in imitating infernal birds and fishes—he supposed we'd soon bring off reptiles the kind of creature the modern young would be likely to represent best.

"We shall soon have the police crawling on their bellies up and down the Strand hiding behind lamp-posts," finished Sir Peter. "Call that kind of thing science! It's an inverted Noah's Ark! That's what it is! And when you get it all going to suit yourself, there'll be another flood, and serve you all damned well right. I shall enjoy seeing you drown!"

Winn replied that you had to fight with your head now and that people who fought with their fists were about as dangerous as stuffed rabbits.

Sir Peter replied that in the end everything came down to blood, how much you'd got yourself and how much you could get out of the enemy.

Lady Staines was slightly afraid of leaving them in this atmosphere, but at last she reluctantly withdrew to the hall, where she listened to the varying shades of Sir Peter's voice and decided they were on the whole loud enough to be normal.

At eleven o'clock she and Winn between them assisted Sir Peter to bed.

This was a sharp and fiery passage usually undertaken by the toughest of the gardeners.

Winn however managed extraordinarily well. He insisted on occasional pauses and by a home truth of an appallingly personal nature actually silenced his father for the last half flight.

Sir Peter breakfasted in his room.

He had had a bad night. He wouldn't, as he explained to his wife, have minded if Winn had been a puny chap; but there he was, sound and strong, with clear hard eyes, broad, straight shoulders and a grip of iron, and yet Taylor, that little village hound of an apothecary, said once you had microbes it didn't matter how strong you were—they were just as likely to be fatal as if you were a narrow-chested epileptic.

Microbes! The very thought of such small insignificant creatures getting in his way filled Sir Peter with fury. He had always hated insects. But the worst of it was in the morning he didn't feel angry, he simply felt chilled and helpless. His son was hit and he couldn't help him. It all came back to that. There was only one person who could help a sick man, and that person was his wife. Theoretically Sir Peter despised and hated women, but practically he leaned on his wife as only a strong man can lean on a woman; without her, he literally would not have known which way to turn. His trust in her was as solid as his love for a good stout ship. In every crisis of his life she had stood by his side, bitter tongued, hard-headed, undemonstrative and his as much as any ship that had sailed under his flag.

If she had failed him he would have gone down, and now here was his son's wife—another woman—presumably formed for the same purpose, leaking away from under him at the very first sign of weather.

He thought of Estelle with a staggered horror; she had looked soft and sweet—just the woman to minister to a knocked-out man. The trouble with her was she had no guts.

Sir Peter woke his wife up at four o'clock in the morning to shout this fact into her ear. Lady Staines said, "Well—whoever said she had?" and apparently went to sleep again. But Sir Peter didn't go to sleep: Estelle reminded him of how he had once been done over a mare, a beautiful, fine stepping lady-like creature who looked as if she were made of velvet and steel, no vice in her and every

point correct; and then what had happened? He'd bought her and she'd developed a spirit like wet cotton wool, no pace, no staying power. She'd sweat and stumble after a few minutes run, no amount of dieting, humoring or whipping affected her. She'd set out to shirk, and shirk she did—till he worked her off on a damned fool Dolores had fortunately introduced him to—only wives can't be handed on like mares—"Devil's the pity"—Sir Peter said to himself, as he fell off to sleep. "Works perfectly with horses."

Winn came up-stairs soon after breakfast a little set and silent, to say good-by to his father. Sir Peter had thrown his breakfast out of the window and congealed the Plymouth Brother's morning prayers. He wanted to get hold of something tangible to move circumstances and cheat fate, but he couldn't think what you did do, when it wasn't a question of storms or guns—or a man you could knock down for insubordination, simply a physical fact.

He scowled gloomily at his son's approach. "I wish you weren't such a damned fool," he observed by way of greeting. "Why can't you shake a little sense into your wife? What's marriage for? I've been talking to your mother about it. I don't say she isn't a confoundedly aggravating woman, your mother! But she's always stuck to me, hasn't let me down, you know. A wife ain't meant to do that. It's unnatural! Why can't you say to her, 'You come with me or I'll damned well show you the reason why—' That's the line to take!"

"A woman you've got to say that to isn't going to make much of a companion," Winn said quietly. "I'd rather she stayed where she liked."

Sir Peter was silent for a moment, then he said, "Any more children coming?"

"No," said his son, "nor likely to be either, as far as I'm concerned."

"There you are!" said Sir Peter. "Finicky and immoral, that's what I call it! That's the way trouble begins, the more children the less nonsense. Why don't you have more children instead of sitting sneering at me like an Egyptian Pyramid?"

"That's my look-out," said Winn with aggravating composure. "When I want 'em, I'll have 'em. Don't you worry, Father."

"That's all devilish well!" said Sir Peter crossly. "But I *shall* worry! Do I know more about the world or do you? Not that I want to quarrel with you, my dear boy," he added hastily. "I admit things are awkward for you—damned awkward—still it's no use sitting down under them when you might have a row and clear

the air, is it? What I want to say is—why not have a row?"

"You can't have a row with a piece of pink silk, can you?" his son demanded. "I don't want to blame her, but it's no use counting her in; besides, honestly, Father, I don't care a rap—why should I expect her to? My marriage was a misdeal."

Sir Peter shook his head. "Men ought to love their wives," he said solemnly; "in a sense, of course, no fuss about it, and never letting them know—and not putting oneself out about it! But still there ought to be something to hold on to, and anyhow the more you stick together, the more there is, and your going off like this won't improve matters. Love or no love, marriage is a life."

Winn laughed again. "Life—" he said, "yes—well—how do I know how much longer I shall have to bother about life?"

There was a silence. Sir Peter's gnarled old hands met above his blackthorn stick and trembled.

Winn wished he hadn't spoken. He did not know how to tell his father not to mind. He hadn't really thought his father would mind.

However, there they sat, minding it.

Then Sir Peter said, "I don't believe in consumption, I never have, and I never shall; besides Taylor says Davos is a very good place for it, and you're an early case, and it's all damned nonsense, and you've got to buck up and think no more about it. What I want to hear is that you're back in your Regiment again. I dare say there'll be trouble later on, and then where'll you be if you're an invalid—have you ever thought of that?"

"Yes—that'd be something to live for," Winn said gravely; "trouble."

"You shouldn't be so confoundedly particular," said his father. "Now look at me—if we did have trouble where'd I be? Nowhere at all—old! Just gout and newspapers and sons getting up ideas about their lungs, but when do I complain?

"If you want another £50 any time—I don't say that I can't give it to you—though the whole thing's damned unremunerative! There's the trap. Well—good-by."

Winn stood quite still for a moment looking at his father. It might have been thought by an observer that his eyes, which were remarkably bright, were

offensively critical, but Sir Peter, though he wished the last moment to end, knew that his son was not being critical.

Then Winn said, "Well—good-by, Father. I'm sure I'm much obliged to you." And his father said, "Damn everything!" just after the door was shut.

CHAPTER X

It hadn't seemed dismal at first, it had only seemed quite unnatural. Everything had stopped being natural when the small creature in lawn, only the height of his knee, had been torn reluctantly away from its hold on his trousers. This parting had made Winn feel as if something inside him was being unfairly handled.

There was nothing he could get hold of in Peter to promise security, and the only thing that Peter could grasp was the trousers, which had had to be forcibly removed from him.

Later on Peter would be consoled by a Teddy Bear or the hearth brush, but Winn had had to go before Peter was consoled, and without the resources of the hearth brush.

Estelle wept bitterly in the hall, but Winn hadn't minded that; he had long ago come to the conclusion that Estelle had a taste for tears, just as some people liked boiled eggs for breakfast. He simply patted her on the shoulder and looked away from her while she kissed him.

He had enjoyed starting from Charing Cross, intimidating the porters and giving the man who registered his luggage dispassionate and unfavorable pieces of his mind. But when he was once fairly off he began to have a new feeling. It came over him when he was out of England and had crossed the small gray strip of formless familiar sea—the sea itself always seemed to Winn to belong much more to England than to France—so much so that it annoyed him at Boulogne to have to submit to being thought possibly unblasphemous by porters. He began to feel alone. Up till now he had always seen his way. There had been fellows to do things with and animals; even marriage, though disconcerting, had not set him adrift. He had been cramped by it, but not disintegrated. Now what seemed to have happened was that he had been cut loose. There wasn't the regiment or even a staff college to fall back upon. There wasn't a trail to follow or horses to gentle; his very dog had had to be left behind because of the ridiculous restrictions of canine quarantine.

It really was an extraordinarily uncomfortable feeling, as if he were a damned ghost poking about in a new world full of surprises. It was quite possible that he might find himself among bounders. He had always avoided bounders, but that

had been comparatively easy in a world where everybody observed an unspoken, inviolable code. If people didn't know the ropes, they found it simpler to go, and Winn had sometimes assisted them to find it simpler; but he saw that now bounders could really turn up with impunity, for, as far as ropes went, it was he himself who would be in the minority. He might meet men who talked, long-haired, mysterious chaps too soft to kick or radicals, though if the worst came to the worst, he flattered himself that he had always the resource of being unpleasant.

He knew that when the hair rose up on his head like the back of a challenged bull-dog, and he stuck his hands in his pockets and looked at people rather straight between the eyes, they usually shut up.

He didn't mind doing this of course, if necessary; only if he had to do it to everybody in the hotel it might become monotonous, and he had a nervous fear that consumption was rather a cad's disease.

Fortunately he had got his skates, and he supposed there'd be toboggans and skis. He would see everybody in hell before he would share a table.

It was curious how one could get to thirty-six and then suddenly in the middle of nothing start up a whole new set of feelings—feelings about Peter, who had, after all, only just happened, and yet seemed to have belonged to him always; and his lungs going wrong, and loneliness, like a homesick school-girl! Winn had never felt lonely in Central Africa or Tibet, so that it seemed rather absurd to start such an emotion in a railway train surrounded by English people, particularly as it had nothing to do with what he looked upon as his home. His feeling about leaving the house at Aldershot had been, "Thank God there aren't going to be any more dinners!"

Still, there it was. He did feel lonely; probably it was one of the symptoms of bad lungs which Travers hadn't mentioned, the same kind of thing as the perfectly new desire to lean back in his corner and shut his eyes.

He felt all right in a way, his muscles acted, he could easily have thrown a stout young man with white eyelashes passing along the corridor through the nearest window; but there was a blurred sensation behind everything, a tiresome, unaccountable feeling as if he mightn't always be able to do things. He couldn't explain it exactly; but if it really turned up at all formidably later, he intended to shoot himself quickly before Peter got old enough to care.

One thing he had quite made up his mind about: he would get well if he could, but if he couldn't, he wasn't going to be looked after. The mere thought of it drove him into the corridor, where he spent the night alternately walking up and down and sitting on an extremely uncomfortable small seat by a draughty door to prove to himself that he wasn't in the least tired.

He began to feel rather better after the coffee at Basle, and though he was hardly the kind of person to take much interest in mere scenery, the small Swiss villages, with their high pink or blue clock-faced churches made him wish he could pack them into a box, with a slice of green mountain behind, and send them to Peter to play with.

After Landeck he smelt the snows, and challenged successfully the whole shivering carriage on the subject of an open window. The snows reminded Winn in a jolly way of Kashmir and nights spent alone on dizzy heights in a Dak bungalow.

The valleys ceased slowly to breathe, the dull autumn coloring sank into the whiteness of a dream. The mountains rose up on all sides, wave upon wave of frozen foam, aiming steadily at the high, clear skies. The half-light of the failing day covered the earth with a veil of silver and retreating gold.

The valleys passed into silence, freezing, whispering silence. The moon rose mysteriously behind a line of black fir-trees, sending shafts of blue light into the hollow cup of mountain gorges. It was a poet's world, Blake or Shelley could have made it, it was too cold for Keats. Winn had not read these poets. It reminded him of a particularly good chamois hunt, in which he had bagged a splendid fellow, after four hours' hard climbing and stalking. The mountains receded a little, and everything became part of a white hollow filled with black fir-trees, and beyond the fir-trees a blue lake as blue as an Indian moonstone, and then one by one, with the unexpectedness of a flight of glow-worms, sparkled the serried ranks of the hotels. Out they flashed, breaking up the mystery, defying the mountains, as insistent and strident as life.

The train stopped, and its contents spilled themselves out a little uncertainly and stiffly on the platform. Instantly the cold caught them, not the insidious, subtle cold of lower worlds, but the fresh, brusk buffet of the Alps. It caught them by the throat and chest, it tingled in ears and noses; there was no menace in it, and no weakness. It was as compulsory as a policeman in a street fight.

Winn had just stepped aside to allow a clamorous lady to take possession of his

porter when he saw a man struggle into the light under a lamp-post; he was carrying something very carefully in his arms.

Winn could not immediately make out what it was, but he saw the man's face and read utmost mortal misery in his eyes; then he discovered that the burden was a woman. Her hands were so thin that they lay like broken flower petals on the man's shoulders; her face was nothing but a hollow shell; her eyes moved, so that Winn knew she was alive, and in the glassy stillness of the air he caught her dry whispering voice, "I am not really tired, dearest," she murmured. In a moment they had vanished. It struck Winn as very curious that people could love each other like that, or that a dying woman should fight her husband's fears with her last strength. He felt horribly sorry for them and impatient with himself for feeling sorry. After all, he had not come up to Davos to go about all over the place feeling sorry for strange people to whom he had never been introduced. The funny part of it was that he didn't only feel sorry for them, he felt a little sorry for himself. Was love really like that? And had he missed it? Well, of course he knew he had missed it, only he hadn't realized that it was quite like that.

Fortunately at this moment a German porter appeared to whom Winn felt an instant simple antagonism. He was a self-complacent man, and he brought Winn the wrong luggage.

"Look here, my man," Winn said smoothly, but with a rocky insistence behind his words, "if you don't look a little sharp and bring me the *right* boxes with green labels, I shall have to kick you into the middle of next week."

This restored Winn even more quickly than it restored his luggage. No one followed him into the small stuffy omnibus which glided off swiftly toward its destination. The hotel was an ugly wooden house in the shape of a hive built out with balconies; it reminded Winn of a gigantic bird-cage handsomely provided with perches. It was only ten o'clock, but the house was as silent as the mountains behind it.

The landlord appeared, and, leading Winn into a brilliantly lighted, empty room, offered him cold meat.

Winn said the kind of thing that any Staines would feel called upon to say on arriving at a cold place at a late hour and being confronted with cold meat.

The landlord apologized in a whisper, and returned after some delay with soup.

Nothing, not even more language, could move him beyond soup. He kept saying that it was late and that they must be quiet, and he didn't seem to believe Winn when Winn remarked that he hadn't come up there to be quiet. Winn himself became quieter as he followed the landlord through interminable passages covered with linoleum where his boots made a noise like muffled thunder.

Everywhere there was a strange sense of absolute cleanliness and silence, the subduing smell of disinfectant and the sight of padded, green felt doors.

When Winn was left alone in a room like a vivid cell, all emptiness and electric light, and with another green door leading into a farther room, he became aware of a very faint sound that came from the other side of the door. It was like the bark of a dog shut up in a distant cellar; it explained the padding of the doors.

In all the months that followed, Winn never lost this sound, near or far; it was always with him, seldom shattering and harsh, but always sounding as if something were being broken gradually, little by little, shaken into pieces by some invisible disintegrating power.

Winn flung open the long window which faced the bed. It led out to a small private balcony—if he had to be out on a balcony, he had of course made a point of its being private—and looked over all Davos.

The lights were nearly gone now. Only two or three twinkled in a narrow circle on a sheet of snow; behind them the vague shapes of the mountains hung immeasurably alien and at peace.

A bell rang out through the still air with a deep, reverberating note. It was a reassuring and yet solemn sound, as if it alone were responsible for humanity, for all the souls crowded together in the tiny valley, striving for their separate, shaken, inconclusive lives.

"An odd place—Davos," Winn thought to himself. "No idea it was like this. Sort of mix up between a picnic and a cemetery!"

And then suddenly somebody laughed. The sound came from a slope of mountain behind the hotel, and through the dark Winn's quick ear caught the sound of a light rushing across the snow. Some one must be tobogganing out there, some one very young and gay and incorrigibly certain of joy. Winn hoped he should hear Peter laughing like that later on. It was such a jolly boy's laugh, low, with a mischievous chuckle in it, elated, and very disarming.

He hoped the child wouldn't get hauled up for being out so late and making a noise. He smiled as he thought that the owner of the voice, even if collared, would probably be up to getting out of his trouble; and when he turned in, he was still smiling.

CHAPTER XI

Dr. Gurnet's house was like an eye, or a pair of super-vigilant eyes, stationed between Davos Dorf and Davos Platz.

It stood, a small brown chalet, perched high above the lake. There was nothing on either side of it but the snows, the sunshine, and the sense of its vigilance; inside, from floor to ceiling, there were neat little cases with the number of the year, and in each year there was a complete, exhaustive, and entertaining history of those who wintered, unaware of its completion and entertainment, in either of the villages. No eye but his own saw these documents, but no secret policeman ever so controlled the inner workings of a culprit's mind. There was nothing in Dr. Gurnet himself that led one to believe in his piercing quality. He was a stout little man, with a high-domed, bald head, long arms, short legs, and whitish blue eyes which had the quality of taking in everything they saw without giving anything out.

Sometimes they twinkled, but the twinkle was in most cases for his own consumption; he disinfected even his jokes so that they were never catching. The consulting-room contained no medical books. There were two book-shelves, on one side psychology from the physical point of view, and in the other bookcase, psychology as understood by the leading lights of the Catholic religion.

Dr. Gurnet was fond of explaining to his more intelligent patients that here you had the two points of view.

"Psychology is like alcohol," he observed; "you may have it with soda-water or without. Religion is the soda-water."

Two tiger skins lay on the floor. Dr. Gurnet was a most excellent shot. He was too curious for fear, though he always asserted that he disliked danger, and took every precaution to avoid it, excepting, of course, giving up the thing which he had set out to do. But it was a fact that his favorites among his patients were, as a rule, those who loved danger for its own sake without curiosity and without fear.

He saw at a glance that Winn belonged to this category. Names were like pocket electric lamps to Dr. Gurnet. He switched them on and off to illuminate the dark places of the earth. He held Winn's card in his hand and recalled that he had

known a former colonel of his regiment.

"A very distinguished officer," he remarked, "of a very distinguished regiment. Probably perfectly unknown in England. England has a preference for worthless men while they live and a tenderness for them after they are dead unless corrected by other nations. It is an odd thing to me that men like Colonel Travers and yourself, for instance, care to give up your lives to an empire that is like a badly deranged stomach with a craving for unhealthy objects."

"We haven't got to think about it," said Winn. "We keep the corner we are in quiet."

"Yes," said Dr. Gurnet sympathetically, "I know; but I think it would be better if you had to think about it. Perhaps it wouldn't be necessary to keep things quiet if they were more thoroughly exposed to thought."

Winn's attention wandered to the tiger skins.

"Did you bag those fellows yourself?" he asked. Dr. Gurnet smilingly agreed. After this Winn didn't so much mind having his chest examined.

But the examination of his chest, though a long and singularly thorough operation, seemed to Dr. Gurnet a mere bead strung on an extended necklace. He hadn't any idea, as the London specialist had had, that Winn could only have one organ and one interest. He came upon him with the effect of bouncing out from behind a screen with a series of funny, flat little questions. Sometimes Winn thought he was going to be angry with him, but he never was. There was a blithe impersonal touch in Dr. Gurnet, a smiling willingness to look on private histories as of less importance than last year's newspapers. It was as if he airily explained to his patients that really they had better put any facts there were on the files, and let the housemaid use the rest for the kitchen fire; and he required very little on Winn's part. From a series of reluctant monosyllables he built up a picturesque and reliable structure of his new patient's life. They weren't by any means all physical questions. He wanted to know if Winn knew German. Winn said he didn't, and added that he didn't like Germans.

"Then you should take some pains to understand them," observed Dr. Gurnet. "Not to understand the language of an enemy is the first step toward defeat. Why, it is even necessary sometimes to understand one's friends."

Winn said that he had a friend he understood perfectly; his name was Lionel

Drummond.

"I know him through and through," he explained; "that's why I trust him." Dr. Gurnet looked interested, but not convinced.

"Ah," he said, "personally I shouldn't trust any man till he was dead. You know where you are then, you know. Before that one prophesies. By the by, are you married?" Dr. Gurnet did not raise his eyes at this question, but before Winn's leaden "Yes" had answered him he had written on the case paper, "Unhappy domestic life."

"And—er—your wife's not here with you?" Dr. Gurnet suavely continued. Winn thought himself non-committal when he confined himself to saying:

"No; she's in England with my boy." He was as non-committal for Dr. Gurnet as if he had been a wild elephant. He admitted Peter with a change of voice, and asked eagerly if things with lungs were hereditary or catching?

"Not at present in your case," Dr. Gurnet informed him. "By the by, you'll get better, you know. You're a little too old to cure, but you'll patch up."

"What does that mean?" Winn demanded. "Shall I be a broken-winded, cats'-meat hack?"

Dr. Gurnet shook his head.

"You can go back to your regiment," he said, "and do anything you like bar pig-sticking and polo in a year's time. That is to say, if you do as you are told for that year and will have the kindness to remember that, if you do not, I am not responsible, nor shall I be in any great degree inconsolable. I am here like a sign-post; my part of the business is to point the road. I really don't care if you follow it or not; but I should be desolated, of course, if you followed it and didn't arrive. This, however, has not yet occurred to me.

"You will be out of doors nine hours a day, and kindly fill in this card for me. You may skate, but not ski or toboggan, nor take more than four hours' active exercise out of the twenty-four. In a month's time I shall be pleased to see you. Remember about the German and—er—do you ever flirt?"

Winn stared ominously.

"Flirt? No," he said. "Why the devil should I?"

Dr. Gurnet gave a peculiar little smile, half quizzical and half kindly.

"Well," he said, "I sometimes recommend it to my patients in order that they may avoid the intenser application known as falling in love. Or in cases like your own, for instance, when a considerable amount of beneficial cheerfulness may be arrived at by a careful juxtaposition of the sexes. You follow me?"

"No, hanged if I do," said Winn. "I've told you I'm married, haven't I? Besides, I dislike women."

"Ah, there perhaps we may be more in agreement than you imagine," said Dr. Gurnet, increasing his kindly smile. "But I must continue to assure you that this avoidance of what you dislike is a hazardous operation. The study of women at a distance is both amusing and instructive. I grant you that too close personal relations are less so. I have avoided family life most carefully from this consideration, but much may be obtained from women without going to extremes. In fact, if I may say so, women impart their most favorable attributes solely under these conditions. Good morning."

Winn left the small brown house with a heart that was strangely light. Of course he didn't believe in doctors any more than Sir Peter did, but he found himself believing that he was going to get well.

All the morning he had been moving his mind in slow waves that did not seem like thoughts against the rock of death; but he came away from the tiger-skins and the flickering laughter of Dr. Gurnet's eyes with a comfortable sense of having left all such questions on the doorstep. He thought instead of whether it was worth while to go down to the rink before lunch or not.

It was while he was still undecided as to this question that he heard a little shriek of laughter. It ran up a scale like three notes on a flute; he knew in a moment that it was the same laughter he had listened to the night before.

He turned aside and found himself at the bend of a long ice run leading down to the lake. A group of men were standing there, and with one foot on a toboggan, her head flung back, her eyes full of sparkling mischief, was the child. He forgot that he had ever thought her a boy, though she looked on the whole as if she would like to be thought one. Her curly auburn hair was short and very thick, and perched upon it was a round scarlet cap; her mouth was scarlet; her eyes were like Scotch braes, brown and laughing; the curves of her long, delicate lips ran upward; her curving thin, black eyebrows were like question-marks; her chin

was tilted upward like the petal of a flower. She was very slim, and wore a very short brown skirt which revealed the slenderest of feet and ankles; a sweater clung to her unformed, lithe little figure. She had an air of pointed sharpness and firmness like a lifted sword. She might have been sixteen, though she was, as a matter of fact, three years older; but she was not so much an age as a sensation—the sensation of youth, incredibly arrogant and unharmed. The men were trying to dissuade her from the run. It had just been freshly iced; the long blue line of it curved as hard as iron in and out under banks of ice far down into the valley. A tall boy beside her, singularly like her in features and coloring, but weaker in fiber and expression, said querulously:

"Don't go and make a fool of yourself, Claire. It's a man's run, not a girl's. I won't have you do it." It was the fatal voice of authority without power.

Across the group her eyes met Winn's; wicked and gay they ran over him and into him. He stuck his hands into his pockets and stared back at her grimly, like a Staines. He wasn't going to say anything; only if she had belonged to him he would have stopped her. His eyes said he could have stopped her; but she didn't belong to him, so he set his square jaw, and gave her his unflinching, indifferent disapproval.

She appeared after this to be unaware of him, and turned to her brother.

"Won't have it?" she said, with a little gurgle of laughter. "Why, how do you suppose you can stop me? There's only one way of keeping a man's run for men, and that's for girls not to be able to use it—see!"

She slipped her teasing foot off the toboggan and with an agile twist of her small body sprang face downward on the board. In an instant she was off, lying along it light as a feather, but holding the runners in a grip of steel. In a moment more she was nothing but a traveling black dot far down the valley, lifting to the banks, swirling lightning swift back into the straight in a series of curves and flashes, till at the end the toboggan, girl and all, swung high into the air, and subsided safely into a snow-drift.

Winn turned and walked away; he wasn't going to applaud her. Something burned in his heart, grave and angry, stubborn and very strong. It was as if a strange substance had got into him, and he couldn't in the least have said what it was. It voiced itself for him in his saying to himself, "That girl wants looking after." The men on the bank admired her; there were too many of them, and no woman. He wondered if he should ever see her again. She was curiously vivid to

him—brown shoes and stockings, tossed hair, clear eyes. He remembered once going to an opera and being awfully bored because there was such a lot of stiff music and people bawling about; only on the stage there had been a girl lying in the middle of a ring of flames. She'd showed up uncommonly well, rather like this one did in the hot sunshine.

Walking back to the hotel he met a string of bounders, people he had seen and loathed at breakfast. Some of them had tried to talk to him; one beggar had had the cheek to ask Winn what he was up there for, and when Winn had said, "Not to answer impertinent questions," things at the breakfast-table—there was one confounded long one for breakfast—had fallen rather flat.

He felt sure he wouldn't see the girl again; only he did almost at once. She came into the *salle-à-manger* with her brother, as if it belonged to them. After two stormy, obstinate scenes Winn had obtained the shelter of his separate and solitary table. The waiter approached the two young things as they entered late and a little flushed; apparently he explained to them with patient stubbornness that they, at any rate, must give up this privilege; they couldn't have a separate table. He also tried to persuade them which one to join. The boy made a blustering assertion of himself and then subsided. Claire Rivers did neither. Her eyes ran over the room, mutinous and a little disdainful; then she moved. It seemed to Winn he had never seen anybody move so lightly and so swiftly. There was no faltering in her. She took the room with her head up like a sail before a breeze. She came straight to Winn's table and looked down at him.

"This is ours," she said. "You've taken it, though we were here first. Do you think it's fair?"

Winn rose quietly and looked down at her. He was glad he was half a head taller; still he couldn't look very far down. She caught at the corner of her lip with a small white tooth. He tried to make a look of sternness come into his eyes, but he felt guiltily aware that he wanted to give in to her, just as he wanted to give in, to Peter.

"Of course," he said, gravely, "I had no idea it was your table when I got it from that tow-headed fool. You must take it at once, and I'll make him bring in another one."

"He won't," said Claire. "He says he can't; Herr Avalon, the proprietor, won't give him another; besides, there isn't room."

"Oh, I think he will," said Winn. "Shall I go over and bring your brother to you? Won't you sit down?"

She hesitated, then she said:

"You make me feel as if I were being very rude, and I don't want to drive you away. Only, you know, the other people here are rather awful, aren't they?"

Winn was aware that their entire awfulness was concentrated upon his companion.

"Please sit down," he said a little authoritatively. Her brother ought to have backed her up, but the young fool wouldn't; he stood shamefacedly over by the door. "I'll get hold of your brother," Winn added, turning away from her. The waiter hovered nervously in their direction.

"Am I to set for the three, sir?" he ventured. Claire turned quickly toward Winn.

"Yes," she said; "why not? If you don't mind, I mean. You aren't really a bit horrid."

"How can you possibly tell?" Winn asked, with a short laugh. "However, I'll get your brother, and if you really don't mind, I'll come back with him."

Claire was quite sure that she could tell and that she didn't mind.

The waiter came back in triumph, but Winn gave him a sharp look which extracted his triumph as neatly as experts extract a winkle with a pin. Maurice apologized with better manners than Winn had expected. He looked a terribly unlicked cub, and Winn found himself watching anxiously to see if Claire ate enough and the right things. He couldn't, of course, say anything if she didn't, but he found himself watching.

CHAPTER XII

Winn was from the first sure that it was perfectly all right. She wouldn't notice him at all. She would merely look upon him as the man who was there when there were skates to clean, skis to oil, any handy little thing which the other fellows, being younger and not feeling so like an old nurse, might more easily overlook. Women liked fellows who cut a dash, and you couldn't cut a dash and be an old nurse simultaneously. Winn clung to the simile of the old nurse. That was, after all the real truth of his feelings, not more than that, certainly not love. Love would make more of a figure in the world, not that it mattered what you called things provided you behaved decently. Only he was glad he was not in love.

He bought her flowers and chocolates, though he had a pang about the chocolates, not feeling quite sure that they were good for her; but flowers were safe.

He didn't give her lilies—they seemed too self-consciously virginal, as if they wanted to rub it in—he gave her crimson roses, flowers that frankly enjoyed themselves and were as beautiful as they could be. They were like Claire herself. She never stopped to consider an attitude; she just went about flowering all over the place in a kind of perpetual fragrance.

She enjoyed herself so much that she simply hadn't time to notice any one in particular. There were a dozen men always about her. She was so young and happy and unintentional that every one wanted to be with her. It was like sitting in the sun.

She never muddled things up or gave needless pain or cheated. That was what Winn liked about her. She was as fair as a judge without being anything like so grave.

They were all playing a game, and she was the leader. They would have let her break the rules if she had wanted to break them! but she wouldn't have let herself.

Of course the hotel didn't approve of her; no hotel could be expected to approve of a situation which it so much enjoyed. Besides Claire was lawless; she kept her

own rules, but she broke everybody else's. She never sought a chaperon or accepted some older woman's sheltering presence; she never sat in the ladies' salon or went to tea with the chaplain's wife. On one dreadful occasion she tobogganed wilfully on a Sunday, under the chaplain's nose, with a man who had arrived only the night before.

When old Mrs. Stewart, who knitted regularly by the winter and counted almost as many scandals as stitches, took her up on the subject out of kindness of heart, Claire had said without meaning to be rude:

"I really don't think the chaplain's nose ought to be there, to *be* under, do you?"

Of course, Mrs. Stewart did. She had the highest respect for the chaplain's nose; but it wasn't the kind of subject you could argue about.

For a long time Claire and Winn never really talked; she threw words at him over her shoulder or in the hall or when he put her skates on or took them off at the rink. He seemed to get there quicker than any one else, though the operation itself was sometimes a little prolonged. Of course there were meals, but meals belonged to Maurice, and Claire had a way of always slipping behind him, so that it was really over the skates that Winn discovered how awfully clever she was.

She read books, deep books; why, even Hall Caine and Marie Corelli didn't satisfy her, and Winn had always thought those famous authors the last words in modern literature. He now learned others. She gave him Conrad to read, and Meredith. He got stuck in Meredith, but he liked Conrad; it made him smell the mud and feel again the silence of the jungle.

"Funny," he explained to Claire, "because when you come to think of it, he doesn't actually write about the smell; only he's got it, and the jungle feeling, too. It's quiet, you know, in there, but not a bit like the snows out here; there's nothing doing up in this snow, but God alone knows what's happening in the jungle. Odd how there can be two sorts of quiet, ain't it?"

"There can be two sorts of anything," said Claire, exultantly. "Oh, not only two —dozens; that's why it's all such fun."

But Winn was inclined to think that there might be more fun where there were fewer candidates for it. There was, for instance, Mr. Roper. Maurice was trying to work up for his final examination at Sandhurst with Mr. Roper. He was a

black-haired, polite man with a constant smile and a habit of agreeing with people much too promptly; also he read books and talked to Claire about them in the evening till every one started bridge. Fortunately, that shut him up.

Winn was considered in Anglo-Indian clubs, where the standard of bridge is high, to play considerably above it, and Claire played with a relish, that was more instinctive than reliable; nevertheless, Winn loved playing with her, and accepted Mr. Roper and Maurice as one accepts severity of climate on the way to a treat. He knew he must keep his temper with them both, so when he wanted to be nasty he looked at Claire, and when Claire looked at him he wanted to be nice. He couldn't, of course, stop Claire from ever in any circumstances glancing in the direction of Mr. Roper, and it would have startled him extremely if he had discovered that Claire, seeing how much he disliked it, had reduced this form of communion to the rarest civility; because Winn still took for granted the fact that Claire noticed nothing.

It was the solid earth on which he stood. For some months his consciousness of his wife had been an intermittent recognition of a disagreeable fact; but for the first few weeks at Davos he forgot Estelle entirely; she drifted out of his mind with the completeness of a collar stud under a wardrobe.

He never for a moment forgot Peter, but he didn't talk about him because it would have seemed like boasting. Even if he had said, "I have a boy called Peter," it would have sounded as if nobody else had ever had a boy like Peter. Besides, he didn't want to talk about himself; he wanted to talk about Claire.

She hadn't time to tell him much; she was preparing for a skating competition, which took several hours a day, and then in the afternoons she skied or tobogganed with Mr. Ponsonby, a tall, lean Eton master getting over an illness. Winn privately thought that if Mr. Ponsonby was well enough to toboggan, he was well enough to go back and teach boys; but this opinion was not shared by Mr. Ponsonby, who greatly preferred staying where he was and teaching Claire.

Claire tobogganed and skied with the same thrill as she played bridge and skated; they all seemed to her breathless and vital duties. She did not think of Mr. Ponsonby as much as she did of the toboggan, but he gave her points. In any case, Winn preferred him to Mr. Roper, who was obliged to teach Maurice in the afternoons.

If one wants very much to learn a particular subject, it is surprising how much of it one may pick up in the course of a day from chance moments.

In a week Winn had learned that Maurice and Claire were orphans, that they lived with an aunt who didn't get on with Claire and an uncle who didn't get on with Maurice, and that there were several cousins too stodgy for words. Claire was waiting for Maurice to get through Sandhurst—he'd been horribly interrupted by pleurisy—and then she could keep house for him somewhere—wherever he was sent—unless she took up a profession. She rather thought she was going to do that in any case, because they would have awfully little money; and besides, not doing things was a bore, and every girl ought to make her way in the world, didn't Major Staines think so?

Major Staines didn't, and emphatically said that he didn't.

"Good God, no! What on earth for?" was how he expressed it. Claire stopped short, outside the office door, just as she was going to pay her bill.

"We shall have to talk about this," she said gravely. "I'm awfully afraid you're a reactionary."

"I dare say I am," said Winn, who hadn't the faintest idea what a reactionary was, but rather liked the sound of it. "We'll talk about it as much as you like. How about lunch at the Schatz Alp?"

That was how they went to the Schatz Alp and had their first real talk.

CHAPTER XIII

Claire was not perfectly sure of life—it occurred to her at nineteen that it might have in store for her certain surprises—but she was perfectly sure of herself. She knew that she ought to have been a boy, and that if she had been a boy she would have tried to be like General Gordon. Balked of this ambition by the fact of her sex, she turned her attention to Maurice.

It seemed to her essential that he should be like General Gordon in her place, and by dint of persuasion, concentration of purpose, and sheer indomitable will power she infected Maurice with the same idea. He had made her no promises, but he had agreed to enter the army.

It is improbable that General Gordon's character was formed wholly by the exertions of his sister, but Claire in her eagerness rather overlooked the question of material. There was nothing in Maurice himself that was wrong, but he belonged to a class of young men who are always being picked up by "wrong 'uns."

He wanted a little too much to be liked. He was quite willing to be a hero to please Claire if it was not too much trouble. Meanwhile he expected it to be compatible with drinking rather more than was good for him, spending considerably too much money, and talking loudly and knowingly upon subjects considered doubtful.

If the world had been as innocent as Maurice, this program would in time have corrected itself. But besides holes and the unwary, there are from time to time diggers of holes, and it was to these unsound guides that Maurice found himself oftenest attracted.

What he asked of Claire was that she should continue to believe in him and make his way easy for him. She could fight for his freedom with a surly uncle, but having won it, she shouldn't afterward expect a fellow to do things with it which would end in his being less free.

Maurice really loved Claire, his idea of love being that he would undeviatingly choose her to bear all his burdens. She managed the externals of his life with the minimum of exertion to himself. She fought his guardians; she talked straight to

his opposers; she took buffets that were meant for him to take; she made plans, efforts, and arrangements for his comfort. Lots of things he wanted he could simply not have had if she had failed to procure them.

Pushed beyond a certain point Maurice gave in, or appeared to give in, and lied. Claire never admitted even to herself that Maurice lied, but she took unusual pains to prevent his ever being pushed beyond a certain point.

It was Claire who had managed the journey to Davos in the teeth of opposition; but it was Maurice who would have no other guide than Mr. Roper, a splendid army coach picked up at a billiard room in a hotel. Now that they were at Davos, Claire became a little doubtful if, after all, her uncle hadn't been right when he had declared that Bournemouth would have done as well and been far less expensive. Then Winn came, and she began mysteriously to feel that the situation was saved.

It wasn't that Winn looked in the least like General Gordon, but Mr. Ponsonby had told her that he was a distinguished officer and shot tigers on foot.

Claire was quite surprised that Winn had been so nice to her, particularly as he hadn't appeared at all a friendly kind of person; but she became more and more convinced that Winn was a knight errant in disguise and had been sent by heaven to her direct assistance.

Claire believed very strongly in heaven. If you have no parents and very disagreeable relatives, heaven becomes extremely important. Claire didn't think it was at all the place her aunt and uncle vaguely held out to her as a kind of permanent and compulsory pew into which an angelic verger conducted the more respectable after death.

Everything Mr. and Mrs. Tighe considered the laws of God seemed to Claire unlikely to be the laws of anybody except people like Mr. and Mrs. Tighe; but she did believe that God looked after Maurice and herself, and she was anxious that He should look particularly after Maurice.

She determined that on the day she went to the Schatz Alp with Major Staines she would take him into her confidence. She could explain the position of women to him while they climbed the Rhüti-Weg; this would give them all of lunch for Maurice's future, and she hoped without direct calculations—because, although Claire generally had very strong purposes, she seldom had calculations—that perhaps if she was lucky he would tell her about tigers on the way down.

It was one of those mornings at Davos which seemed made out of fragrance and crystal. The sun soaked into the pines, the sky above the tree-tops burned like blue flame. It was the first time in Claire's life that she had gone out all by herself to lunch with a grown-up man. Winn was far more important than a mere boy, besides being a major.

She had been planning all the morning during her skating what arguments she should use to Winn on the subject of women, but when she saw him in the hall everything went out of her head. She only knew that it was a heavenly day and that it seemed extraordinarily difficult not to dance.

It was a long walk up to the Schatz Alp; there were paths where the pine-trees met overhead, garlanded with wreaths of snow, and the spaces between the wreaths were as blue as love-in-a-mist, an old-fashioned flower that grows in English gardens. Claire pointed it out to Winn.

"Only," she said, "up here there isn't any mist, is there?"

"No," said Winn, looking at her in a curious way; "as far as I can see, there is none whatever. By the by, that particular flower you mention isn't only called love-in-a-mist, it's also called devil-in-a-bush."

"But that's a pity," said Claire, decisively. "I like the other name better."

She moved beside him with a buoyant, untiring step, without haste and without effort. He told her that he would like to take her up into the Himalayas. She would make a good climber. In his heart he knew there was no place on earth to which he wouldn't like to take her. She was born to be a man's comrade, observant, unexacting, level-headed. She was the kind of girl you wouldn't mind seeing in a tight place if you were there, of course, to get her out of it. Then he pulled himself up and told himself not to be fanciful.

It was rather a fanciful morning: the day and the snowy hillside and the endless, pungent sweetness of the sunny air were like a spell. He found he was telling Claire about the things he used to do when he was a boy. He went on doing it because the adventures of the Staines family made her laugh.

He had not supposed that James, Charles, Isabella, Dolores, and he himself were particularly funny before, but he was delighted to discover their hidden gift. Claire wanted to hear everything about them, their ponies, their dogs, their sharp disgraces, and their more wonderful escapes and revenges; but she didn't want

them to be punished, and Winn had to hasten over those frequent and usually protracted disasters.

They had the woods to themselves; there was no sound at all except the occasional soft drop of melting snow. Once they stood quite still holding their breath to watch the squirrels skim from tree to tree as if they were weaving the measures of a mystic dance. If it hadn't been for the squirrels they might have been the only creatures alive in all the silent, sparkling earth.

The mountains spread out around them with the reticent hush of interrupted consciousness. They seemed to be on the verge of further revelations, and were withheld from a last definite whisper only by the intrusion of humanity.

"I know they could speak if they liked," Claire murmured. "What do you suppose they'd say?"

"Let's have an avalanche and knock the silly blighters out of our valley for good and all," Winn suggested.

Claire disposed of Davos with a wave of her hand.

"But they don't mind us, do they?" she urged. "Because we're so happy and we like them so. Doesn't the air make you feel awfully funny and happy?"

"Yes," Winn admitted; "but it's not all the air, you know."

Claire wanted to know what else it was; but as Winn didn't offer to explain, she felt that perhaps she had better not ask.

They were near the top when Winn paused suddenly and said in a most peculiar reluctant voice; "Look here, I think I ought to tell you."

He stumbled over the words and then added, "No, by Jove, that won't do!"

"Oh, don't let's tell each other things we ought!" Claire entreated. "It's not the kind of morning for that. I meant to talk about lots of really important subjects, but I'm not going to now. I may later, of course; but just now I don't feel in the mood for being important."

Winn looked at her very hard, and then he said:

"But still you are rather important, you know."

"Then," she laughed, "I'm important enough to have my own way, aren't I?"

Winn said nothing. He seemed to acquiesce that she was important enough for that.

"Would you like to know," she asked, "what I'd really like for lunch?" Winn said he would awfully, and by the time she had told him they had reached the top, and the funicular appeared, disgorging people in front of a big glass-covered restaurant.

Winn found the best and quietest table with the finest view. From it they could see the valley down to Frauenkirch and up to Clavedel.

It was a splendid lunch, curiously good, with sparkling sweet wine, which Claire loved, and Winn, secretly loathing, serenely shared because of a silly feeling he had that he must take what she did.

After lunch they sat and smoked, leaning over the great clear view. They could hear the distant velvety boom of the village clock beneath them. Winn gripped his hand firmly on the table.

"I've got to damned well do it," he said to himself. He remembered that he had had once to shoot a spy in cold blood, and that he used those words to himself before he did it.

A couple passed close to their table. The woman was over-dressed, and hung with all kinds of jingling chains and bangles; she was pretty, and as she sat with her profile turned a little toward them she was curiously like Estelle. This was his opportunity. It must come now; all the morning it had lain in the back of his mind, behind delight, behind their laughter, like some lurking jungle creature waiting for the dark.

"Do you see that woman," he asked Claire, "the pretty one over there by the pillar? She's awfully like—"

Claire stopped him. "Pretty!" she cried. "Do you really think she's pretty? I think she's simply loathsome!"

Winn checked himself hurriedly; he obviously couldn't finish his sentence with "she's awfully like my wife."

"Well, she sets out to be pretty, doesn't she?" he altered it rather lamely. Claire continued extremely scornful.

"Yes, I dare say," she admitted. "She may set out to be smart too, hung round with things like a Christmas-tree, but she's as common as a sixpenny bazaar. I'll tell you why I don't like her, Major Staines, and who she reminds me of, but perhaps you think her pretty, too? I mean that horrid woman, Mrs. Bouncing in our hotel?"

"But can't horrid women be pretty, too?" Winn ventured with meekness.

"No, of course not," said Claire, with great decisiveness. "Why, you know horrid men can't be handsome. Look at Mr. Roper!" Winn was uncertain if this point of knowledge had ever reached him; but he wasn't at this time of day going to look at Mr. Roper, so he gave in.

"I dare say you're right," he said. "As a matter of fact, you know, I never *do* look at Roper."

"But that's not the reason," Claire went on, slightly softened by her victory, "that I dislike her. I really dislike her because I think she is bad for Maurice; but perhaps you haven't noticed the way he keeps hanging about her. It makes me sick."

Winn admitted that he had noticed it.

"Still," he said, "of course if you hadn't proved to me that by being horrid she couldn't be pretty, I should have supposed that he simply hung about Mrs. Bouncing because she was—well, not precisely plain."

Claire looked doubtfully at him, but he wasn't smiling; he was merely looking at her with sufficient attention.

"There are only two of us," she said in a low voice, "Maurice and me, and I do so awfully want him to be a success. I don't think anybody else does. I don't even know how much he wants it himself. You see, Maurice is so young in many ways, and our people having died—he hasn't had much of a chance, has he? Men ought to have fathers."

Winn listened intently; he always remembered anything she said, but this particular opinion sank deep into the bottom of his heart: "Men ought to have fathers."

"I've done the best I can," Claire went on, "but you see, I'm young, too; there are lots of things I don't really know about life. I think perhaps I sometimes believe

too much that things are going to be jolly, and that makes me a bad adviser for Maurice. Do you know what I mean?"

Winn nodded, but he determined that whether she expected or not, she should have things jolly. He must be able to manage it. If one wanted a thing as much as he wanted this, surely one could bring it off.

Hadn't he pulled off races on the scratchiest of polo ponies, when he couldn't afford better, out of sheer intention? He had meant to win, moved the pony along, and won. Was life less controllable than a shoddy polo pony?

He set his mouth and stared grimly out over the sparkling snow. He did not ask himself how a man with a wife hung round his neck like a millstone was going to manage the perpetual happiness of a stray young woman. He never asked himself questions or saw how things were to be done, but when the crisis came his instinct taught him in a flash the short cut to victory.

"Now," said Claire, unexpectedly, "you are looking awfully dangerous—you do rather sometimes, you know—like a kind of volcano that might go off."

Winn turned his eyes slowly toward her.

"I shall never be dangerous for you, Miss Rivers," he said gently.

He did not know how much he promised her or that he was already incapable of keeping his promise. She looked away from him with smiling lips and happy, mysterious eyes. She had known long ago that all the force he had was as safe with her as if he had laid it in her hands; safer than that, because he held it in his own—for her.

It seemed to Claire that you were only perfectly secure when you were with a man who could be dangerous to everybody else, but always safe for you.

"You will help me with Maurice?" she said softly. "Then I sha'n't feel worried any more."

"I shouldn't let it worry me for a moment if I were you," Winn assured her. "He hasn't come to much harm so far. He's young, that's all. I'll keep my eye on him, of course."

Winn knew quite well what he would do with a subaltern of Maurice's type. He would take him out shooting and put the fear of God into him. If this were done

often and systematically enough, the subaltern would improve or send in his papers. But Davos did not offer equal advantages. One could not get the fear of God everywhere on a tap; besides, there was Mrs. Bouncing.

Claire turned suddenly toward him.

"I want Maurice," she said rather breathlessly, with shining eyes, "to be a good soldier; I want him to be like you."

Winn felt a pang of fear; it was a pang that was half horrible pain, and half passionate and wild delight. Was Claire perfectly safe? Why did she want Maurice to be like him? It was Claire herself who banished his fear; she added hastily:

"He really must get through Sandhurst properly."

Of course she hadn't meant anything. In fact, if she really had liked him in any particular way she'd have been shot before she showed it. What she wanted was simply the advice of an older man in the service. It did not occur to Winn that Claire had been shot already without knowing it.

He went on being reassured all the way back because Claire talked persistently about tigers. Winn explained that once you thoroughly knew where you were, there was no real danger in a tiger.

PART II

CHAPTER XIV

Winn discovered almost immediately that what assistance he could give to Maurice would have to be indirect. He had not a light hand for weak, evasive, and excitable people, and Maurice did not like to be driven off the rink with "Better come along with me" or "I should think a good brisk walk to Clavedel would be about your mark." Winn's idea of a walk was silence and pace; he had a poor notion of small talk, and he became peculiarly dumb with a young man whose idea of conversation was high-pitched boasting.

When Maurice began telling stories about how he got the better of so-and-so or the length of his ski-jumps, Winn's eyes became unpleasantly like probes, and Maurice felt the élan of his effects painfully ebbing away. Still, there was a certain honor in being sought out by the most exclusive person in the hotel and Winn's requests, stated in flat terms and with the force of his determination behind them, were extraordinarily difficult to refuse.

It was Mr. Roper who gave Maurice the necessary stiffening. Mr. Roper didn't like Winn, and though their intercourse had been limited to a series of grunts on Winn's part, Mr. Roper felt something unerringly inimical behind each of these indeterminate sounds.

"That man's a spoil-sport," he informed his pupil. Maurice agreed.

"But he's beastly difficult to say no to," he added. "You mean to somehow, but you don't."

"I expect he's trying to manage you," Mr. Roper cleverly hinted.

This decided Maurice once and for all. He refused all further invitations. He had a terror of being managed, and though he always was managed, gusts of this fear would seize upon him at any effort to influence him in any direction favorable to himself. He was never in the least uneasy at being managed to his disadvantage.

Baffled in his main direction, Winn turned his mind upon the subject of Mr. Roper. Mr. Roper was slippery and intensely amiable; these were not the qualities with which Winn felt himself capable of direct dealing. He would have liked to destroy Mr. Roper, and he thought that the situation might eventually

arrive at this point; but until it did, he saw that he had better leave Mr. Roper alone. "You can't do anything with a worm but tread on it," he said to himself, and in hotels people had to be careful how they trod on worms. There was still Mrs. Bouncing, but a slight study of that lady, which took place in the hall after dinner, put this possibility out of the question. She called Winn a "naughty man" and suggested his taking her tobogganing by moonlight.

Mr. Bouncing was a side issue, but Winn, despite his own marriage, held the theory that men ought to look after their wives. He felt that if there had been any question of other men he could have managed Estelle; or, even short of managing Estelle, he could have managed the other men. It occurred to him now that perhaps Mr. Bouncing could be led to act favorably upon the question of his wife's behavior.

Mr. Bouncing could not walk at all; he could get out to the public balcony in the sun, and when he was there, he lay with the "Pink 'Un" and "The Whipping Post" on his lap and his thermometer beside him. All he asked was that he should have his hot milk regularly four times a day. He hardly talked to anybody at all. This was not because it made him cough to talk—it didn't particularly; he coughed without being made to—but because he had exhausted his audience.

There was only one subject left to Mr. Bouncing, and that was his health; after he had told people all his symptoms, they didn't want to hear any more and there was nothing left to talk about. So he lay there in the sunshine thinking about his symptoms instead. There were a good many of them to think about, and all of them were bad.

Mr. Bouncing was surprised when Winn sat down to talk to him, and he explained to him at once exactly what the doctors thought of his case. Winn listened passively, and came back the next day at the same time.

This surprised Mr. Bouncing still more, and little by little the subjects between them widened. Mr. Bouncing still talked about himself, but he talked differently. He told Winn things he had never told any one else, and he was really pleased when Winn laughed at a joke he showed him in "The Pink 'Un."

"You can laugh," he said almost admiringly. "I daren't, you know; that's one of the things I'm told not to do, but I often wish some one would come here and laugh at the jokes for me. It's quite an effort for me sometimes not to burst out; and then, you see, hemorrhage! I knew a poor chap who literally died of it—died of laughing. They might put that in the 'Pink 'Un,' mightn't they?"

Winn said he thought one might die of worse things.

"Yes, I know," agreed Mr. Bouncing, "but I'm not going to be caught like that. I dare say you don't know, but I believe I'm the worst case in the hotel. I'm not *quite* sure; that's what worries me. There's a Mrs. Maguire who stays in bed. I've made all sorts of inquiries about her; but people are so stupid, they don't know the right symptoms to ask about, and I can't go in and look at her, can I? And my wife won't. She says one death's-head is enough for her and I quite see her point. Perhaps Mrs. Maguire's case is partly nerves. My wife thinks I'm very nervous. So I am, you know, in a way. I have to be careful; but, Lord! when I see the things people do up here! The risks they take! You, for instance. I've seen you do heaps of things that are perfectly deadly; and yet there you are getting better. Funny, isn't it?"

Winn said it was funny, but he supposed one must take his chance.

"Yes, I know; that is what people keep saying," Mr. Bouncing admitted. "You can take it if you've got it; but my point is, if you haven't got it, you can't take it, can you? Now, as far as I can see, looking back from the start, you know, I never had a dog's chance. It's years since I went out in a wind without an overcoat on, and once in the very beginning I got my feet wet; but for the last five years I've been as careful as a girl with a new hat. I think I shall live till the spring if I don't get influenza. I hope you'll remember not to come near me if you feel a cold coming on." Winn assured him that he would. "I asked Dr. Gurnet the other day," Mr. Bouncing went on musingly, "if he thought I should ever be able to walk to the post-office again—I used to get there and back last winter, you know—but he wouldn't give me a direct answer. He said he thought I could rely on the hotel porter. He's not quite definite enough—Dr. Gurnet. I told him the other day how difficult it was to get up in the morning, and he said, 'Well, then, why not stay in bed?' But I'm not going to do that. I believe you go quicker when you stay in bed. Besides, I should be dull lying there in bed. I like to sit here and watch people and see the silly things they do. That young boy you sit at table with—he won't come to any good. Silly! He thinks my wife likes him, but she doesn't; it's just that she must have her mind taken off, you know, at times, poor thing. I like to see her amused."

"And what about you?" asked Winn. "It seems to me she might better spend some of her time amusing you."

Mr. Bouncing pointed to the "Pink 'Un."

"I've got plenty to amuse me," he explained, "and you mustn't think she doesn't look after me. Why, the other day—when I had the high temperature, you know, and stayed in my room—she came to the door after she'd been skating, and said, 'Still coughing?' That shows she noticed I was worse, doesn't it?"

"I'm sure she must be awfully anxious about you," Winn assented with more kindliness than truth. "But do you care for her knocking about so with young Rivers and that chap Roper? It seems to me she's too young and too pretty. If I were you, I'd call her in a bit; I would really."

Mr. Bouncing leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes. This always made Winn a little uneasy, for when Mr. Bouncing's eyes were shut it was so difficult to tell whether he was alive or dead. However, after a few minutes he opened them.

"They are five minutes late with my hot milk," he said. "Do you mind just getting up and touching the bell? And you've got such a sharp way of speaking to waiters, perhaps you wouldn't mind hauling him over the coals for me when he comes?" Winn complied with this request rapidly and effectively, and the hot milk appeared as if by magic.

Mr. Bouncing drank some before he returned to the subject of his wife.

"Yes," he said, "I dare say you would call her in. You're the kind of man who can make people come in when you call. I'm not. Besides, you see, she's young; she's got her life to live, and, then, ought I to have married her at all? Of course I was wonderfully well at the time; I could walk several miles, I remember, and had no fever to speak of. Still, there were the symptoms. She took the risk, of course—she was one of a large family, and I had money—but it hasn't been very amusing for her, you must admit."

Winn didn't admit it, because it seemed to him as if it had been extremely amusing for Mrs. Bouncing, a great deal more amusing than it had any right to be.

"Perhaps you think she oughtn't to have married for money," Mr. Bouncing went on when he had finished the hot milk and Winn still sat there saying nothing. "But you're quite wrong if you do. Money is the most important thing there is—next to health of course. Health and money—one's no use without the other, of course; but I don't honestly think anything else really matters. I know what the chaplain says; but he's always been quite strong."

"That's all very well," said Winn. "I'm not a religious man myself, but people oughtn't to take something for nothing. If she's married you for your money, she ought to be more with you. She's got the money, hasn't she, and what have you got? That's the way I look at it."

Mr. Bouncing did not shake his head—he was too careful for that—but he looked as if he were shaking it.

"That's one point of view, of course," he said slowly; "but how do you know I want to have her more with me? She's very young and strong. I expect she'd be exciting, and it wouldn't be at all good for me to be excited.

"Besides, she has no sense of humor. I wouldn't dream of asking her to laugh at my jokes as I do you. She wouldn't see them, and then I shouldn't like to show her the improper ones. They're not suitable for ladies, and the improper ones are the best. I sometimes think you can't have a really good joke unless it's improper."

Winn did not say anything; but he thought that however limited Mrs. Bouncing's sense of humor might be, she would have enjoyed the improper ones.

Mr. Bouncing took out his thermometer.

"It is five minutes," he said, "since I've had the glass of milk, and I think my tongue must have cooled down by now. So I shall take my temperature, and after that I shall try to go to sleep. But I don't believe you are really anxious about my wife; what you're worried about is young Rivers. I've seen you taking him for walks, and it's no use your worrying about him, because, as I've said before, he's silly. If he didn't do one silly thing, he'd do another. However, he's selfish, too. That's always something; he won't be so likely to come to grief as if he were merely silly. It's his sister I should be worried about if I were you."

"Why?" asked Winn without looking at him. Mr. Bouncing looked at Winn, but he made no answer. He had already got his thermometer in his mouth.

CHAPTER XV

Winn had a feeling that he ought to keep away from her, but Davos was an inconvenient place for keeping away. People were always turning up when one least expected them, or one turned up oneself. Privacy and publicity flashed together in the sunny air. Even going off up a mountain with a book was hardly the resource it seemed; friends skied or tobogganed down upon you from the top, and carried you off to tea.

Winn had an uneasy feeling that he oughtn't to go every morning to the rink, though that was naturally the place for a man who was only allowed to skate to find himself. It was also the place where he could not fail to find Claire. There were a good many other skaters on the rink, too; they were all preparing for the International Skating Competition.

The English, as a rule, stuck to their own rink, where they had a style of skating belonging to themselves. Their style was perpendicular and very stiff; it was by no means easy to attain, and when attained, hardly perhaps, to the observer, worth the efforts expended. Winn approved of it highly. He thought it a smart and sensible way to skate, and was by no means a bad exponent; but once he had seen Claire skating on the big rink, he put aside his abortive circling round an orange. It is difficult to concentrate upon being a ramrod when every instinct in you desires to chase a swallow. She wore, when she skated, a short, black velvet skirt, white fox furs, and a white fur cap. One couldn't very well miss seeing her. It did not seem to Winn as if she skated at all. She skimmed from her seat into the center of her chosen corner, and then looked about her, balanced in the air. When she began to skate he could not tell whether the band was playing or not, because he felt as if she always moved to music.

She would turn at first mysteriously and doubtingly, trying her edges, with little short cuts and dashes, like a leaf blown now here and now there, pushed by a draught of air, and then some purpose seemed to catch her, and her steps grew intricate and measured. He could not take his eyes from her or remember that she was real, she looked so unsubstantial, eddying to and fro, curving and circling and swooping. There was no stiffness in her, and Winn found himself ready to give up stiffness; it was terrible the amount of things he found himself ready to give up as he watched her body move like seaweed on a tide. Motion

and joy and music all seemed easy things, and the things that were not easy slipped out of his mind.

After a time Maurice would join her to practise the pair-skating. He was a clever skater, but careless, and it set Winn's teeth on edge to watch how nearly he sometimes let her down. He would have let any other woman down, but Claire knew him. She counted on his not being exactly where he ought to be, hovered longer on her return strokes, pushed herself more swiftly forward to meet him, or retreated to avoid his too impulsive rushes. Winn was always glad when Maurice, satisfied with his cursory practice, left her circling alone and unfettered like a sea-gull on a cliff.

This was the time when he always made up his mind not to join her, and felt most sure that she didn't care whether he joined her or not.

He had not talked with her alone since their lunch at the Schatz Alp nearly a week ago. Every one of her hours was full, her eyes danced and laughed as usual, the secretive bloom of youth hid away from him any sign of expectation. He did not dream that every day for a week she had expected and wanted him. She couldn't herself have explained what she wanted. Only her gaiety had lost its unconsciousness; she was showing that she didn't mind, she was not, now minding. It seemed so strange that just when she had felt as if they were real friends he had mysteriously kept away from her. Perhaps he hadn't meant all the nice things he had said or all the nicer things he hadn't said at all, but just looked whenever her eyes met his? They did not meet his now; he always seemed to be looking at something else. Other men put on her skates and found her quickest on the rink, and the other men seemed to Claire like trees walking; they were no longer full of amusing possibilities. They were in the way. Then one morning Winn, watching her from a distance noticed that Maurice didn't turn up. Claire actually looked a forlorn and lonely little figure, and he couldn't make up his mind not to join her.

He skated slowly up to her.

"Well," he said, "where's Maurice? He oughtn't to be missing a good skating morning like this?" It suddenly seemed to Claire as if everything was all right again. Winn was there for her, just as he had been on the Schatz Alp; his eyes looked the same, and the intentional bruskness which he put into his voice was quite insufficient to hide its eagerness.

"Oh," she said, "Major Staines, I didn't mean to tell anybody, but I shall tell you

of course. It's rather sickening, isn't it? Maurice doesn't want to go in for the competition any more; he says he can't spare the time."

"What!" cried Winn; "look here, let's sit down and talk about it." They sat down, and the music and the sunshine spread out all round them. Everything swung into a curious harmony, and left them almost nothing to be upset about. "He can't throw you over like this," Winn protested. "Why, it's only a fortnight off the day, and you're one of the tiptop skaters."

Claire did not say what she knew to be true, that people had been saying that too much to Maurice, and Maurice only liked praise that came his own way.

"I think it's Mrs. Bouncing," she said dejectedly. "He's teaching her to skate, but she'll never learn. She's been up here for years, and she doesn't know her edges! It looks awfully as if he really liked her, because Maurice skates quite well."

"I'm afraid I've been of very little use to you about Mrs. Bouncing," Winn said apologetically. "I thought Bouncing might help us, he's quite a good chap; but I'm afraid he's too down in the mouth. Still, I think I may be able to do something if things get to look really bad. Don't worry about that, please. But, by Jove! this skating matter *is* serious. What are you going to do about it?" Anything that stopped sport seemed to Winn to be really serious; something had got to be done about it. "Isn't there any one else up here not going in for it that you could lick into shape?"

Claire shook her head doubtfully.

"They'd have to give up every bit of their time," she explained, "and virtually hardly breathe. You see, pair-skating is really very stiff. Of course, if I got a new man, I'd do most of the figures; but he'd have to be there to catch me at the right times, and awfully steady on his edges, and waltz of course."

"What about me?" Winn asked quietly.

"I'm steady on my edges, and I can waltz after a fashion, and I'd promise not to breathe for a fortnight." He looked at her, and then looked away quickly. He was a damned fool to have offered himself! How on earth was he going to stand a fortnight with her when he could barely keep himself in hand for five minutes?

"Oh," she said, "you!"

Afterward she said a good deal more, but Winn only remembered the way she

said "you," because her voice had sounded different, as if she had found something she had wanted to lay her hands on. Of course what she really wanted was to go in for the pair-skating; it was much the most fun.

They began from that moment to go in for it. Winn had to speak to Dr. Gurnet about the skating, because four hours wasn't enough, and Claire insisted upon Dr. Gurnet's consent.

Dr. Gurnet had consented, though he had raised his eyebrows and said, "Pair-skating?" and then he had asked who Major Staines had chosen for his partner. Naturally Winn had become extremely stiff, and said, "Miss Rivers," in a tone which should have put an end to the subject.

"Well, well!" said Dr. Gurnet. "And she's a woman, after all, isn't she?" Winn ignored this remark.

"By the by," he said, "my friend's coming out in about a fortnight—the one I told you about, Captain Drummond."

"I remember perfectly," said Dr. Gurnet; "a most estimable person I understand you to say. In about a fortnight? The skating competition will just be over then, won't it? I am sure I hope you and Miss Rivers will both make a great success of it."

The fortnight passed in a sunny flash. On the whole Winn had kept himself in hand. His voice had betrayed him, his eyes had betrayed him, all his controlled and concentrated passion had betrayed him; but he hadn't said anything. He had buried his head deep in the sands and trusted like an ostrich to an infectious oblivion. He reviewed his behavior on the way to the rink the day of the International.

It was an icy cold morning; the valley was wrapped in a thick blue mist. There was no sunlight yet. The tops of the mountains were a sharpened deadly white, colder than purity. As he walked toward the valley the black fir-trees on the distant heights took fire. They seemed to be lighted one by one from some swift, invisible torch, and then quicker than sight itself the sun slipped over the edge and ran in a golden flood across the mountains. The little willows by the lake-side turned apricot; the rink was very cold and only just refrozen. It was a small gray square surrounded by color. Winn was quite alone in the silence and the light and the tingling bitter air. There was something in him that burned like a secret undercurrent of fire. Had he played the game? What about that dumb

weight on his lips when he had tried to tell Claire on the Schatz Alp about Estelle? He couldn't get it out then; but had he tried again later? Had he concealed his marriage? Why should he tell her anything? She wouldn't care, she was so young. Couldn't he have his bit of spring, his dance of golden daffodils, and then darkness? He really thought of daffodils when he thought of Claire. She wouldn't mind, because she was spring itself, and had in front of her a great succession of flowers; but these were the last he was going to have. There wouldn't be anything at all after Claire, and he wasn't going to make love to her. Good God! he wasn't such a beast! There had been times this last fortnight that had tried every ounce of his self-control, and he hadn't touched her. He hadn't said a word that damned yellow-necked, hen-headed chaplain's wife couldn't have heard and welcome. Would many fellows have had his chances and behaved as if they were frozen barbed-wire fences? And she'd looked at him—by Jove, she'd looked at him! Not that she'd meant anything by it; only it had been hard to have to sit on the only decent feelings he had ever had and not let them rip. And as far as Estelle was concerned, she didn't care a damn for him, and he might just as well have been a blackguard. But that wasn't quite the point, was it? Blackguards hurt girls, and he hadn't set out to hurt Claire.

Well, there was no use making any song or dance about it; he'd have to go. At first he had thought he could tell her he was married—tell her as soon as the competition was over, and stay on; but he hadn't counted on the way things grew, and he didn't think now he could tell her and then hold his tongue about what he felt. If he told her, the whole thing would be out; he couldn't keep it back. There were things you knew you could do, like going away and staying away; there were others you were a fool to try.

He circled slowly over the black ice surrounded by pink flames. It made him laugh, because he might have been a creature in hell. Yes, that was what hell was like, he had always known it—cold. Cold and lonely, when, if you'd only had a bit of luck, you might have been up somewhere in the sunlight, not alone. He didn't feel somehow this morning as if his marriage was an obstruction; he felt as if it were a shame. It hurt him terribly that what had driven him to Estelle could be called love, when love was this other feeling—the feeling that he'd like to be torn into little bits rather than fail Claire. He'd be ridiculous to please her; he'd face anything, suffer anything, take anything on. And it wasn't in the least that she was lovely. He didn't think about her beauty half as much as he thought about her health and the gentle, tender ways she had with sick people. He'd watched her over and over again, when she had no idea he was anywhere near,

being nice to people in ways in which Winn had never dreamed before one could be nice. When people had nothing but their self-esteem left them, no attractions, no courage, no health, she'd just sit down beside them and make their self-esteem happy and comfortable.

She needn't have been anything but young and gay and triumphant, but she never shirked anybody else's pain. He had puzzled over her a good deal because, as far as he could see, she hadn't the ordinary rules belonging to good people—about church, and not playing cards for money, and pulling people up. It wasn't right and wrong she was thinking of most; it was other people's feelings.

He tried not to love her like that, because it made it worse. It was like loving God and Peter; it mixed him all up.

He couldn't see straight because everything he saw turned into love of her, and being with her seemed like being good; and it wasn't, of course, if he concealed things.

The icy blue rink turned slowly into gold before he had quite made up his mind what to do. Making up his mind had a good deal to do with Lionel, so that he felt fairly safe about it. It was going to hurt horribly, but if it only hurt him, it couldn't be said to matter. You couldn't have a safe plan that didn't hurt somebody, and as long as it didn't hurt the person it was made for, it could be counted a success.

Davos began to descend upon the rink, first the best skaters—Swedes, Russians, and Germans—and then all the world. The speed-skaters stood about in heavy fur coats down to their feet.

Claire came down surrounded by admirers. Winn heard her laugh before he saw her, and after he had seen her he saw nothing else. She looked like one of the fir-trees when the sun had caught it; she seemed aflame with a quite peculiar radiance and joy. She flew toward Winn, imitating the speed-skaters with one long swift stride of her skates.

"Ah," she cried, "isn't it a jolly morning? Isn't everything heavenly? Aren't you glad you are alive?"

That was the kind of mood she was in. It was quite superfluous to ask if she was nervous. She was just about as nervous as the sun was when it ran over the mountains.

"There doesn't seem to be much the matter with you this morning," said Winn, eying her thoughtfully.

The rink cleared at eleven and the band began to play.

The judges sat in different quarters of the rink so as to get the best all-around impression of the skating. The audience, muffled up in furs, crowded half-way up the valley, as if it were a gigantic amphitheater.

A Polish girl, very tall and slender, with a long black pigtail, swung out upon the ice. She caught the music with a faultless steadiness and swing. Her eyes were fixed on the mountains; her flexible hips and waist swung her to and fro as easily as a winter bird hovers balanced on its steady pinions. Out of the crowd her partner, a huge black-bearded Russian, glided toward her, caught her by the waist, lifted her, and flung her from side to side in great swirls and resounding leaps. Her skirts flew about her, her pigtail swung round her in the air, her feet struck the ice firmly together like a pair of ringing castanets. The crowd shouted applause as he caught her by the wrists after a particularly dazzling plunge into the empty air, and brought her round to face them, her fixed eyes changed and shot with triumph. The dance was over.

Then a succession of men skaters came forward, whirling, twisting, capering with flying feet. Winn watched them with more astonishment than pleasure.

"Like a ring of beastly slippery microbes!" he remarked to Claire.

"Yes," she said; "but wait." Half a dozen men and women came running out on the rink; with lifted feet, hand in hand, they danced like flying sunbeams.

Then a German pair followed the Polish. Both were strong, first-rate skaters, but the man was rough and selfish; he pulled his girl about, was careless of her, and in the end let her down, and half the audience hissed.

Swedish, Norwegian, French pairs followed swiftly after. Then Claire rose with a quickening of her breath.

"Now," she said, "you!" It was curious how seldom she said Major Staines.

Winn didn't much care to do this kind of thing before foreigners. However, it was in a way rather jolly, especially when the music warmed one's blood. He swept her out easily to the center of the ice. For a time he had only to watch her. He wondered what she looked like to all the black-headed dots sitting in the sun

and gazing. In his heart there was nothing left to which he could compare her. She turned her head a little, curving and swooping toward him, and then sprang straight into the air. He had her fast for a moment; her hands were in his, her eyes laughed at his easy strength, and again she shot away from him. Now he had to follow her, in and out, to the sound of the music; at first he thought of the steps, but he soon stopped thinking. Something had happened which made it quite unnecessary to think.

In his heart there was nothing left to which he could compare her

He was reading everything she knew out of his own heart; she had got into him somehow, so that he had no need to watch for his cue.

Wherever she wanted him he was; whenever she needed the touch of his hand or his steadiness it was ready for her. They were like the music and words of a song, or like a leaf and the dancing air it rests upon. They were no longer two beings; they had slipped superbly, intolerably into one; they couldn't go wrong; they couldn't make a mistake. Where she led he followed, indissolubly a part of her.

They swung together for the final salute. It seemed to Winn that her heart—her happy, swift-beating, exultant heart—was in his breast, and then suddenly, violently he remembered that she wasn't his, that he had no right to touch her. He moved away from her, leaving her, a little bewildered, to bow alone to the great cheering mass of people.

She found him afterward far back in the crowd, with a white face and inscrutable eyes.

"You must come and see the speed-skaters," she urged, with her hand on his arm. "It's the thing I told you about most. And I believe we've won the second prize. The Russian and Pole have got the first, of course; They were absolutely perfect, but we were rather good. Why did you rush off, and what are you looking like that for? Is anything the matter? You're not—" her voice faltered suddenly —"you're not angry, are you?"

"No, I'm not angry," said Winn, recklessly, "and nothing's the matter, and I'll go wherever you want and see what you want and do what you want, and I ran away because I was a damned fool and hate a fuss. And I see you're going to ask me if I liked it awfully. Yes, I did; I liked it awfully. Now are you satisfied?" He still hadn't said anything, he thought, that mattered.

"Oh, yes," she said slowly, "of course I'm satisfied. I'm glad you liked it awfully; I liked it awfully myself."

CHAPTER XVI

The valley of the Dischmatal lies between two rather shapeless mountains; it leads nowhere, and there is nothing in it.

Winn gave no reason for his wish to walk there with Lionel except that it was a quiet place for a talk. They had been together for twenty-four hours and so far they had had no talk. Lionel had expected to find a change in Winn; he had braced himself to meet the shock of seeing the strongest man he knew pitilessly weakened under an insidious disease. He had found a change, but not the one he expected. Winn looked younger, more alert, and considerably more vigorous. There was a curious excitement in his eyes which might have passed for happiness if he had not been so restless. He was glad to see Lionel, but that wasn't enough to account for it. Winn looked ten years younger and he had something up his sleeve.

Lionel had his own theory as to what that something might be, but he wouldn't have expected it to make Winn look younger. He couldn't help being afraid that Winn had found out Estelle. There had always been the chance that he might never find her out; he was neither reflective nor analytical, and Lionel was both. Winn might have been content simply to accept her as lovely and delightful, an ideal wife—not a companion, but a beautiful, fluttering creature to be supplied with everything it wanted. If he had done that he wouldn't have waked up to the fact that the creature gave him nothing whatever back—beyond preening its feathers and forbearing to peck. Lionel respected and loved women, so that he could afford to feel a certain contempt for Estelle, but he had always feared Winn's feeling any such emotion. Winn would condemn Estelle first and bundle her whole sex after her. Lionel hardly dared to ask him, as he did at last on their way through Dorf, what news he had of his wife.

"What news of Estelle?" Winn asked indifferently. "None particularly. She doesn't like Peter's language. My people seem to have taken to him rather, and I hear he's picked up parts of the Governor's vocabulary. It'll be jolly hearing him talk; he couldn't when I left. Estelle's taken up religion. It's funny, my mother said she would, before we were married. My mother's got a pretty strong head; Estelle hasn't, she was keen about the Tango when I left; but I dare say religion's better for her; hers is the high church kind. Up there is the valley—funny sort of

place; it'll remind you of the hills—that's one reason why I brought you out here—that and the hotel being like a fly paper. Davos is like all the places where our sort of people go—fashion or disease—it don't matter a penny which—they're all over the place itself, in and out of each other's pockets, and yet get a mile or two out and nobody's in sight. Funny how people like each other. I don't like 'em, you know. I hate 'em."

In the early February afternoon the valley lay before them singularly still and white. There were no fir-trees on the sides of the abrupt snow slopes, and it took Winn some time to rediscover a faint pathway half blotted out by recent snow.

A few minutes later the road behind them vanished, everything dropped away from them but the snow, and the low gray skies. A tiny wind slipped along the valley; it was strange not to see it, for it felt like the push of a Presence, in the breathless solitude. A long way off Lionel could hear a faint noise like the sound of some one choking.

It reminded him of the sound behind the green baize doors in the hotel. It was just such a sound, suppressed, faint, but quite audible, that he heard along the passages at night. He looked questioningly at Winn.

"That's a waterfall," said Winn; "most of it's frozen up but it leaks through a little. There's a story about this place—I didn't mention it to you before, did I?"

Lionel shook his head. Winn was not in the habit of telling him stories about places. He had informed Lionel on one occasion some years ago, that he thought legends too fanciful, unless they were in the Bible, which was probably true, and none of our business. But Lionel had already wondered if this change in Winn wasn't on the whole making him more fanciful.

"I dare say," Winn began, "there's not a word of truth in it, and it's perfectly pointless besides; still it's a queer place, this valley, and what's particularly odd is, that though you can find it easily enough sometimes, there are days when I'm blessed if it's there at all! Anyhow I've gone wrong times out of number when I've looked for it, and you know I don't usually go wrong about finding places. This is the middle one of three valleys, count 'em backwards or forwards, whichever way you like—but I give you my word, after you've passed the first, and take the second turn, you'll find yourself in the third valley—or take it the other way, you'll be in the first. It's made me jumpy before now, looking for it. However, that hasn't anything to do with the story, such as it is.

"They say that on New Year's eve, all the dead that have died in Davos (there must be a jolly lot of 'em when you come to think of it) process through the valley to the Waterfall. What their object is, of course, the story doesn't mention—ghosts, as far as I can see, never have much object, except to make you sit up; but they set out anyhow, scores and scores of 'em.

"If it happens to be moonlight, you can see them slipping over the snow, making for the waterfall as fast as they can hoof it, but none of them look back—and if they were all your dearest friends you couldn't catch a glimpse of their faces—unless, I suppose, you had the gumption to start off by sitting up at the waterfall and waiting for 'em—which nobody has, of course. The point of the story, if you can call it a point, is that the last man in the procession isn't dead at all. He's a sort of false spook of the living—taking his first turn in with them—because as sure as fate he dies before the next year's out, and when the other chaps have reached the waterfall, he stops short and looks back toward Davos—that's how he's been spotted, and he's always died all right before the end of the year. Rum tale, isn't it?"

"How did you get hold of it?" Lionel asked curiously. "It's not much in your line, is it?"

"Well—I don't know," said Winn, taking out his pipe and preparing to light it. "The last six months or so, I've thought a lot of funny things. I came up here prepared to die; that's to say, I thought I'd got to, which is as far as you can prepare for most things, but I'm not going to die, as I told you yesterday, but what I didn't mention to you then was that, on the whole, as it happens now, I'd jolly well rather."

"You mean," said Lionel, "that it's got too thick between you and Estelle? I wish you'd tell me, old chap. I haven't an idea how it stands, but I've been afraid ever since I stayed with you, that you'd made a bit of a mistake over your marriage?"

"As far as that goes," said Winn, "I swallowed that down all right. It's no use bothering about a thing that isn't there. It's what is that counts. It counts damnably, I can tell you that. Look here, have you ever had any ideas about love?"

"I can't say that I have," Lionel admitted cautiously. "Many. I dare say I should like it if it came; and I've had fancies for girls, of course, but nothing so far I couldn't walk off, not what people call the real thing, I suppose. I've always liked women more than you have, and I don't think you get let in so much if you

honestly like 'em. I haven't seen any one I particularly want to marry yet, if that's what you mean?"

"That's part of it," agreed Winn. "I supposed you'd been like that. I shouldn't wonder if what you say about liking 'em being safer, isn't true. I never liked 'em. I've taken what I could get when I wanted it. I rather wish I hadn't now, but I can't say I was ever sorry before. Even—Estelle—well, I don't want to be nasty about her—but it was only different, I can see that now, because I knew I couldn't get what I wanted without marrying her—still—I somehow think I'd made a kind of a start that time—only I got pulled up too short. I dare say I quite deserved it. That's no way of liking a woman. When you do *really*, you know all the rest's been half twaddle and half greed. Your father and mother are all right—so are mine really, though they do blow each other's heads off—still, there's something there—you know what I mean?"

"Something indestructible and uniting—" said Lionel quietly. "I've often wondered about it."

"Well, I've never wondered about it," said Winn, firmly, "and I'm not going to begin now. Still, I admit it's there. What I'm getting at is that there's something I want you to do for me. You'll probably think I'm mad, but I can't help that. It'll work out all right in the end, if you'll do it."

"You can ask me anything you like," said Lionel, quietly; "any damned thing. I don't suppose I'll refuse to do it."

The water broke into a prolonged gurgle under their feet; it sounded uncannily like some derisive listener. There was nothing in sight at all—not even their shadows on the unlighted snows.

"Well—there's a girl here," Winn said in a low voice; "it's not very easy to explain. I haven't told her about Estelle; I meant to, but I couldn't. I'm afraid you'll think I haven't played the game, but I haven't made love to her; only I can't stay any longer; I've got to clear out."

Lionel nodded. "All right," he said; "let's go wherever you like; there are plenty of other snow places jollier than this."

"That isn't what I want," said Winn. "I want you to stay with her. I want you to marry her eventually—d' you see? It's quite simple, really."

"By Jove," said Lionel, thoughtfully; "simple, d' you call it? As simple as taking

a header into the mid-Atlantic! And what good would it do you, my dear old chap, if I did? It wouldn't be you that had got her?"

"I dare say not," said Winn; "you don't see my point. She'd be all right with you. What I want for the girl is for her to be taken care of. She hasn't any people to speak of, and she's up here now with a rotten, unlicked cub of a brother. I fancy she's the kind of girl that would have a pretty hideous time with the wrong man. I've got to know she's being looked after. D' you see?"

"But why should she marry?" Lionel persisted. "Isn't she all right as she is? What do you want to marry her off for?"

"There'll be a man sooner or later," Winn explained. "There always is, and she's —well, I didn't believe girls were innocent before. By God, when they are, it makes you sit up! I couldn't run the risk of leaving her alone, and that's flat! It's like chucking matches to a child and turning your back on it.

"For after all, if a man cares about a girl the way I care about her, he does chuck her matches. When I go—some one decent ought to be there to take my place."

"But there isn't the slightest chance she'll like me, even if I happened to like her," Lionel protested. "Honestly, Winn, you haven't thought the thing out properly. You can't stick people about in each other's places—they don't fit."

"They can be made to," said Winn, inexorably, "if they're the proper people. She'll like you to start with, besides you read—authors. So does she—she's awfully clever, she doesn't think anything of Marie Corelli; and she likes a man. As to your taking to her—well, my dear chap, you haven't seen her! I give you a week; I'll hang about till then. You can tell me your decision at the end of it."

"That's another thing," said Lionel. "Of course you only care for the girl, I see that, it's quite natural, but if by any chance I did pull the thing off—what's going to happen to you and me, afterwards? I've cared for that most, always."

A Föhn wind had begun to blow up the valley—it brought with it a curious light that lay upon the snow like red dust. "I don't say I shall like it," Winn said after a pause. "I'm not out to like it. There isn't anything in the whole damned job possible for me to like. But I'd a lot rather have it than any other way. I think that ought to show you what I think of you. You needn't be afraid I'll chuck you for seeing me through. I might keep away for a time, but I'd come back. She isn't the kind of a woman that makes a difference between friends."

"Oh, all right," said Lionel after a pause, "I'll go in for it—if I can."

Winn got up and replaced his pipe carefully, shaking his ashes out on to the snow. "I'm sure I'm much obliged to you," he said stiffly.

The wind ran up the valley with a sound like a flying train. Neither of them spoke while the gust lasted. It fell as suddenly as it came, and the valley shrank back into its pall of silence.

It was so solitary that it seemed to Lionel as if, at times, it might easily have no existence.

Lionel walked a little in front of Winn; the snow was soft and made heavy going. At the corner of the valley he turned to wait for Winn, and then he remembered the fanciful legend of New Year's eve, for he saw Winn's face very set and white, and his eyes looked as if the presence of death was in them—turned toward Davos.

CHAPTER XVII

Winn was under the impression that he could stand two or three days, especially if he had something practical to do. What helped him was the condition of Mr. Bouncing. Mr. Bouncing had suddenly retired. He had a bedroom on the other side of Winn's, and a sitting-room connected it with his wife's; but Mrs. Bouncing failed increasingly to take much advantage of this connection. Her theory was that, once you were in bed, you were better left alone.

Mr. Bouncing refused to have a nurse; he said they were disagreeable women who wouldn't let you take your own temperature. This might have seemed to involve the services of Mrs. Bouncing; but they were taken up for the moment by a bridge drive.

"People do seem to want me so!" she explained plaintively to Winn in the corridor. "And I have a feeling, you know, Major Staines, that in a hotel like this it's one's duty to make things go."

"Some things go without much making," said Winn, significantly. He was under the impression that one of these things was Mr. Bouncing.

Winn made it his business, since it appeared to be nobody else's, to keep an eye on Mr. Bouncing: in the daytime he sat with him and ran his errands; at night he came in once or twice and heated things for Mr. Bouncing on a spirit lamp.

Mr. Bouncing gave him minute directions, and scolded him for leaving milk exposed to the menaces of the air and doing dangerous things with a teaspoon. Nevertheless, he valued Winn's company.

"You see," he explained to Winn, "when you can't sleep, you keep coming up to the point of dying. It's very odd, the point of dying, a kind of collapsishness that won't collapse. You say to yourself, 'I can't feel any colder than this,' or, 'I must have more breath,' or, 'This lung is bound to go if I cough much more.' And the funny part of it is, you do go on getting colder, and your breath breaks like a rotten thread, and you never stop coughing, and yet you don't go! I dare say I shall be quite surprised when I do. Then when you come in and give me warm, dry sheets and something hot to drink, something comes back. I suppose it's life force; but not much—never as much as when I started the collapse. I'm getting

weaker every hour; don't you notice it? I never approved of all this lying in bed. I shall speak to Dr. Gurnet about it to-morrow."

Winn had noticed it; he came and sat down by Mr. Bouncing's bed.

"Snowy weather," he suggested, "takes the life out of you."

Mr. Bouncing ignored this theory.

"I hear," he went on, "that you and your new friend have changed your table. You don't sit with the Rivers any more."

"No," said Winn, laconically; "table isn't big enough."

"I expect they eat too fast," Mr. Bouncing continued; "young people almost always eat too fast. You'll digest better at another table. You look to me as if you had indigestion now."

Winn shook his head.

"Look here, Bouncing," he said earnestly, "I'm going off to St. Moritz next week to have a look at the Cresta; I wish you'd have a nurse. Drummond will run in and give an eye to you, of course; but you're pretty seedy, and that's a fact. I don't like leaving you alone."

"Next week," said Mr. Bouncing, thoughtfully. "Well, I dare say I shall be ready by then. It would be a pity, when I've just got you into the way of doing things properly, to have to teach them all over again to somebody else. I'm really not quite strong enough for that kind of thing. But I'm not going to have a nurse. Oh, dear, no! Nurses deceive you and cheer you up. I don't feel well enough to be cheered up. I like somebody who is thoroughly depressed himself, as you are, you know. I dare say you think I notice nothing lying here, but I've noticed that you're thoroughly depressed. Have you quarreled with your friend? It's odd you rush off to St. Moritz alone just when he's arrived."

"No, it isn't," said Winn, hastily. "He'll join me later; he's staying here at my request."

Mr. Bouncing sighed gently.

"Well," he said; "then all I can say is that you make very odd requests. One thing I'm perfectly sure about: if you go and look at the Cresta, you'll go down it, you're such a careless man, and then you'll be killed. Is that what you want?"

"I could do with it," said Winn, briefly.

"That," said Mr. Bouncing, "is because you're strong. It really isn't nice to talk in that light way about being killed to any one who has got to be before very long whether he likes it or not. If you were in my place you'd value your life, unless it got too uncomfortable, of course."

Winn apologized instantly. Mr. Bouncing accepted his apology graciously.

"You'll learn," he explained kindly, "how to talk to very ill people in time, and then probably you'll never see any more of them. Experience is a very silly thing, I've often noticed; it hops about so. No continuity. What I was going to say was, don't be worried about young Rivers and my wife. Take my word for it, you're making a great mistake."

"I am glad to hear you say so," Winn answered. "As a matter of fact, I have at present a few little private worries of my own; but I'm relieved, you think the Rivers boy is all right. I've been thinking of having a little talk with that tutor of his."

"Ah, I shouldn't do that if I were you," said Mr. Bouncing, urgently; "you're sure to be violent. I see you have a great deal of violence in you; you ought to control it. It's bad for your nerves. There are things I could tell you which would make you change your mind about young Rivers, but I don't know that I shall; it would excite me too much. I think I should like you to go down and telephone to Dr. Gurnet. Tell him my temperature is normal. It's a very odd thing; I haven't had a normal temperature for over three years. Perhaps I'm going to get better, after all. It's really only my breathing that's troubling me to-night. It would be funny if I got well, wouldn't it? But I mustn't talk any more; so don't come back until I knock in the night. Pass me the 'Pink 'Un.'" Winn passed him the "Pink 'Un" and raised him with one deft, strong movement more comfortably up on his pillows.

"You've got quite a knack for this sort of thing," Mr. Bouncing observed. "If you'd been a clever man, you might have been a doctor."

Mr. Bouncing did not knock during the night. Winn heard him stirring at ten o'clock, and went in. The final change had come very quickly. Mr. Bouncing was choking. He waved his hand as if the very appearance of Winn between him and the open balcony door kept away from him the air that he was vainly trying to breathe. Then a rush of blood came in a stream between his lips. Winn moved quickly behind him and lifted him in his arms.

Mr. Bouncing was no weight at all, and he made very little sound. He was quite conscious, and the look in his eyes was more interested than alarmed. The rush of bleeding stopped suddenly; his breathing was weaker and quieter, but he no longer choked.

"Look here, old man," Winn said, "let me get your wife."

But Mr. Bouncing signaled to him not to move; after a time he whispered:

"This is the first time I ever had hemorrhage. Most uncomfortable."

"Do let me get your wife!" Winn urged again.

"No," said Mr. Bouncing. "Women—not much good—after the first."

"Don't talk any more then, old man," Winn pleaded. "You'll start that bleeding off again."

But Mr. Bouncing made a faint clicking sound that might have been a laugh.

"Too late," he whispered. "Don't matter now. No more risks. Besides, I'm too—too uncomfortable to live."

There were several pauses in the hemorrhage, and at each pause Mr. Bouncing's mind came back to him as clear as glass. He spoke at intervals.

"Not Rivers," he said, fixing Winn's eyes, "Roper—Roper." Then he leaned back on the strong shoulder supporting him. "Glad to go," he murmured. "Life has been—a damned nuisance. I've had—enough of it." Then again, between broken, flying breaths he whispered, "Lonely."

"That's all right," Winn said gently.

"You're not alone now. I've got hold of you."

"No," whispered Mr. Bouncing, "no, I don't think you have."

There was no more violence now; his failing breath shook him hardly at all. Even as he spoke, something in him was suddenly freed; his chest rose slowly, his arm lifted then fell back, and Winn saw that he was no longer holding Mr. Bouncing.

CHAPTER XVIII

He closed the balcony door; the cold air filled the room as if it were still trying to come to the rescue of Mr. Bouncing. Winn had often done the last offices for the dead before, but always out of doors. Mr. Bouncing would have thought that a very careless way to die; he had often told Winn that he thought nature most unpleasant.

When Winn had set the room in order he sat down by the table and wondered if it would be wrong to smoke a cigarette. He wanted to smoke, but he came to the conclusion that it wasn't quite the thing.

To-night was the ball for the international skaters—he ought to have been there, of course. He had made Lionel go in his place, and had written a stiff little note to Claire, asking her to give his dances to his friend. He had Claire's answer in his pocket. "Of course I will, but I'm awfully disappointed." She had spelled disappointed with two s's and one p. Win had crushed the note into his pocket and not looked at it since, but he took it out now. It wasn't like smoking a cigarette. Bouncing wouldn't mind. There was no use making a fuss about it; he had done the best thing for her. He was handing all that immaculate, fresh youth into a keeping worthy of it. He wasn't fit himself. There were too many things he couldn't tell her, there was too much in him still that might upset and shock her. He would have done his best, of course, to have taken care of her; but better men could take better care. Lionel had said nothing so far; he had taken Claire skiing and skating, and once down the Schatz Alp. When he had come back from the Schatz Alp he had gone a long walk by himself. Winn had offered to accompany him, but Lionel had said he wanted to go alone and think. Winn accepted this decision without question. He knew Lionel was a clever man, but he didn't himself see anything to think about. The thing was perfectly simple: Lionel liked Claire or he didn't; no amount of being clever could make any difference. Winn was a little suspicious of thinking. It seemed to him rather like a way of getting out of things.

The room was very cold, but Winn didn't like going away and leaving Mr. Bouncing. By the by he heard voices in the next room. He could distinguish the high, flat giggle of Mrs. Bouncing. She had come back from the dance, probably with young Rivers. He must go in and tell her. That was the next thing to be

done. He got up, shook himself, glanced at the appeased and peaceful young face upon the pillow, and walked into the next room. It was a sitting-room, and Winn had not knocked; but he shut the door instantly after him, and then stood in front of it, as if in some way to keep the silent tenant of the room behind him from seeing what he saw.

Mrs. Bouncing was in a young man's arms receiving a prolonged farewell. It wasn't young Rivers, and it was an accustomed kiss. Mrs. Bouncing screamed. She was the kind of woman who found a scream in an emergency as easily as a sailor finds a rope.

It wasn't Winn's place to say, "What the devil are you doing here, sir?" to Mr. Roper; it was the question which, if Mr. Roper had had the slightest presence of mind, he would have addressed to Winn. As it was he did nothing but snarl—a timid and ineffectual snarl which was without influence upon the situation.

"You'd better clear out," Winn continued; "but if I see you in Davos after the eight o'clock express to-morrow I shall give myself the pleasure of breaking every bone in your body. Any one's at liberty to play a game, Mr. Roper, but not a double game; and in the future I really wouldn't suggest your choosing a dying man's wife to play it with. It's the kind of thing that awfully ruffles his friends."

"I don't know what you mean," said Mr. Roper, hastily edging toward the door; "your language is most uncalled for. And as to going away, I shall do nothing of the kind."

"Better think it over," said Winn, with misleading calm. He moved forward as he spoke, seized Mr. Roper by the back of his coat as if he were some kind of boneless mechanical toy, and deposited him in the passage outside the door.

Mrs. Bouncing screamed again. This time it was a shrill and gratified scream. She felt herself to be the heroine of an occasion. Winn eyed her as a hostile big dog eyes one beneath his fighting powers. Then he said:

"I shouldn't make that noise if I were you; it's out of place. I came here to give you bad news."

This time Mrs. Bouncing didn't scream. She took hold of the edge of the table and repeated three times in a strange, expressionless voice:

"George is dead! George is dead! George is dead!"

Winn thought she was going to faint, but she didn't. She held on to the table.

"What ought I to do, Major Staines?" she asked in a quavering voice.

Winn considered the question gravely. It was a little late in the day for Mrs. Bouncing to start what she ought to do, but he approved of her determination.

"I think," he said at last—"I think you ought to go in and look at him. It's usual."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Bouncing, with a shiver, "I never have seen a corpse!"

Winn escorted her to the bedside and then turned away from her. She looked down at her dead husband. Mr. Bouncing had no anxiety in his face at all now; he looked incredibly contented and young.

"I—I suppose he really is gone?" said Mrs. Bouncing in a low voice. Then she moved waveringly over to a big armchair.

"There is no doubt about it at all," said Winn. "I didn't ring up Gurnet. He will come in any case first thing to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Bouncing moved her beringed hands nervously, and then suddenly began to cry. She cried quietly into her pocket-handkerchief, with her shoulders shaking.

"I wish things hadn't happened!" she sobbed. "Oh, dear! I wish things hadn't happened!" She did not refer to the death of Mr. Bouncing. Winn said nothing. "I really didn't mean any harm," Mrs. Bouncing went on between her sobs—"not at first. You know how things run on; and he'd been ill seven years, and one does like a little bit of fun, doesn't one?"

"I shouldn't think about all that now," Winn replied. "It isn't suitable."

Mrs. Bouncing shook her head and sobbed louder; sobbing seemed a refuge from suitability.

"I wouldn't have minded," she said brokenly, "if I'd heated his milk. I always thought he was so silly about having skin on it. I didn't believe when he came up-stairs it was because he was really worse. I wanted the sitting-room to myself. Oh dear! oh dear! I said it was all nonsense! And he said, 'Never mind, Millie; it won't be for long,' and I thought he meant he'd get down-stairs again. And he didn't; he meant this!"

Winn cleared his throat.

"I don't think he blamed you," he said, "as much as I did."

Mrs. Bouncing was roused by this into a sudden sense of her position.

"Oh," she said, "what are you going to do to me? You've always hated me. I'm sure I don't know why; I took quite a fancy to you that first evening. I always have liked military men, but you're so stand-offish; and now, of course, goodness knows what you'll think! If poor old George were alive he'd stand up for me!"

"I'm not going to do anything to hurt you, Mrs. Bouncing," said Winn, after a short pause. "You'll stay on here, of course, till after the funeral. We shall do all we can to help you, and then you'll go back to England, won't you?"

"Yes," she said, shivering, "I suppose so. I shall go back to England. I shall have to see George's people. They don't like me. Will—will that be all?"

"As far as I am concerned," said Winn, more gently, "there is only one thing further I have to suggest. I should like you to promise me, when you leave here, to have nothing more to do with young Rivers. It's better not; it puts him off his work."

Mrs. Bouncing reddened.

"Oh," she said, "I know; I didn't mean any harm by that. You can't help young men taking a fancy to you, can you? At least I can't. It looked better didn't it, in a way—you know what I mean. I didn't want people to think anything. If only George hadn't been so good to me! I don't suppose you can understand, but it makes it worse when they are."

It seemed to Winn as if he could understand, but he didn't say so. Bouncing should have pulled her up. Winn always believed in people being pulled up. The difficulty lay in knowing how to carry the process out. It had seemed to Mr. Bouncing simpler to die.

"You'd better go to bed now," Winn said at last. "People will be up soon. He died quite peacefully. He didn't want you to be disturbed. I think that's all, Mrs. Bouncing."

She got up and went again to the bed.

"I suppose I oughtn't to kiss him?" she whispered. "I haven't any right to now, have I? You know what I mean? But I would have liked to kiss him."

"Oh, I don't believe he'd mind," said Winn, turning away.

Mrs. Bouncing kissed him.

CHAPTER XIX

Winn felt no desire to go to bed. He went out into the long, blank corridor and wondered if the servants would be up soon and he could get anything to drink. The passage was intensely still; it stretched interminably away from him like a long, unlighted road. A vague gray light came from the windows at each end. It was too early for the shapes of the mountains to be seen. The outside world was featureless and very cold.

There was no sound in the house except the faint sound behind the green baize doors, which never wholly ceased. Winn had always listened to it before with an impatient distaste; he had hated to hear these echoes of dissolution. This morning, for the first time, he felt curious.

Suppose things had gone differently; that he'd been too late, and known his fate? He could have stayed on then; he could have accepted Claire's beautiful young friendliness. He could have left her free; and yet he could have seen her every day; then he would have died.

Weakness has privileges. It escapes responsibility; allowances are made for it. It hasn't got to get up and go, tearing itself to pieces from the roots. He could have told her about Peter and Estelle and what a fool he had been; and at the end, he supposed, it wouldn't have mattered if he had just mentioned that he loved her.

Now there wasn't going to be any end. Life would stretch out narrow, interminable, and dark, like the passage with the windows at each end, which were only a kind of blur without any light.

However, of course there was no use bothering about it; since the servants weren't up and he couldn't get any coffee, he must just turn in. It suddenly occurred to Winn that what he was feeling now was unhappiness, a funny thing; he had never really felt before. It was the kind of feeling the man had had, under the lamp-post at the station, carrying his dying wife. The idea of a broken heart had always seemed to Winn namby-pamby. You broke if you were weak; you didn't break if you were strong. What was happening now was that he was strong and he was being broken. It was a painful process, because there was a good deal of him to break, and it had only just begun. However, this was mercifully hidden from him. He said to himself: "I dare say I'm run down and fidgety with having

had to sit up with Bouncing. I shall feel all right to-morrow." Then the door behind him opened, and Lionel joined him. He was still dressed as he had been when he came back from the ball some hours earlier.

"Hullo!" he said. "I wondered if that was you; I thought I heard something stirring outside. You weren't in your room when I came in. Been with Bouncing?"

"Yes," said Winn; "he's dead. I'm looking for some coffee. These confounded, tow-headed Swiss mules never get up at any decent hour. Why are you still dressed? Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Well, I didn't feel particularly sleepy, somehow," Lionel acknowledged. "Are you going to stand outside in this moth-eaten passage the rest of the night, or will you come in with me and have a whisky and soda? You must be fagged out."

"I don't mind if I do," Winn agreed. "We may as well make a night of it."

For a few minutes neither of them spoke, then Winn said: "Had a jolly dance?"

Lionel did not answer him directly; but he turned round, and met his friend's eyes with his usual unswerving honesty.

"Look here, old Winn," he said, "it's up to you to decide now. I'll stay on here or go with you, whichever you like."

"You like her, then?" Winn asked quickly.

"Yes," said Lionel, "I like her."

"Well, then, you'll stay of course," said Winn without any hesitation. "Isn't that what we damned well settled?"

Lionel's eyes had changed. They were full of a new light; he looked as if some one had lit a lantern within him. Love had come to him not as it had come to Winn, bitterly, unavailingly, without illusion; it had fallen upon his free heart and lit it from end to end with joy. He loved as a man loves whose heart is clean and who has never loved before, without a scruple and without restraint. Love had made no claims on him yet; it had not offered him either its disappointments or its great rewards. He was transformed without being altered. He simply saw everything as glorious which before had been plain, but he did not see different

things.

"Yes," he said, "I know we talked about it; but I'm hanged if I'll try unless I'm sure you are absolutely keen. I thought it all out after—after I'd seen her, and it seemed to me all very well in the abstract giving her up to another man and all that, but when it came to the point, would you be really sure to want me to carry through? I've seen her now, you know, and I'm glad I've seen her. I'll be glad always for that, but it needn't go any further."

Winn looked past him; he was tired with the long night's strain, and he had no white ideal to be a rapture in his heart. He loved Claire not because she was perfection, but because she was herself. She was faultless to Lionel, but Winn didn't care whether she was faultless or not. He didn't expect perfection or even want it, and he wasn't the man to be satisfied with an ideal; but he wanted, as few men have ever wanted for any women, that Claire should be happy and safe.

"I've told you once," he said; "you might know I shouldn't change. I've got one or two little jobs to see to about Bouncing's funeral. That woman's half a little cat and half an abject fool. Still, you can't help feeling a bit sorry for her. I dare say I can get things done by lunch-time; then I'll drive over the Fluella. I'll put up at the Kulm; but don't bother to write till you've got something settled. I'm not going to mess about saying good-by to people. You can tell Miss Rivers when I'm gone."

"Look here," Lionel urged, "you can't do that; you must say good-by to her properly. She was awfully sick at your not turning up at the ball. After all, you know, you've seen a lot of her, and she particularly likes you. You can't jump off into space, as if you were that old chap in the Bible without any beginning or any end!"

Winn stuck his hands in his pockets and looked immovably obstinate.

"I'm damned if I do," he replied. "Why should I? What's the use of saying good-by? The proper thing to do when you're going away is to go. You needn't linger, mewing about like somebody's pet kitten."

Lionel poured out the whiskey before replying, and pushed a glass in Winn's direction; then he said:

"Don't be a fool, old chap; you'll have to say good-by to her. You don't want to hurt her feelings."

"What's it to you whether I hurt her feelings or not?" Winn asked savagely.

There was a moment's sharp tension. It dropped at the tone of Lionel's quiet voice.

"It's a great deal to me," he said steadily; "but I know it's not half as much to me as it is to you, old Winn."

"Oh, all right," said Winn after a short pause. "I suppose I'll say it if you think I ought to. Only stand by if you happen to be anywhere about. By the by, I hope I shall have some kind of a scrap with Roper before the morning's over. I shall enjoy that. Infernal little beast, I caught him out last night. I can't tell you how; but unless he's off by the eight o'clock to-morrow, he's in for punishment."

Lionel laughed.

"All right," he said; "don't murder him. I'm going to turn in now. Sorry about Bouncing. Did he have a bad time, poor chap?"

"No," said Winn, "not really. He had a jolly sight harder time living; and yet I believe he'd have swopped with me at the end. Funny how little we know what the other fellow feels!"

"We can get an idea sometimes," Lionel said in a queer voice, with his back to his friend. Winn hastened to the door of his room. He knew that Lionel had an idea. He said, as he half closed the door on himself:

"Thanks awfully for the whiskey."

CHAPTER XX

Unfortunately, Winn was not permitted the pleasure of punishing Mr. Roper in the morning. Mr. Roper thought the matter over for the greater part of an unpleasantly short night. He knew that he could prepare a perfect case, he could easily clear himself to his pupil, he could stand by his guns, and probably even succeed in making Mrs. Bouncing stand by hers; but he didn't want to be thrashed. Whatever else happened, he knew that he could not get out of this. Winn meant to thrash him, and Winn would thrash him. People like Winn could not be manipulated; they could only be avoided. They weren't afraid of being arrested, and they didn't care anything about being fined. They damned the consequences of their ferocious acts; and if you happened to be one of the consequences and had a constitutional shrinking from being damned, it was wiser to pack early and be off by an eight o'clock train.

Winn was extremely disappointed at this decision; it robbed him of something which, as he thought, would have cleared the air. However, he spent a busy morning in assisting Mrs. Bouncing. She was querulous and tearful and wanted better dressmakers and a more becoming kind of mourning than it was easy to procure in Davos. It seemed to Winn as if she was under the impression that mourning was more important to a funeral than a coffin; but when it came to the coffin, she had terrible ideas about lilies embroidered in silver, which upset Winn very much.

Mr. Bouncing had always objected to lilies. He considered that their heavy scent was rather dangerous. Mrs. Bouncing told Winn what everybody in the hotel had suggested, and appeared to expect him to combine and carry out all their suggestions, with several other contradictory ones of her own.

During this crisis Maurice Rivers markedly avoided Mrs. Bouncing. He felt as if she might have prevented Mr. Bouncing's death just then. It was a failure of tact. He didn't like the idea of death, and he had always rather counted oh the presence of Mr. Bouncing. He was afraid he might, with Mr. Bouncing removed, have gone a little too far.

He explained his position to Winn, whom he met on one of his many errands.

"One doesn't want to let oneself in for anything, you know," he asserted. "I'm

sure, as a man of the world, you'd advise me to keep out of it, wouldn't you? It's different for you, of course; you were poor Bouncing's friend."

Winn, whose temper was extremely ruffled, gave him a formidable glance.

"You get into things a bit too soon, my boy," he replied coldly, "and get out of 'em a bit too late."

"Oh, come, you know," said Maurice, jauntily, "I'm not responsible for poor old Bouncing's death, am I?"

"I don't say you are," Winn continued, without looking any pleasanter. "Bouncing had to die, and a jolly good thing for him it was when it came off; his life wasn't worth a row of pins. But I wasn't talking about him; I was talking about her. If you really want my advice, I'll tell you plainly that if you want to go the pace, choose women one doesn't marry, don't monkey about with the more or less respectable ones who have a right to expect you to play the game. It's not done, and it's beastly unfair. D' you see my point?"

Maurice wondered if he should be thoroughly angry or not. Suddenly it occurred to him that Winn was waiting, and that he had better see his point and not be thoroughly angry.

"Yes, I dare say I did go a little far," he admitted, throwing out a manly chest; "but between you and me, Staines, should you say our friend Mrs. B. *was* respectable or not?"

"She isn't my friend," said Winn, grimly; "but as she ought to be yours, I'll trouble you to keep your questions to yourself."

The idea of being angry having apparently been taken out of Maurice's hands, he made haste to disappear into the hotel.

Winn walked on into the village. It was the last time he intended to go there. There was nothing peculiarly touching about the flat, long road, with the rink beneath it and the mountains above. The houses and shops, German pensions and crowded balconies had no particular charm. Even the tall, thin spire of the church lacked distinction; and yet it seemed to Winn that it would be difficult to forget. He stopped at the rink as he returned to pick up his skates. He told himself that he was fortunate when he discovered Claire, with Lionel on one side of her and Ponsonby on the other; he had wanted the help of an audience; now he was going to have one. Claire saw him before the others did, and skated

swiftly across to him.

"But why don't you put your skates on?" she said, pointing to them in his hand. "You're not much good there, you know, on the bank."

"I'm not much good anywhere, as far as that goes," said Winn, quickly, before the others came up. Then he said in a different voice, "I hope you enjoyed your dance last night."

Claire paused the briefest moment before she answered him; it was as if she were trying quickly to change the key in which she spoke in order to meet his wishes, and as if she did not want to change the key.

"Yes, I did," she said, "most awfully. It was a heavenly dance. I was so sorry you couldn't come, but Captain Drummond told me why."

Winn confounded Lionel under his breath for not holding his tongue; but he felt a warmth stir in his heart at the knowledge that, no matter what was at stake, Lionel would not suffer the shadow of blame to attach itself to him. It had been one of Winn's calculations that Claire would be annoyed at his disappointing her and think the less of him because she was annoyed. He was not a clever calculator.

"Of course I understood," Claire went on; "you had to be with poor Mr. Bouncing. It was just like you to stay with him." She had said a good deal, considering that Mr. Ponsonby and Lionel were there. Still, Winn did not misunderstand her. Of course she meant nothing.

"Well," he said, holding out his hand, "I'm extremely glad, Miss Rivers, to have run across you like this, because I'm off this afternoon to St. Moritz. I want to have a look at the Cresta."

Claire ignored his outstretched hand.

"Oh," she cried a little breathlessly, "you're not going away, are you? But you'll come back again, of course?"

"I hope so, I'm sure, some day or other," said Winn. Then he turned to Ponsonby. "Have you been down the Cresta?" he asked.

Mr. Ponsonby shook his head.

"Not from Church Leap," he replied. "I've got too much respect for my bones.

It's awfully tricky; I've gone down from below it. You don't get such a speed on then."

"Oh, Major Staines, you won't toboggan?" Claire cried out. "You know you mustn't toboggan! Dr. Gurnet said you mustn't. You won't, will you? Captain Drummond, aren't you going with him to stop him?"

Lionel laughed.

"He isn't a very easy person to stop," he answered her. "I'll join him later on, of course; but I want to see a little more of Davos before I go."

"There isn't the slightest danger," Winn remarked, without meeting Claire's eyes. "The Cresta's as safe as a church hassock. There isn't half the skill in tobogganing that there is in skating. Good-by, Miss Rivers. I never enjoyed anything as much as I enjoyed our skating competition. I'm most grateful to you for putting up with me."

Claire gave him her hand then, but Winn remembered afterward that she never said good-by. She looked at him as if he had done something which was not fair.

CHAPTER XXI

Winn's chief objection to St. Moritz was the shabby way in which it imitated Davos. It had all the same materials—endless snows, forests of fir-trees, soaring peaks and the serene blueness of the skies—and yet as Davos it didn't in the least come off. It was more beautiful and less definite; the peaks were nearer and higher; they streamed out around the valley like an army with banners. The long, low lake and the small, perched villages, grossly overtopped by vulgar hotel palaces, had a far more fugitive air.

It was a place without a life of its own. Whatever character St. Moritz might once have had was as lost as that of the most catholic of evening ladies in Piccadilly.

Davos had had the dignity of its purpose; it had set out to heal. St. Moritz, on the contrary, set out to avoid healing. It was haunted by crown princes and millionaire Jews, ladies with incredible ear-rings and priceless furs; sharp, little, baffling trans-atlantic children thronged its narrow streets, and passed away from it as casually as a company of tramps.

There was this advantage for Winn: nobody wanted to be friendly unless one was a royalty or a financial magnate. Winn was as much alone as if he had dropped from Charing Cross into the Strand. He smoked, read his paper, and investigated in an unaccommodating spirit all that St. Moritz provided; but he didn't have to talk.

Winn was suffering from a not uncommon predicament: he had done the right thing at enormous cost, and he was paying for it, instead of being paid. Virtue had struck her usual hard bargain with her votaries. She had taken all he had to give, and then sent in a bill for damages.

He was not in the least aware that he was unhappy, and often, for five or ten minutes at a time, he would forget Claire; afterward he would remember her, and that was worse. The unfortunate part of being made all of a piece is that if you happen to want anything, there is really no fiber of your being that doesn't want it.

Winn loved in the same spirit that he rode and he always rode to a finish. In

these circumstances and in this frame of mind, the Cresta occurred to Winn in the light of a direct inspiration. No one could ride the Cresta with any other preoccupation.

Winn knew that he oughtn't to do it; he remembered Dr. Gurnet's advice, and it put an edge to his intention. If he couldn't have what he wanted, there would be a minor satisfaction in doing what he oughtn't. The homely adage of cutting off your nose to spite your face had never been questioned by the Staines family. They looked upon a nose as there chiefly for that purpose. It was a last resource to be drawn upon, when the noses of others appeared to be out of reach.

There were, however, a few preliminary difficulties. No one was allowed to ride the Cresta without practice, and it was a part of Winn's plan not to be bothered with gradual stages. Only one man had ever been known to start riding the Cresta from Church Leap without previous trials, and his evidence was unobtainable as he was unfortunately killed during the experiment. Since this adventure a stout Swiss peasant had been placed to guard the approaches to the run. Winn walked up to him during the dinner-hour, when he knew the valley was freest from possible intruders.

"I want you to clear off," he said to the man, offering him five francs, and pointing in the direction of St. Moritz. The peasant shook his head, retaining the five francs, and opening the palm of his other hand. Winn placed a further contribution in it and said firmly:

"Now if you don't go I shall knock you down." He shook his fist to reinforce the feebleness of his alien speech. The Swiss peasant stepped off the path hurriedly into a snow-drift. He was a reasonable man, and he did not grasp why one mad Englishman should wish to be killed, nor, for the matter of that, why others equally mad, should wish to prevent it. So he walked off in the direction of St. Moritz and hid behind a tree, reposing upon the deeply rooted instinct of not being responsible for what he did not see.

Winn regarded the run methodically, placed his toboggan on the summit of the leap, and looked down at the thin, blue streak stretching into the distance. The valley appeared to be entirely empty; there was nothing visibly moving in it except a little distant smoke on the way to Samaden. The run looked very cold and very narrow; the nearest banks stood up like cliffs.

Winn strapped a rake to his left foot, and calculated that the instant he felt the ice under him he must dig into it, otherwise he would go straight over the first bank.

Then he crouched over his toboggan, threw himself face downward, and felt it spring into the air.

He kept no very definite recollection of the sixty-odd seconds that followed. The ice rose up at him like a wall; the wind—he had not previously been aware of the faintest draught of air—cut into his eyes and forehead like fire. His lips blistered under it.

He felt death at every dizzy, dwindling second—death knotted up and racketing, so imminent that he wouldn't have time to straighten himself out or let go of his toboggan before he would be tossed out into the empty air.

He remembered hearing a man say that if you fell on the Cresta and didn't let go of your toboggan, it knocked you to pieces. His hands were fastened on the runners as if they were clamped down with iron. The scratching of the rake behind him sounded appalling in the surrounding silence.

He shot up the first bank, shaving the top by the thinness of a hair, wobbled sickeningly back on to the straight, regained his grip, shot the next bank more easily, and whirled madly down between the iron walls. He felt as if he were crawling slowly as a fly crawls up a pane of glass, in a buzzing eternity.

Then he was bumped across the road and shot under the bridge. There was a hill at the end of the run. As he flew up it he became for the first time aware of pace. The toboggan took it like a racing-cutter, and at the top rose six feet into the air, and plunged into the nearest snow-drift.

Winn crawled out, feeling very sick and shaken, and as if every bone in his body was misplaced.

"Oh, you idiot! You idiot! you unbounded, God-forsaken idiot!" a voice exclaimed in his ears. "You've given me the worst two minutes of my life!"

Winn looked around him more annoyed than startled. He felt a great disinclination for speech and an increasing desire to sit down and keep still; and he did not care to conduct a quarrel sitting down.

However, a growing inability to stand up decided him; he dragged out his toboggan and sat on it.

The speaker appeared round a bend of the run. She had apparently been standing in the path that overlooked a considerable portion of it.

She was not a young woman, and from her complexion and the hardness of her thickly built figure she might have been made of wood.

She wore a short, strapped-in skirt, leather leggings, and a fawn-colored sweater. Her eyes were a sharp, decided blue, and the rest of her appearance matched the sweater.

Winn pulled himself together.

"I don't see, Madam," he remarked slowly, but with extreme aggressiveness, "what the devil my actions have to do with you!"

"No," said the lady, grimly, "I don't suppose from the exhibition I've just been watching, that you're in the habit of seeing farther than to the end of your own nose. However, I may as well point out to you that if you had killed yourself, as you richly deserved, and as you came within an ace of doing, the run would have been stopped for the season. We should all have been deprived of the Grand National, and I, who come up here solely to ride the Cresta, which I have done regularly every winter for twenty years, would have had my favorite occupation snatched from me at an age when I could least afford to miss it."

"I haven't been killed, and I had not the slightest intention of being so," Winn informed her with dangerous calm. "I merely wished to ride the Cresta for the first time unobserved. Apparently I have failed in my intention. If so, it is my misfortune and not my fault." He took out a cigarette, and lit it with a steady hand, and turned his eyes away from her. He expected her to go away, but, to his surprise, she spoke again.

"My name," she said, "is Marley. What is yours?"

"Staines," Winn replied with even greater brevity. He had to give her his name, but he meant it to be his last concession.

"Ah," she said thoughtfully, "that accounts for it. You're the image of Sir Peter, and you seem to have inherited not only his features, but his manners. I needn't, perhaps, inform you that the latter were uniformly bad. I knew your father when I was a girl. He was stationed in Hong-Kong at the time and he was good enough to call me the little Chinese, no doubt in reference to my complexion. Plain as I am now, I was a great deal plainer as a girl, though I dare say you wouldn't think it."

Winn made no comment upon this doubtful statement; he merely grunted. His

private opinion was that ladies of any age should not ride the Cresta, and that ladies old enough to have known his father at Hong-Kong should not toboggan at all.

It was unsuitable, and she might have hurt herself; into these two pitfalls women should never fall.

Miss Marley had a singularly beautiful speaking voice; it was as soft as velvet. She dropped it half a tone, and said suddenly:

"Look here, don't do that kind of thing again. It's foolish. People don't always get killed, you know; sometimes they get maimed. Forgive me, but I thought I would just like to point it out to you. I could not bear to see a strong man maimed."

Winn knew that it was silly and weak to like her just because of the tone of her voice, but he found himself liking her. He had a vague desire to tell her that he wouldn't do it again and that he had been rather a fool; but the snow was behaving in a queer way all around him; it appeared to be heaving itself up. He said instead:

"Excuse me for sitting down like this. I've had a bit of a shake. I'll be all right in a moment or two." Then he fainted.

Miss Marley stooped over him, opened his collar, laid him flat on the ground—he had fallen in a heap on his toboggan—and chafed his wrists and forehead with snow. When she saw that he was coming round, she moved a little away from him and studied his toboggan.

"If I were you," she observed, "I should have these runners cut a little finer; they are just a shade too thick."

Winn dragged himself on to the toboggan and wondered how his collar came to be undone. When he did it up, he found his hands were shaking, which amazed him very much. He looked a little suspiciously at his companion.

"Of course," Miss Marley continued pleasantly, "I ought to have that watchman discharged. I am a member of the Cresta committee, and he behaved scandalously; but I dare say you forced him into it, so I shall just walk up the hill and give him a few straight words. Probably you don't know the dialect. I've made a point of studying it. If I were you, I should stay where you are until I come back. I want you to come to tea with me at Cresta. There's a particularly

good kind of bun in the village, and I think I can give you some rather useful tobogganing tips. It isn't worth while your climbing up the hill just to climb down again, is it? Besides, you'd probably frighten the man."

"Thanks," said Winn. "All right; I'll stay." He didn't want the Cresta bun, and he thought that he resented Miss Marley's invitation; but, on the other hand, he was intensely glad she was going off and leaving him alone.

He felt uncommonly queer. Perhaps he could think of some excuse to avoid the tea when she came back.

All the muscles of his chest seemed to have gone wrong; it hurt him to breathe. He sat with his head down, like a man climbing a hill against a strong wind. It was rather funny to feel ill again when he had really forgotten he was up there for his health. That was what he felt—ill.

It was not nearly as painful a feeling as remembering Claire. Unfortunately, it was very quickly followed by the more painful feeling.

When Miss Marley came back, he had the eyes of a creature caught in a trap.

She took him to Cresta to tea, and it did not occur to Winn to wonder why a woman who at forty-five habitually rode the Cresta should find it necessary to walk at the pace of a deliberating snail. It was a pace which at the moment suited Winn precisely.

On the whole he enjoyed his tea. Miss Marley's manners, though abrupt, had certain fine scruples of their own. She showed no personal curiosity and she gave Winn some really valuable tips. He began to understand why she had so deeply resented his trifling with the Cresta.

Miss Marley was one of the few genuine workers at St. Moritz, a member of the old band who had worked devotedly to produce the Monster which had afterward as promptly devoured them. This fate, however, had not as yet overtaken Miss Marley. She was too tough and too rich to be very easily devoured. The Cresta was at once her child and her banner; she had helped to make it, and she wound its folds around her as a screen for her invisible kindnesses.

Menaced boys could have told how she had averted their ruin with large checks and sharp reproofs. She had saved many homes and covered many scandals. For girls she had a special tenderness. She had never been a beautiful young girl, and

she had a pathetic reverence for what was frail and fair. For them she had no reproofs, only vast mercy, and patient skill in releasing them from the traps which had caught their flurried young senses; but for those who had set the traps she had no mercy.

Miss Marley was not known for any of these things. She was celebrated for fights with chaplains and sanitary inspectors, and for an inability to give in to authority unless authority knew what it was about. She had never once tried to please, which is the foundation of charm. Perhaps it would have been a useless effort, for she was not born to please. She was born to get things done.

After Miss Marley had talked to Winn for an hour, she decided to get him to join the Bandy Club. He was the kind of man who must do something, and it was obviously better that he should not again tempt fate by riding the Cresta from Church Leap without practice. This course became clearer to Miss Marley when she discovered that Winn had come up for his health.

"Of course a fellow who wasn't seedy wouldn't have made an ass of himself over riding the Cresta," Winn explained, eyeing her thoughtfully.

He must have got somehow off his toboggan on to the snow, and he had no recollection at all of getting there. Miss Marley said nothing to enlighten him further. She merely suggested bandy. After dinner she introduced Winn to the captain of the St. Moritz team, and at three o'clock the next afternoon she watched him play in a practice-match.

Winn played with a concentrated viciousness which assured her of two things: he would be an acquisition to the team, and if he felt as badly as all that, it was just as well to get some of it worked off on anything as unresponsive as a ball.

After this Miss Marley let him alone. She considered this the chief factor in assisting the lives of others; and for nearly two hours a day, while he was playing bandy, Winn succeeded in not remembering Claire.

CHAPTER XXII

Winn's way of playing bandy was to play as if there wasn't any ice. In the first few practices it had the disadvantage of a constant series of falls, generally upon the back of his head; but he soon developed an increasing capacity of balance and an intensity of speed. He became the quickest forward the St. Moritz team had ever possessed.

When he was following the ball he took up his feet and ran. The hard clash of the skates, the determined onrush of the broad-built, implacable figure, were terrible to withstand. What was to be done against a man who didn't skate, but tore, who fell upon a ball as a terrier plunges, eyeless and intent, into a rat-hole? The personal safety of himself or others never occurred to Winn. He remembered nothing but the rules of the game. These he held in the back of his mind, with the ball in front of it.

All St. Moritz came to watch the great match between itself and Davos. It was a still, cold day; there was no blue in the sky; the mountains were a hard black and white and the valley very colorless and clear. There was a hush of coming snow in the air, and the sky was covered by a toneless, impending cloud.

The game, after a brief interval, became a duel between two men: Winn, with his headlong, thirsty method of attack, and the champion player of Davos, Mavorovitch, who was known as the most finished skater of the season.

Mavorovitch never apparently lifted his skates, but seemed to send them forward by a kind of secret pressure. He was a very cool player, as quick as mercury and as light as thistledown. Winn set himself against him with the dogged fury of a bull against a toreador.

"That man's not brave; he's careless," a St. Moritz potentate remarked to Miss Marley. Miss Marley gave a short laugh and glanced at Winn.

"That's my idea of courage," she said, "carelessness toward things that don't count. Major Staines isn't careless with the ball."

"A game's a game," the foreign prince protested, "not a prolonged invitation to concussion."

"All, that's where your foreign blood comes in, Your Highness," argued Miss Marley. "A game isn't a game to an Englishman; it's his way of tackling life. As a man plays so he reaps."

"Very well, then," remarked her companion, gravely. "Mark my words, Madame, your friend over there will reap disaster."

Winn tackled the ball in a series of sudden formidable rushes; he hurled himself upon the slight form of Mavorovitch, only to find he had before him a portion of the empty air. Mavorovitch was invariably a few inches beyond his reach, and generally in possession of the ball.

Twice Winn wrested it forcibly from him and got half way up the ice, tearing along with his skates crashing their iron way toward the goal, and twice Mavorovitch noiselessly, except for a faint scraping, slid up behind him and coaxed the ball out of his very grip. St. Moritz lost two goals to nothing in the first half, and Winn felt as if he were biting on air.

He stood a little apart from the other players, with his back turned to the crowd. He wished it wasn't necessary always to have an audience; a lot of people who sat and did nothing irritated him. Mavorovitch irritated him, too. He did not like a man to be so quiet; the faint *click, click* of Mavorovitch's skates on the ice was like a lady knitting.

The whistle sounded again, and Winn set upon the ball with redoubled fury. He had a feeling that if he didn't win this game he was going to dislike it very much. He tore up the ice, every muscle strained, his stick held low, caressing the round, flying knob in front; he had got the ball all right, the difficulty was going to be, to keep it. His mind listened to the faint distant scraping of Mavorovitch's approach. Winn had chosen the exact spot for slowing up for his stroke.

It must be a long-distance shot or Mavorovitch would be there to intercept him, the longer, the safer, if he could get up speed enough for his swing. He had left the rest of the players behind him long ago, tossing some to one side and outflanking others; but he had not got clear away from Mavorovitch, bent double, and quietly calculating, a few feet behind him, the exact moment for an intercepting spurt: and then through the sharpness of the icy air and the sense of his own speed an extraordinary certainty flashed into Winn. He was not alone; Claire was there. He called it a fancy, but he knew it was a certainty. A burning joy seized him, and a new wild strength poured into him. He could do anything now.

He drew up suddenly, long before the spot he had fixed upon as a certain stroke, lifted his arm, and struck with all his might. It was a long, doubtful, crossing stroke, almost incredibly distant from the goal.

The crowd held its breath as the ball rose, cutting straight above the goal-keeper's head, through the very center of the goal.

Winn was probably the only person there who didn't follow its flight. He looked up quickly at the bank above him, and met her eyes. She was as joined to him as if they had no separate life.

In a moment it struck him that there was nothing else to do but to go to her at once, take her in his arms, and walk off with her somewhere into the snow. He knew now that he had been in hell; the sight of her was like the sudden cessation of blinding physical pain.

Then he pulled himself together and went back to the game. He couldn't think any more, but the new activity in him went on playing methodically and without direction.

Mavorovitch, who was playing even more skilfully and swiftly, got the better of him once or twice; but the speed that had given Winn room for his great stroke flowed tirelessly through him. It seemed to him as if he could have outpaced a Scotch express.

He carried the ball off again and again out of the mob of his assailants. They scattered under his rushes like creatures made of cardboard. He offered three goals and shot one. The cheering of the St. Moritzers sounded in his ears as if it were a long way off. He saw the disappointed, friendly grin of little Mavorovitch as the last whistle settled the match at five goals to four against Davos, but everything seemed cloudy and unreal. He heard Mavorovitch say:

"Spooner never told us he had a dark horse over here. I must say I am disappointed. Until half-time I thought I should get the better of you; but how did you get that devilish spurt on? Fierce pace tires, but you were easier to tire when you began."

Winn's eyes wandered over the little man beside him.

"Oh, I don't know," he said good-naturedly; he had never in his life felt so good-natured. "I suppose I thought we were getting beaten. That rather braces one up, doesn't it?"

"Ah, that is you English all over," laughed Mavorovitch. "We have a saying, 'In all campaigns the English lose many battles, but they always win one—namely, the last.'"

"I'm sure it's awfully jolly of you to say so," said Winn. "You play a pretty fine game yourself, you know, considerably more skill in it than mine. I had no idea you were not English yourself."

Mavorovitch seemed to swim away into a mist of laughter, people receded, the bank receded; at last he stood before her. Winn thought she was a little thinner in the face and her eyes were larger than ever. He could not take his own away from her; he had no thoughts, and he forgot to speak.

Everybody was streaming off to tea. The rink was deserted; it lay a long, gray shadow beneath the high, white banks. The snow had begun to fall, light, dry flakes that rested like powder on Claire's curly hair. She waited for him to speak; but as he still said nothing, she asked with a sudden dimple:

"Where does this path lead to?"

Then Winn recollected himself, and asked her if she didn't want some tea. Claire shook her head.

"Not now," she said decidedly; "I want to go along this path."

Winn obeyed her silently. The path took them between dark fir-trees to the farthest corner of the little park. Far below them a small stream ran into the lake, it was frozen over, but in the silence they could hear it whispering beneath the ice. The world was as quiet as if it lay in velvet. Then Claire said suddenly:

"Oh, why did you make me hurt him when I liked him so much?"

They found a bench and sat down under the trees.

"Do you mean you've sent Lionel away?" Winn asked anxiously.

"Yes," she said in a forlorn little voice; "yesterday I sent him away. He didn't know I was coming over here, he was very miserable. He asked me if I knew about you—he said he believed you wanted me to—and I said, 'Of course I know everything.' I wasn't going to let him think you hadn't told me. Why did you go away?"

He had not thought she would ask him that. It was as if he saw before him an

interminable hill which he had believed himself to have already climbed.

He drew a deep breath, then he said:

"Didn't they talk about it? I wrote to her, the chaplain's wife I mean; I hadn't time to see her, but I sent it by the porter. I thought she'd do; she seemed a gossipy woman, kept on knitting and gassing over a stove in the hall. I thought she was —a sort of circulating library, you see. I tipped the porter—tow-headed Swiss brute. I suppose he swallowed it."

"He went away the same day you did," Claire explained. "Nobody told me anything. Do you think I would have let them? I wouldn't let Lionel, and I knew he had a right to, but I didn't care about anybody's rights. You see, I—I thought you'd tell me yourself. So I came," she finished quietly.

She waited. Winn began to draw patterns on the snow with his stick, then he said:

"I've been a bit of a blackguard not telling you myself. I didn't want to talk about it, and that's a fact. I'm married."

He kept his face turned away from her. It seemed a long time before she spoke.

"You should have told me that before," she said in a queer, low voice. "It's too late now."

"Would it," he asked quickly, "have made any difference—about Lionel, I mean?"

She shook her head.

"Not," she said, "about Lionel."

He bent lower over the pattern in the snow; it had become more intricate.

"I couldn't tell you," he muttered; "I tried. I couldn't. That was why I went off. You say too late. D'you mind telling me if you mean—you care?"

Her silence seemed interminable, and then he knew she had already answered him. It seemed to him that if he sat there and died, he couldn't speak.

"Winn," she asked in a whisper, "did you go because of me—or because of you?"

He turned round, facing her.

"Is that worrying you?" he asked fiercely. "Well, you can see for yourself, can't you? All there is of me—" He could not finish his sentence.

It was snowing heavily. They seemed intensely, cruelly alone. It was as if all life crept off and left them by themselves in the drifting gray snow, in their silent little corner of the unconscious, unalterable world.

Winn put his arm around her and drew her head down on his shoulder.

"It's all right," he said rather thickly. "I won't hurt you."

But he knew that he had hurt her, and that it was all wrong.

She did not cry, but she trembled against his heart. He felt her shivering as if she were afraid of all the world but him.

"I must stay with you," she whispered. "I must stay with you, mustn't I?"

He tried not to say "always," but he thought afterward that he must have said "always."

Then she lifted her curls and her little fur cap with the snow on it from his shoulder, and looked deep into his eyes. The worst of it was that hers were filled with joy.

"Winn," she said, "do you love me enough for anything? Not only for happiness, but, if we had to have dreadful things, enough for dreadful things?"

She spoke of dreadful things as if they were outside her, and as if they were very far away.

"I love you enough for anything," said Winn, gravely.

"Tell me," she whispered, "did you ever even think—you liked her as much?"

Winn looked puzzled; it took him a few minutes to guess whom she meant, then he said wonderingly:

"My wife, you mean?"

Claire nodded. It was silly how the little word tore its way into her very heart; she had to bite her lips to keep herself from crying out. She did not realize that

the word was meaningless to him.

"No," said Winn, gravely; "that's the worst of it. I must have been out of my head. It was a fancy. Of course I thought it was all right, but I didn't *care*. It was fun rather than otherwise; you know what I mean? I'm afraid I gave her rather a rotten time of it; but fortunately she doesn't like me at all. It's not surprising."

"Yes, it is," said Claire, firmly; "it's very surprising. But if she doesn't care for you, and you don't care for her, can't anything be done?"

There is something cruel in the astonishing ease with which youth believes in remedial measures. It is a cruelty which reacts so terribly upon its possessors.

Winn hesitated; then he told her that he would take her to the ends of the world. Claire pushed away the ends of the world; they did not sound very practical.

"I mean," she said, "have you got to consider anybody else? Of course there's Maurice and your people, I've thought of them. But I don't think they'd mind so awfully always, do you? It wouldn't be like robbing or cheating some one who really needed us. We couldn't do that, of course."

Then Winn remembered Peter. He told her somehow that there was Peter. He hid his face against her breast while he told her; he could not bear to see in her eyes this new knowledge of Peter.

But she was very quiet about it; it was almost as if she had always known that there was Peter.

Winn spoke very wildly after that; he denied Peter; he denied any obstacles; he spoke as if they were already safely and securely married. He explained that they had to be together; that was the long and short of it. Anything else was absurd; she must see that it was absurd.

Claire didn't interrupt him once; but when he had quite finished, she said consideringly:

"Yes; but, after all, she gave you Peter."

Then Winn laughed, remembering how Estelle had given him Peter. He couldn't explain to Claire quite how funny it was.

She bore his laughter, though it surprised her a little; there seemed to be so many new things to be learned about him. Then she said:

"Anyway, we can be quite happy for a fortnight, can't we?"

Winn raised his head and looked at her. It was his turn to be surprised.

"Maurice and I," she explained, "have to go back in two weeks; we've come over here for the fortnight. So we'll just be happy, won't we? And we can settle what we'll do afterward, at the end of the time."

She spoke as if a fortnight was a long time. Then Winn kissed her; he did it with extraordinary gentleness, on the side of her cheek and on her wet curls covered with snow.

"You're such a baby," he said half to himself; "so it isn't a bit of use your being as old as the hills the other part of the time. There are just about a million reasons why you shouldn't stay, you know."

"Oh, reasons!" said Claire, making a face at anything so trivial as a reason. Then she became very grave, and said, "I *want* to stay, Winn; of course I know what you mean. But there's Maurice; it isn't as if I were alone. And afterwards—oh, Winn, it's because I don't know what is going to happen afterwards—I *must* have now!"

Winn thought for a moment, then he said:

"Well, I'll try and work it. You mustn't be in the same hotel, though. Fortunately, I know a nice woman who'll help us through; only, darling, I'm awfully afraid it's beastly wrong for you. I mean I can't explain properly; but if I let you go now, it would be pretty sickening. But you'd get away; and if you stay, I'll do the best I can but we shall get mixed up so that you'll find it harder to shake me off. You see, you're awfully young; there are chances ahead of you, awfully decent other chaps, marriage—"

"And you," she whispered—"you?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter a damn about me either way," he explained carefully. "I'm stuck. But it isn't really fair of me to let you stay. You don't understand, but it simply isn't fair."

Claire looked reproachfully at him.

"If I don't want you to be fair," she said, "you oughtn't to want to be—not more than I do, I mean. Besides—Oh, Winn, I do know about when I go! That's why I

can't go till we've been happy, awfully happy, *first*. Don't you see, if I went now, there'd be nothing to look back on but just your being hurt and my being hurt; and I want happiness! Oh, Winn, I want happiness!"

That was the end of it. He took her in his arms and promised her happiness.

PART III

CHAPTER XXIII

It seemed incredible that they should be happy, but from the first of their fortnight to the last they were increasingly, insanely happy. Everything ministered to their joy; the unstinted blue and gold of the skies, the incommunicable glee of mountain heights, their blind and eager love.

There was no future. They were on an island cut off from all to-morrows; but they were together, and their island held the fruits of the Hesperides.

They lived surrounded by light passions, by unfaithfulnesses that had not the sharp excuses of desire, bonds that held only because they would require an effort to break and bonds that were forged only because it was easier to pass into a new relation than to continue in an old one. Their solid and sober passion passed through these light fleets of pleasure-boats as a great ship takes its unyielding way toward deep waters.

Winn was spared the agony of foresight; he could not see beyond her sparkling eyes; and Claire was happy, exultantly, supremely happy, with the reckless, incurious happiness of youth.

It was terrible to see them coming in and out with their joy. Their faces were transfigured, their eyes had the look of sleep-walkers, they moved as through another world. They had only one observer, and to Miss Marley the sight of them was like the sight of those unknowingly condemned to die. St. Moritz in general was not observant. It had gossips, but it did not know the difference between true and false, temporary and permanent. It had one mold for all its fancies: given a man and a woman, it formed at once its general and monotonous conjecture.

Maurice might have noticed Claire's preoccupation, for Maurice was sensitive to that which touched himself, but for the moment a group more expensive and less second rate than he had discovered at Davos took up his entire attention. He had none to spare for his sister unless she bothered him, and she didn't bother him.

It was left to Miss Marley to watch from hour to hour the significant and rising chart of passion. The evening after the Davos match, Winn had knocked at the door of her private sitting-room. It was his intention only to ask her if she would dine with some friends of his from Davos; he would mention indifferently that

they were very young, a mere boy and girl, and he would suggest with equal subtlety that he would be obliged if Miss Marley would continue to take meals at his table during their visit. St. Moritz, he saw himself saying, was such a place for talk. There was no occasion to go into anything, and Miss Marley would, of course, have no idea how matters really stood. She was a good sort, but he wasn't going to talk about Claire.

Miss Marley said, "Come in," in that wonderful, low, soft voice of hers that came so strangely from her blistered lips. She was sitting in a low chair, smoking, in front of an open wood fire.

Her room was furnished by herself. It was a comfortable, featureless room, with no ornaments and no flowers; there were plenty of books in cases or lying about at ease on a big table, a stout desk by the window, and several leather-covered, deep armchairs. The walls were bare except for photographs of the Cresta. These had been taken from every possible angle of the run—its banks, its corners, its flashing pieces of straight, and its incredible final hill. It was noticeable that though there was generally a figure on a toboggan in the photograph, it never happened to be one of Miss Marley herself. She was a creditable rider, but she did not, to her own mind, show off the Cresta.

Her eyes met Winn's with a shrewdness that she promptly veiled. He wasn't looking as if he wanted her to be shrewd. It struck her that she was seeing Winn as he must have looked when he was about twenty. She wondered if this was only because he had won the match. His eyes were very open and they were off their guard. It could not be said that Winn had ever in his life looked appealing, but for a Staines to look so exposed to friendliness was very nearly an appeal.

"Mavorovitch has just left me," said Miss Marley. "You ought to have heard what he said about you. It was worth hearing. You played this afternoon like a successful demon dealing with lost souls. I don't think I've ever seen bandy played quite in that vein before."

Winn sank into one of the leather armchairs and lighted a cigarette.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I played like a fluke. I am not up to Mavorovitch's form at all. I just happened to be on my game; he would have had me down and out otherwise."

Miss Marley nodded; she was wondering what had put Winn on his game. She turned her eyes away from him and looked into the fire. Winn was resting for the

first time that day; the sense of physical ease and her even, tranquil comradeship were singularly soothing to him. Suddenly it occurred to him that he very much liked Miss Marley, and in a way in which he had never before liked any woman, with esteem and without excitement. He gave her a man's first proof of confidence.

"Look here," he said, "I want you to help me."

Miss Marley turned her eyes back to him; she was a plain woman, but she was able to speak with her eyes, and though what she said was sometimes hard and always honest, on the present occasion they expressed only an intense reassurance of good-will.

"When I came in," Winn said rather nervously, "I meant to ask you a little thing, but I find I am going to ask you a big one."

"Oh, well," said Miss Marley, "ask away. Big or little, friends should stand by each other."

"Yes," said Winn, relieved, "that's what I thought you'd say. I don't know that I ever mentioned to you I'm married?"

"No," she answered quietly, "I can't say that you did; however, most men of your age are married."

"And I've got a son," Winn continued. "His name is Peter—after my father, you know."

"That's a good thing," she concurred heartily. "I'm glad you've got a son."

"Unfortunately," said Winn, "my marriage didn't exactly come off. We got hold of the wrong end of the stick."

"Ah," said Miss Marley, "that's a pity! The right end of the stick is, I believe, almost essential in marriage."

"Yes," Winn acknowledged; "I see that now, of course. I was keen on getting her, but I hadn't thought the rest out. Rather odd, isn't it, that you don't get as much as a tip about how jolly a thing could be till you've dished yourself from having it?"

Miss Marley agreed that it was rather odd.

Winn came back swiftly to his point.

"What I was going to ask you," he said, holding her with his eyes, "is to sit at my table for a bit. I happen to have two young friends of mine over from Davos. He's her brother, of course, but I thought I'd like to have another woman somewhere about. Look better, wouldn't it? She's only nineteen."

His voice dropped as he mentioned Claire's age as if he were speaking of the Madonna.

"Yes," agreed Miss Marley, "it would look better."

"I dare say," said Winn after rather a long pause, "you see what I mean? The idea is—our idea, you know—to be together as much as we can for a fortnight. It'll be all right, of course; only I rather wondered if you'd see us through."

"See you through being all right?" Miss Marley asked with the directness of a knife-thrust.

"Well—yes," said Winn. "It would just put people off thinking things. Everybody seems to know you up here, and I somehow thought I'd rather you knew."

"Thank you," said Miss Marley, briefly.

She turned back to the fire again. She had seen all she wanted to see in Winn's eyes. She saw his intention. What she wasn't sure about was the fortnight. A fortnight can do a good deal with an intention.

Miss Marley knew the world very well. People had often wanted to use her for a screen before, and generally she had refused, believing that the chief safeguard of innocence is the absence of screens. But she saw that Winn did not want her to be that kind of a screen; he wanted her to be in the center of his situation without touching it. He wanted her for Claire, but he wanted her also a little for himself, so that he might feel the presence of her upright friendliness. He intensely trusted her.

There are people who intend to do good in the world and invariably do harm. They enter eagerly into the lives of others and put their fingers pressingly upon delicate machinery; very often they destroy it, more seldom, unfortunately, they cut their own fingers. Miss Marley did not belong to this type. She did not wish to be involved and she was scrupulous never to involve others. She hesitated before she gave her consent, but she couldn't withstand the thought that Claire was only nineteen. She spoke at last.

"What you suggest," she said quietly, "is going to be rather hard for you both. I suppose you do realize how hard? You see, you are only at the beginning of the fortnight now. Unhappy men and very young girls make difficult situations, Major Staines."

He got up and walked to the window, standing with his back to her. She wondered if she had said too much; his back looked uncompromising. She did not realize that she could never say too much in the defense of Claire. Then he said, without looking round:

"We shall have to manage somehow."

It occurred to Miss Marley, with a wave of reassurance, that this was probably Winn's usual way of managing.

"In any case," she said firmly, "you can count on me to do anything you wish."

Winn expressed no gratitude. He merely said:

"I shall introduce her to you this evening."

Before he left Miss Marley he shook hands with her. Her hands were hard and muscular, but she realized when she felt his grip that he must have been extremely grateful.

CHAPTER XXIV

They went out early, before the sun was up, when the valley was an apricot mist and the mountains were as white as snowdrops in the spring. The head waiter fell easily into their habits, and provided them with an early breakfast and a parcel for lunch. Then they drove off through the biting, glittering coldness.

Sometimes they went far down the valley to Sils and on to the verge of the Maloja. Sometimes they drove through the narrower valleys to Pontresina and on into the impenetrable winter gloom of the Mortratsch glacier. The end was the same solitude, sunshine, and their love. The world was wrapped away in its winter stillness. The small Swiss villages slept and hardly stirred. In the hot noonday a few drowsy peasants crept to and from the barns where the cattle passed their winter life. Sometimes a woman labored at a frozen pump, or a party of skiers slipped rapidly through the shady streets, rousing echoes with their laughter; but for the most part they were as much alone as if the world had ceased to hold any beings but themselves. The pine-trees scented all the air, the snow dripped reluctantly, and sometimes far off they heard the distant boom of an avalanche. They sat together for long sunlit hours on the rickety wooden balcony of a friendly hospice, drinking hot spiced *glüwein* and building up their precarious memories.

There were moments when the hollow present snapped under their feet like a broken twig, and then the light in their eyes darkened and they ran out upon the safer path of make-believe.

It was Winn who, curiously enough, began it, and returned to it oftenest. It came to him, this abolishing of Estelle, always more easily than it came to Claire. It was inconceivable to Claire that Winn didn't, as a rule, remember his wife. She could have understood the tragedy of his marriage, but Winn didn't make a tragedy of it, he made nothing of it at all. It seemed terrible to Claire that any woman, bearing his name, the mother of his child, should have no life in his heart. She found herself resenting this for Estelle. She tried to make Winn talk about her, so that she might justify her ways to him. But Winn went no further in his expressions than the simple phrases, "She's not my sort," "We haven't anything in common," "I expect we didn't hit it off." Finally he said, terribly, under the persistency of Claire's pressure, "Well, if you will have it, I don't

believe a single word she says."

"Oh, but sometimes, sometimes she must speak the truth!" Claire urged, breathless with pity.

"I dare say," Winn replied indifferently. "Possibly she does, but what difference does it make to me when I don't know which times?"

Claire waited a little, then she said:

"I wasn't thinking of the difference to you; I was thinking of the difference to her."

"I tell you," Winn repeated obstinately, "that I don't care a hang about the difference to her. People shouldn't tell lies. I don't care that for her!" He snapped a crumb off the table. He looked triumphantly at Claire, under the impression that he had convinced her of a pleasing fact. She burst into tears.

He tried to take her in his arms, but for a moment she resisted him.

"Do you *want* me to love Estelle?" he asked in desperation.

Claire shook her head.

"I'd like her—to be loved," she said, still sobbing.

Winn looked wonderingly at her.

"Well, as far as that goes, so would I," he observed, with a sardonic grin. "There'd be some way out for us then."

Claire shook her head vehemently, but she made no attempt to explain her tears. She felt that she couldn't alter him, and that when he most surprised her it was wiser to accept these surprises than to probe her deep astonishment.

He surprised her very often, he was in such a hurry to unburden himself of all he was. It seemed to him as if he must tell her everything while he had her. He expressed himself as he had never in his wildest dreams supposed that any man could express himself to another human being. He broke down his conventions, he forced aside his restraint, he literally poured out his heart to her. He gave her his opinions, his religion, his codes of conduct, until she began a little to understand his attitude toward Estelle.

It was part of his exterior way of looking at the world at large. Up till now

people, except Lionel, had never really entered into his imagination. Of course there were his servants and his dogs and, nearer still, his horses. He spent hours telling her about his horses. They really had come into his life, but never people; even his own family were nothing but a background for wrangles.

He had never known tenderness. He had had all kinds of odd feelings about Peter, but they hadn't got beyond his own mind. His tenderness was beyond everything now; it over-flowed expression. It was the radical thing in him. He showed her plainly that it would break his heart if she were to let her feet get wet. He made plans for her future which would have suited a chronic invalid. He wanted to give her jewels, expensive specimens of spaniels, and a banking account.

She would take nothing from him but a notebook and a little opal ring. Winn restrained his passion, but out of revenge for his restraint his fancies ran wild.

It was Claire who had to be practical; she who had spent her youth in dreams now clung desperately to facts. She read nothing, she hardly talked, but she drew his very soul out to meet her listening soul. There were wonders within wonders to her in Winn. She had hardly forced herself to accept his hardness when she discovered in him a tolerance deeper than anything she had ever seen, and an untiring patience. He had pulled men out of holes only to see them run back into them with the swiftness of burrowing rabbits; but nothing made him feel as if he could possibly give them up.

"You can't tell how many new starts a man wants," he explained to Claire; "but he ought to have as many as he can take. As long as a man wants to get on, I think he ought to be helped."

His code about a man's conduct to women was astonishingly drastic.

"If you've let a woman in," he explained, "you've got to strip yourself to get her out, no matter whether you care for her or not. The moment a woman gets caught out, you can't do too much for her. It's like seeing a dog with a tin can tied to its tail; you've got to get it off. A man ought to pay for his fun; even if it isn't his fault, he ought to pay just the same. It's not so much that he's the responsible person, but he's the least *had*. That ought to settle the question."

He was more diffident, but not less decided, on the subject of religion.

"If there's a God at all," he stated, "He must be good; otherwise you can't explain

goodness, which doesn't pay and yet always seems worth having. You know what I mean. Not that I am a religious man myself, but I like the idea. Women certainly ought to be religious."

He hoped that Claire would go regularly to church unless it was draughty.

It was on the Bernina, when they were nine thousand feet up in a blue sky, beyond all sight or sound of life, in their silent, private world, that they talked about death.

"Curious," Winn said, "how little you think about it when you're up against it. I shouldn't like to die of an illness. That's all I've ever felt about it; that would be like letting go. I don't think I could let go easily; but just a proper, decent knock-out—why, I don't believe you'd know anything about it. I never felt afraid of chucking it, till I knew you, now I'm afraid."

Claire looked at his strong hands in the sunshine and at her own which lay on his; they looked so much alive! She tried hard to think about death, because she knew that some day everybody must die; but she felt as if she was alive forever.

"Yes," she said; "of course I suppose we *shall*. But, Winn, don't you think that we could send for each other then? Wouldn't that be splendid?"

The idea of death became suddenly a shortening of the future; it was like something to look forward to. Winn nodded gravely, but he didn't seem to take the same comfort in it that Claire did. He only said:

"I dare say we could manage something. But you feel all right, don't you?"

Claire laughed until something in his grave eyes hurt her behind her laughter.

The sky changed from saffron to dead blue and then to startling rose color. Flame after flame licked the Bernina heights. Their sleigh-bells rang persistently beneath them. They drank their coffee hurriedly while the sun sank out of the valley, and the whole world changed into an icy light.

They drove off rapidly down the pass, wrapped in furs and clinging to each other. They did not know what anything would mean when they were apart. The thought of separation was like bending from a sunny world over a well of darkness. Claire cried a little, but not very much. She never dared let herself really cry because of what might happen to Winn.

It surprised him sometimes how little she tried to influence his future life. She did not make him promise anything except to go to see Dr. Gurnet. He wondered afterward why she had left so much to his discretion when he had made so many plans, and urgent precautions for her future; and yet he knew that when she left him he would be desperate enough to break any promises and never desperate enough to break her trust in him. Suddenly he said to her as the darkness of the pass swallowed them:

"Look here, I won't take to drink. I'd like to, but I won't." And Claire leaned toward him and kissed him, and he said a moment later, with a little half laugh:

"D'you know, I rather wish you hadn't done that. You never have before, and I sha'n't be able to forget it. You put the stopper on to that intention."

And Claire said nothing, smiling into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXV

Claire had never been alone with Miss Marley before; she had known her only as an accompaniment to Winn; but she had been aware, even in these partial encounters, that she was being benevolently judged. It must be owned that earlier in the day she had learned, with a sinking of the heart, that she must give up the evening to Miss Marley. When every hour counted as a victory over time, she could not understand how Winn could let her go; and yet he had said quite definitely: "I want you to go to Miss Marley this evening. She'd like to talk to you, and I think you'd better."

But something happened which changed her feelings. Miss Marley was a woman despite the Cresta and there are times when only a woman's judgment can satisfy the heart of a girl. Claire was startled and perturbed by Maurice's sudden intervention. Maurice said:

"That chap Staines is getting you talked about. Pretty low down of him, as I believe he's married." She was pulled up short in the golden stream of her love. She saw for the first time the face of opinion—that hostile, stupid, interfering face. Claire had never thought that by any malign possibility they could be supposed to be doing wrong. She could not connect wrong with either her love or Winn's. If there was one quality more than another which had distinguished it, it had been its simple sense of rightness. She had seen Winn soften and change under it as the hard earth changes at the touch of spring. She had felt herself enriched and enlarged, moving more unswervingly than ever toward her oldest prayer—that she might, on the whole, be good. She hardly prayed at all about Winn; loving him was her prayer.

If she had meant to take him away from Estelle or to rob him of Peter, then she knew she would have been wrong. But in this fortnight she was taking nothing from Estelle that Estelle had ever had, and she was doing no harm to Peter. It would not be likely to do him any harm to soften his father's heart.

Claire's morality consisted solely in the consideration of other people; her instincts revolted against unkindness. It was an early Christian theory much lost sight of, "Love, and do as you please," the safety of the concession resting upon the quality of the love.

But to-night another idea had occurred to her, and she was very uneasy. Was it really possible that any one could blame Winn? Her first instinct had been sheer anger, and her anger had carried her past fear into the pride of love. She had felt as if she wanted to confront the world and defy it. If the world dared judge them, what did it matter? Their hearts were clean. She was too young to know that under the world's judgments clean hearts break even more easily than soiled ones.

But her mind had not rested there. She had begun to be afraid for Winn, and with all her heart she longed to see him justified. What had he ever done that he could be judged? He had loved her, spared her, guarded her. He had made, he was making, inconceivable sacrifices for her. He was killing not only his own joy, but hers rather than do her what he thought a wrong.

She sat on a footstool in front of Miss Marley's wood fire, frowning at the flames. Miss Marley watched her cautiously; there was a good deal she wanted to say, but she hoped that most of it might be said by Claire. A very careful talker can get a good deal expressed in this way; impressions, to be permanent, must always come from the person you wish to impress.

"Miss Marley," Claire began, "do you think it matters what people *think*?"

Miss Marley, who invariably rolled her own cigarettes, took up a small silver box, flattened the cigarette-paper out carefully, and prepared to fill it before answering. Then she said:

"Very few people do think; that is generally what matters—absence of thought. Speech without thought is responsible for most people's disasters."

"But it can't matter what people say if it isn't true, can it?" Claire persisted. "I mean—*nonsense* can't *count* against any one?"

"I'm rather afraid it does matter," said Miss Marley, lighting her cigarette. "Nonsense is very infectious, and it often carries a good deal of weight. I have known nonsense break people's hearts."

"Oh!" said Claire in a rising breath. She was wondering what it was like to have a broken heart. Somewhere in the back of her mind she knew that she was going to have one, half of one; but what really frightened her was that the other half was going to belong to Winn.

"Could any one," she said under her breath, "think any harm of him? He told me

you knew all about us, and that I might talk to you if I wanted to; but I didn't then. There didn't seem anything to say. But now I do want to know; I want to know awfully what you think. If I asked him, he'd only laugh or else he'd be angry. He's very young in some ways, you know, Miss Marley—younger than I am."

"Yes," agreed Miss Marley; "men are always, to the end of their lives, very young in some ways."

"I never thought," Claire went on breathlessly, "that people would dream of blaming him because we were together. Why, it's so stupid! If they only knew! He's so good!"

"If he's that," said Miss Marley, smiling into the fire, "you've succeeded in making a saint of a Staines, a very difficult experiment! I shouldn't advise you to run away too much with that idea, however."

"It isn't me; it's him," exclaimed Claire, regardless of grammar. "I mean, after what Maurice said this afternoon—I don't know how to put it quite—I almost wish we'd both been bad!"

Miss Marley nodded. She knew the danger of blame when a tug of war is in progress, and how it weakens the side attacked.

"How can I explain to people," Claire went on, "what he's been like? I don't know whether I've told you, but he went away almost directly he found out he cared, before—long before he knew I cared, though he might have known; and he left a message to tell me about his wife, which I never got. But, oh, Miss Marley, I've never told him, I should have come if I'd got it or not! I should really, because I *had* to know if he cared! So you see, don't you, that if either of us was wicked it was me? Only I didn't *feel* wicked; I really felt awfully good. I don't see how you're to tell what's right if God doesn't let you know and people talk nonsense."

"It's not," agreed Miss Marley, dryly, "particularly easy to know."

"And his wife doesn't care for him," Claire went on. "Fancy Winn's wife not caring for him! Poor woman!"

"Why do you pity her?" Miss Marley inquired with interest.

"Well," said Claire, with a sudden dimple, "I was only thinking I shouldn't like to

be Winn's wife if he didn't care for me; and then I was thinking that if he didn't, I'd make him!"

"Well, that effort doesn't seem required of you," said Miss Marley.

"No, but it only shows you that I'm much the most wicked, doesn't it?" asked Claire, with some pride.

"The points against Winn," Miss Marley said gravely, "are his age, his experience, and his wife. I feel bound to tell you that there are points against him."

Claire frowned.

"Winn isn't really old," she explained, "because he's only done things all his life—games or his work; it hasn't been people. People make you old, especially when you are looking after them. He's never really grown up; and as for experience, I don't think you experience anything unless you care about it. It hurts me sometimes to hear him talk about his wife. He's never *had* her; he's only had me. I don't explain very well, but I know it's true, because he told me things about loving which showed me he'd never had anything before except dogs—and Peter; and Peter's awfully young, and dogs can't answer back. You can't grow up on dogs."

Miss Marley tacitly admitted the limitations of canine influence; but she said:

"Still, you know, he's not kept to his own code; that's what one must judge people by. I'm sure he'd tell you himself that a married man should leave girls alone."

Claire thought for a moment, then she said:

"Yes, but he's gone deeper than his code now. Don't you think that perhaps a smash, even of something you value, makes you grow? I don't know how to put it quite, but if you never did what you thought wrong, would you ever know how big right is? Besides, he hasn't gone on doing it. Perhaps he *did* start wrong in getting to care, but that only makes it harder and finer, his stopping himself. Very few people, I think, but Winn could stop themselves, and nobody but Winn could ever care—so much." Her voice broke, and she turned away her head.

"What," said Miss Marley, rolling another cigarette, "are your plans?"

Miss Marley felt that she must give up first principles but she hoped that she might still be able to do something about plans.

"We are going to drive over the Maloja to Chiavenna," said Claire; "Maurice has a party to go with. We shall start by the earlier post, and have lunch together at Vico-Soprano before he comes. And then when Maurice comes we shall say good-by; and then—and then, Miss Marley, I've been thinking—we mustn't meet again! I haven't told Winn yet, because he likes to talk as if we could, in places awfully far away and odd, with you to chaperon us. I think it helps him to talk like that but I don't think now that we must ever meet again. You won't blame him if I tell you something, will you?"

"No," said Miss Marley; "after what you've said to me to-night I am not inclined to blame him."

"Well," said Claire, "I don't think, if we were to meet again, he would let me go. We may manage this time, but not twice."

"Are you sure," asked Miss Marley, gently, "that you will manage this time?"

Claire raised her head and looked at Miss Marley.

"Aren't you?" she said gravely. "I *did* feel very sure."

"I'd feel a great deal surer," said Miss Marley, "if you didn't drive down the pass. If you once set off with Winn, do you suppose he'll stop? I am sure he means to now; in fact, his sending you up here to talk to me proves it. He knows I sha'n't be much of a help to him in carrying you off. But, my dear, I never knew any Staines stop, once he'd started. As long as he is looking at the consequences for you, he'll steer clear of them, he's looking at them now, but a moment will come when he'll cease to look, and then everything will depend on you. I think your one chance is to say good-by here, and to drive down the pass with Maurice. He can dispose of his party for once."

The color left Claire's face, but her eyes never flinched from Miss Marley's. After a time Miss Marley turned her head away; she could no longer bear the look in Claire's eyes. It was like watching the face of some one drowning.

"I don't want a chance!" whispered Claire.

"I don't want a chance," whispered Claire

Miss Marley found her voice difficult to control, but she did control it; she said:

"I was thinking of his chance. If he does you any harm, he won't forgive himself. You can stop it; he can't possibly stop himself."

"No," said Claire. She didn't cry; she sat very straight and still on her footstool in front of the fire. After a while she said in a curious dragging voice: "Very well, then; I must tell him about the pass. Oh, what shall I do if he minds! It's his minding—" She stopped, as if the words broke something in her.

"Yes," said Miss Marley; "but he'll mind more if he ruins your life. You see, you won't think you're ruined, but Winn will think so. He'll believe he's ruined the woman he loves, and after a little time, when his passion has ceased to ride him blind, he'll never hold up his head again. You'll be responsible for that." It sounded cruel, but it was not cruel. Miss Marley knew that as long as she laid the responsibility at Claire's door, Claire would not think her cruel.

Claire repeated slowly after her:

"I should be responsible for that!" Then she said: "Oh, how silly laws are! How silly! As if any one could be ruined who simply loved!"

"We should probably be sillier without laws," Miss Marley observed. "And you must remember they have their recommendations: they keep silly people comparatively safe."

"Safe!" said Claire. "I think that's the emptiest, poorest word there is! Who wants to be safe?"

"You wouldn't think so if you had a child," said Miss Marley, quietly. "You would need safety then, and you would learn to prize it."

Claire bowed her head into her hands.

"Oh, why can't I have one now! Why can't I?" she whispered brokenly.

Miss Marley bit her lips; she had hoped Claire was too young for this particular

stab.

"Because he'd think it wrong," said Miss Marley after a pause, "and because of Peter. He's got that obligation. The two would clash."

Claire rose slowly to her feet.

"I'll just go and tell him about the pass," she said quietly. "When it's over I'll begin to think; but I needn't really think till then, need I? Because I feel as if I couldn't just now; it would stop my going on."

Miss Marley said that she was quite sure that Claire need not begin to think at present and privately she hoped that, when that hour came, something might happen which would deaden thought. She was thankful to remember that the worst of feeling is always over before the worst of thinking can begin. But Claire was too young to comfort herself with the limitations of pain. She only knew that she must tell Winn about the pass and seem for a moment at least, in his eyes, not to trust him. Nevertheless, she smiled at Miss Marley before she left her, because she didn't want Miss Marley to feel upset; and Miss Marley accepted this reassurance with an answering smile until the door was shut.

CHAPTER XXVI

When Claire found Winn at the bridge-table she saw at a glance that he was not in the mood for renunciations. His eyes had the hard, shining stare that was the danger-signal of the Staines family. He shot a glance at Claire as if she were a hostile force and he was taking her measure. He was putting her outside himself in order to fight her. It was as if he knew instinctively that their wills were about to clash. When the rubber was over, he got up and walked straight to her.

"You put me off my game," he said grimly. "I can see you're up to something; but we can't talk here."

"Let's talk to-morrow," she urged, "not now. I thought perhaps you'd like to come and listen to the music with me; there is music in the hall."

"You did, did you?" he replied in the same hard voice. "Well, you were mistaken. Go up-stairs to my room and wait for me. It's number 28, two or three doors beyond Miss Marley's sitting-room. I'll follow you."

An older woman would have hesitated, and if Claire had hesitated, Winn would never have forgiven her. But her youth was at once her danger and her protection.

She would rather have waited till to-morrow, because she saw that Winn was in a difficult mood; but she had no idea what was behind his mood. She went at once.

She had never been in Winn's room before, and as she sat down to wait for him her eyes took in its neat impressive bareness. It was a narrow hotel room, a bed in one corner, a chest of drawers, washstand, and wardrobe opposite. By the balcony window were a small table and an armchair. A cane chair stood at the foot of the bed.

Nothing was lying about. There were few traces of occupation visible; only a pair of felt slippers under the bed, a large bath sponge on the washstand, and a dressing-gown hanging on the nail behind the door. In his tooth-glass by the bedside was a rose Claire had worn and given him. It was put there with meticulous care; its stalk had been re-cut and its leaves freshened. Beside it lay a small New Testament and a book on saddles.

Winn joined her in exactly five minutes. He shut the door carefully after him, and sat down on the cane chair opposite her.

"I thought you might like to know," he said politely, "that I have made up my mind not to let you go."

Then he waited for Claire to contradict him. But Claire waited, too; Claire waited longest. She was not sure what to say, and, unlike most women, when she was not sure what to say, she said nothing. Winn spoke again, but a little less quietly.

"It's no use your making a fuss," he stated, "or cutting up rough about it and throwing morals at my head. I've got past that." He got up, locked the door, and then came back. "I'm going to keep that door locked until I make sure what you're up to."

"You needn't have done that," Claire said quietly. "Do you think I want to leave you? If I did, I shouldn't be here. You can't make me do anything I don't want to do, because I want exactly what you do."

Winn shot an appreciative glance at her; that was a good stroke, but he wasn't going to be taken in by it. In some ways he would have preferred to see her angry. Hostility is generally the sign of weakness; but Claire looked at him with an unyielding tenderness.

"The question is," he said firmly, "can I make you do what we both want and what you are holding back from? I dare say you've got good reasons for holding back and all that, and I know I'm an out-and-out blackguard to press you, but I've reached a place where I won't stand any more. D'you see my point?"

Claire nodded. She was not angry, because she saw that Winn was fighting her not because he wanted to be victorious over her, but because he was being conquered by pain.

She was not going to let him be conquered by it—that, as Miss Marley had said, was her responsibility—but it wasn't going to be easy to prevent it. She was close against the danger-line, and every nerve in her being had long ago become part of Winn. He was fighting against the best of himself, but all that was not the best of Claire fought on his side. Perhaps there was not very much that was not the best in Claire. She hesitated, then she said:

"I thought you wanted me—to go. I think you really do want it; that's why I'm

going."

Winn leaned forward and took hold of both her wrists. "So I did," he agreed; "but it isn't any good. I can't do it. I've thought it all out—just what to do, you know—for both of us. I'll have to leave my regiment, of course, but I can get back into something else all right later on. Estelle will give me a divorce. She'll want to keep the child away from me; besides, she'll like to be a public martyr. As for you and me, you'll have to face rough music for a year or two; that's the worst part of it. I'm sorry. We'll stay abroad till it's over. My mother will help us. I can count on her."

"Winn, come here," said Claire. He came and knelt down beside her. She put her hands on his shoulders and looked deep into his eyes. He tried to keep them hard, but he failed.

"Don't try and get round me!" he said threateningly. "You'll make me dangerous if you do. It isn't the least good!"

"Can you listen to what I say?" Claire asked quietly.

"I suppose so," said Winn, guardedly. "I love every bit of you—I love the ground your chair's on—but I'm not going to give in."

"And that's the way I love you," she said. "I'd go with you to the world's end, Winn, if I didn't love you so much and you'd take me there; but you won't, for just the same reason. We can't do what would be unfair; we shouldn't like it. It's no use, darling; we shouldn't like it."

"That's all you know about it," said Winn, unappeasably. "Anyhow, we're going to do it, whether you like it or not."

Then she took her hands away from his shoulders and leaned back in her chair. He had never seen her look so frail and small, and he knew that she had never been so formidably strong.

"Oh, no, Winn," she whispered; "I'm not. I'm not going to do it. If you wanted it, if you really wanted it with all of you, you wouldn't be rough with me; you'd be gentle. You're not being gentle because you don't think it right, and I'm never going to do what you don't think right."

Winn drew a deep, hard breath. He threw his arms round her and pressed her against his heart.

"I'm *not* rough," he muttered, "and you've got to do it! You've got to give in!"

Claire made no answer. She only clung to him, and every now and then she said his name under her breath as if she were calling to something in him to save her.

Whatever it was that she was calling to answered her. He suddenly bowed his head and buried it in her lap. She felt his body shake, and he began to sob, hard, dry sobs that broke him as they came. He held her close, with his face hidden. Claire pressed her hands on each side of his temples, feeling the throbbing of his heart. She felt as if something inside her were being torn to pieces, something that knocked its way against her side in a vain endeavor to escape. She very nearly gave in. Then Winn stopped as suddenly as he had begun.

"Sorry," he said, "but this kind of thing is a bit wearing. I'm not going to unlock that door. Do you intend to stay all night here, or give me your promise?" He spoke steadily now; his moment of weakness was past. She could have gone then, but nothing would have induced her to leave him while he cried.

"I don't intend to do either," Claire said with equal steadiness. "When you think I ought to go, you'll let me out."

It struck Winn that her knowledge of him was positively uncanny.

"I don't believe," he said sharply, "you're only nineteen. I believe you've been in love before!"

Claire didn't say anything, but she looked past him at the door.

Her look maddened him.

"You're playing with me!" he cried. "By Jove! you're playing with me!" He caught her by the shoulders, and for a moment he believed that he was going to kill her; but her eyes never wavered. He was not hurting her, and she knew that he never would. She said:

"O my darling boy!"

Winn got up and walked to the window. When he came back, his expression had completely changed.

"Now cut along to bed," he said quietly. "You're tired. Go—at once, Claire."

This time she knew she ought to go, but something held her back. She was not

satisfied with the look in his eyes. He was controlled again, but it was a controlled desperation. She could not leave him with that.

Her mind was intensely alert with pain; she followed his eyes. They rested for a moment on the stand by his bed. He pushed the key across the table toward her, but she did not look at the key; she crossed the room and opened the drawer under the Bible.

She saw what she had expected to see. It was Winn's revolver; upon it lay a snap-shot of Peter. He always kept them together.

Claire took out the revolver. Winn watched her, with his hands in his pockets.

"Be careful," he said; "it's loaded."

She brought it to him and said:

"Now take all the things out of it." Winn laughed, and unloaded it without a word. "Now open the window," she ordered, "and throw them into the snow." Winn obeyed. When he came back she put her arms around his neck and kissed him. "Now I'll go," she said.

"All right," agreed Winn, gently. "Wait for me in the cloak-room, and I'll take you across. But, I say, look here—will you ever forgive me? I'm afraid I've been a most fearful brute."

Then Claire knew she couldn't stand any more. She turned and ran into the passage. Fortunately, the cloak-room was empty. She pressed herself against a fur coat and sobbed as Winn had sobbed up-stairs; but she had not his arms to comfort her. She had not dared to cry in his arms.

They walked hand in hand across the snow from his hotel to the door of hers.

Claire knew that she could say anything she liked to Winn now, so she said what she had made up her mind to say.

"Winn dearest, do you know what I came down for this evening?"

He held her hand tighter and nodded.

"I guessed," he said. "That was, you know, what rather did for me. You mean you aren't going to let me come with you down the pass?"

"We mustn't," Claire whispered; and then she felt she couldn't be good any more.

It cost too much. So she added, "But you can if you like." But there wasn't any real need for Claire to be good now; Winn was good instead.

"No," he said; "it's much wiser not. You look thoroughly done up. I'm not going to have any more of this. Let's breakfast together. You come over at eight sharp and arrange with Maurice to take you down at ten. That's quite enough for you."

Claire laughed. Winn stared at her, then in a moment he laughed, too.

"We'd better not take any more chances," he explained. "Next time it might happen to us both together. Then you'd really be had! Thanks awfully for seeing me through. Good night."

She went into the hotel without a word, and all her heart rebelled against her for having seen him through.

CHAPTER XXVII

The hour of parting crept upon them singularly quietly and slowly. They both pretended to eat breakfast, and then they walked out into Badrutt's Park. They sat in the nearest shelter, hand in hand, looking over the gray, empty expanse of the rink. It was too early for any one to be about. Only a few Swiss peasants were sweeping the ice and Winn hardly looked upon Swiss peasants as human.

He asked Claire exactly how much money she had a year, and told her when she came of age what he should advise her to suggest to her trustees to put it in.

Then he went through all the things he thought she ought to have for driving down the pass. Claire interrupted him once to remind him about going to see Dr. Gurnet. Winn said he remembered quite well and would go. They both assured each other that they had had good nights. Winn said he thought Maurice would be all right in a few years, and that he didn't think he was shaping for trouble. He privately thought that Maurice was not going to have any shape at all, but he omitted this further reflection.

He told her how much he enjoyed his regiment and explained laboriously how Claire was to think of his future, which was to be, apparently, a whirl of pleasure from morning till night.

They talked very disconnectedly; in the middle of recounting his future joys, Winn said:

"And then if anything was to happen to me, you know, I hope you'd think better of it and marry Lionel."

Claire did not promise to marry Lionel, but she implied that even without marriage she, like Winn, was about to pass into an existence studded with resources and amusements; and then she added:

"And if you were to die, or I was, Miss Marley could help us to see each other just at the last. I asked her about it." Despite their future happiness, they seemed to draw more solid satisfaction out of this final privilege.

The last ten minutes they hardly talked at all. Every now and then Winn wanted to know if Claire's feet were warm, and Claire asked him to let her have a

photograph of Peter.

Then Maurice came out of the hotel, and a tailing party stood in the open doorway and wondered if it was going to snow. The sleigh drove up to the hotel, jingling in the gayest manner, with pawing horses. Winn walked across the courtyard with her and nodded to Maurice; and Maurice allowed Winn to tuck Claire up, because, after he'd looked at Winn's eyes, it occurred to him that he couldn't do anything else.

Winn reduced the hall porter, a magnificent person in gold lace, with an immense sense of dignity, to gibbering terror before the lift-boy and the boots because he had failed to supply the sleigh with a sufficiently hot foot-warmer.

Finally even Winn was satisfied that there was nothing more to eat or to wear which the sleigh could be induced to hold or Claire agree to want. He stood aside then, and told the man briefly to be off. The driver, who did not understand English, understood perfectly what Winn meant, and hastened to crack his whip.

Claire looked back and saw Winn, bare-headed, looking after her. His eyes were like a mother's eyes when she fights in naked absorption against the pain of her child.

He went on looking like that for a long while after the sleigh had disappeared. Then he put on his cap and started off up the valley toward Pontresina.

It had already begun to snow. The walk to Pontresina is the coldest and darkest of winter walks, and the snow made it heavy going. Winn got very much out of breath, and his chest hurt him. Every now and then he stopped and said to himself, "By Jove! I wonder if I'm going to be ill?" But as he always pushed on afterward with renewed vigor, as if a good idea had just occurred to him, it hardly seemed as if he cared very much whether he was going to be ill or not. He got as far as the Mortratsch Glacier before he stopped.

He couldn't get any farther because when he got into the inn for lunch, something or other happened to him. A fool of a porter had the impertinence to tell him afterward that he had fainted. Winn knocked the porter down for daring to make such a suggestion; but feeling remarkably queer despite this relaxation, he decided to drive back to the Kulm.

He wound up the day with bridge and a prolonged wrangle with Miss Marley on the subject of the Liberal Government.

Miss Marley lent herself to the fray and became extremely heated. Winn had her rather badly once or twice, and as he never subsequently heard her argue on the same subject with others, he was spared the knowledge that she shared his political views precisely, and had tenderly provided him with the flaws in her opponent's case.

When he went to bed he began a letter to Claire. He told her that he had had a jolly walk, a good game of bridge, and that he thought he'd succeeded in knocking some radical nonsense out of Miss Marley's head. Then he inclosed his favorite snap-shot of Peter, the one that he kept with his revolver, and said he would get taken properly with him when he went back to England.

Winn stopped for a long time after that, staring straight in front of him; then he wrote:

"I hope you'll never be sorry for having come across me, because you've given me everything I ever wanted. I hope you'll not mind my having been rather rough the other night. I didn't mean anything by it. I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head; but I think you know that I wouldn't, only I thought I'd just mention it. Please be careful about the damp when you get back to England."

He stopped for half an hour when he had got as far as "England," and as the heating was off, the room grew very cold; then he wrote, "I didn't know men loved women like this."

After that he decided to finish the letter in the morning; but when the morning came he crossed the last sentence out because he thought it might upset her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

He had been afraid that Davos would be beautiful, but the thaw had successfully dissipated its immaculate loveliness. Half of the snow slopes were already bare, the roads were a sea of mud, and the valley was as dingy as if a careless washerwoman had upset a basket of dirty linen on her way to the laundry. All the sport people had gone, the streets were half empty, and most of the tourist shops were shut. Only the very ill had reappeared; they crept aimlessly about in the sunshine with wonder in their eyes that they were still alive.

Winn had put up at the nearest hotel and made the earliest possible appointment with Dr. Gurnet. Dr. Gurnet was obviously pleased to see him, but the pleasure faded rapidly from his face after a glance or two at Winn. The twinkle remained in his eyes, but it had become perceptibly grimmer.

"Perhaps you would be so kind as to take off your things," he suggested. "After I have examined you we can talk more at our ease."

It seemed to Winn as if he had never been so knocked about before. Dr. Gurnet pounced upon him and went over him inch by inch; he reminded Winn of nothing so much as of an excited terrier hunting up and down a bank for a rat-hole. Eventually Dr. Gurnet found his rat. He went back to his chair, sat down heavily, and looked at Winn. For rather an ominous moment he was silent; then he said politely:

"Of course I suppose you are aware, Major Staines, of what you have done with your very excellent chances?"

Winn shook his head doubtfully. He hadn't, as a matter of fact, thought much lately about these particular chances.

"Ah," said Dr. Gurnet, "then I regret to inform you that you have simply walked through them—or, in your case, I should be inclined to imagine, tobogganed—and you have come out the other side. You haven't got any chances now."

Winn did not say anything for a moment or two; then he observed:

"I'm afraid I've rather wasted your time."

"Pray don't mention it," said Dr. Gurnet. "It is so small a thing compared with what you have done with your own."

Winn laughed.

"You rather have me there," he admitted; "I suppose I have been rather an ass."

"My dear fellow," said Dr. Gurnet, more kindly, "I'm really annoyed about this, extremely annoyed. I had booked you to get well. I expected it. What have you been doing with yourself? You've broken down that right lung badly; the infection has spread to the left. It was not the natural progress of the disease, which was in process of being checked; it is owing to a very great and undue physical strain, and absolutely no attempt to take precautions after it. Also you have, I should say, complicated this by a great nervous shock."

"Nonsense!" said Winn, briefly. "I don't go in for nerves."

"You must allow me to correct you," said Dr. Gurnet, gently. "You are a human being, and all human beings are open to the effects of shock."

"I'm afraid I haven't quite played the game," Winn confessed, after a short pause. "I hadn't meant to let you down like this, Doctor Gurnet. I think it is due to me to tell you that I shouldn't have come to you for orders if I had intended at the time to shirk them. You're quite right about the tobogganing: I had a go at the Cresta. I know it shook me up a bit, but I didn't spill. Perhaps something went wrong then."

"And why, may I ask, did you do it?" Dr. Gurnet asked ironically. "You did not act solely, I presume, from an idea of thwarting my suggestions?"

Winn's eyes moved away from the gimlets opposite them.

"I found time dragging on my hands, rather," he explained a trifle lamely.

"Ah," said Dr. Gurnet, "you should have done what I told you—you should have flirted; then you wouldn't have found time hanging on your hands."

Winn held his peace. He thought Dr. Gurnet had a right to be annoyed, so he gave him his head; but he had an uncomfortable feeling that Dr. Gurnet would make a very thorough use of this concession.

Dr. Gurnet watched Winn silently for a few moments, then he said:

"People who don't wish to get well don't get well; but, on the other hand, it is very rare that people who wish to die die. They merely get very ill and give everybody a great deal of highly unnecessary trouble."

"I'm not really seedy yet," Winn said apologetically. "I suppose you couldn't give me any idea of how things are going to go—I mean how long I've—" he hesitated for a few seconds; he felt as if he'd been brought up curiously short —"I've got to live," he finished firmly.

"I can give you some idea, of course," said Dr. Gurnet; "but if you take any more violent or irregular plunges, you may very greatly shorten your time. Should you insist on remaining in your regiment and doing your work, you have, I fancy, about two years more before a complete breakdown. You are a very strong man, and your lung-tissue is tough. Should you remain here under my care, you will live indefinitely, but I can hold out no hope of an ultimate recovery. If you return to England as an invalid, you will most undoubtedly kill yourself from boredom, though I have a suggestion to make to you which I hope may prevent this termination to your career. On the whole, though I fear advice is wasted upon you, I should recommend you to remain in the army. It is what I should do myself if I were unfortunate enough to have your temperament while retaining my own brains."

"Oh, yes," said Winn, rising to go; "of course I sha'n't chuck the army. I quite see that's the only sensible thing to do."

"Pray sit down again," said Dr. Gurnet, blandly, "and do not run away with the idea that I think any course you are likely to pursue sensible in itself. If you were a sensible man, you would not take personal disappointment as if it were prussic acid."

Winn started.

"It isn't disappointment," he said quickly; "it was the only thing to do."

"Ah, well," said Dr. Gurnet, "Heaven forbid that I should enter into a controversy with any one who believes in moral finality! Sensible people compromise, Major Staines; but do not be offended, for I have every reason to believe that sensible people do not make the best soldiers. I am asking you to remain for a few minutes further because there is one other point to which I wish to draw your attention should you be able to spare me the time?"

"All right," said Winn, with a short laugh; "I've got time enough, according to you; I've got two years."

"Well, yes," said Dr. Gurnet, drawing the tips of his fingers carefully together. "And, Major Staines, according to me you will—er—need them."

Winn sat up.

"What d' you mean?" he asked quickly.

"Men in my position," replied Dr. Gurnet, guardedly, "have very interesting little side-lights into the mentality of other nations. I don't know whether you remember my asking you if you knew German?"

"Yes," said Winn. "It went out of head; but now you speak of it, I do remember."

"I am delighted," said Dr. Gurnet, blandly, "to have reconstructed your brain-tissue up to that point. I had a certain reason for asking you this question. I have a good many German patients, some French ones, and a most excellent Belgian professor has placed himself under my care."

"Well, what about it?" asked Winn with some sharpness. He had an idea that this queer fellow before him meant something.

"The Germans are an interesting nation," Dr. Gurnet proceeded without hurrying, "and they have a universal hobby. I don't know whether you have noticed, Major Staines, but a universal hobby is a very powerful thing. I am sometimes rather sorry that with us it has wholly taken the form of athletic sports. I dare say you are going to tell me that with you it is not golf, but polo; even this enlarged idea does not wholly alter my depression.

"With the Germans, you see, the hobby happens to be man[oe]uvers—military man[oe]uvers. I understand that this spring Alsace and Lorraine have taken on the aspect of one gigantic camp. Now, Belgium," Dr. Gurnet proceeded, tapping Winn's knee with his fore-finger, "is a small, flat, undefended country, and one of my French patients informs me that the French Government have culpably neglected their northern line of forts.

"I hear from my other friend, the Belgian professor, that three years ago the Belgian Government ordered big fortress guns from Krupp. They have not got them yet; but I do not believe Krupp is incapable of turning out guns. On the contrary, I hear that Krupp has, in a still shorter time, entirely renovated the

artillery of the Austrian army."

Winn leaned forward excitedly.

"I say, sir," he exclaimed, "you ought to be in the intelligence office."

"God forbid!" said Dr. Gurnet, piously. "Not that I believe in God," he added; "but I cling to the formulated expletives.

"I should be extremely uncomfortable in any office. Besides, I have my doubts as to the value of intelligence in England. It is so very rare and so un-English. One suspects occasional un-English qualities drawn together for government purposes.

"I merely mentioned these interesting national traits because I had an idea, partly that you would respond to them, and partly that they are going in an exceedingly short time to become manifest to the world at large."

"You think we are going to have war?" asked Winn, his eyes sparkling. "War!" He said the word as if he loved it.

Dr. Gurnet shrugged his shoulders and sighed, and spread out his rather fat little hands.

"Yes, Major Staines," he said dryly, "I quite think we are going to have war."

"Then I must get back to my regiment as quickly as possible," said Winn, getting up.

"I shouldn't do that if I were you," said Dr. Gurnet. "I should advise your remaining in England for three months, I think you will be used quicker if you do that. War is unlikely to begin in India, and the climate is deleterious in the summer months. And might I suggest the carrying out of a few minor precautions? If you are to live efficiently for two years, it will be highly necessary for you to carry them out."

Winn turned toward him eagerly.

"I'll do any bally thing you tell me to now," he said quickly.

Dr. Gurnet laughed, then he said:

"Go back to England, study German, and await your chance. Don't play any more heavy games, don't lose your temper or try your heart, don't drink or smoke

or play billiards or sit in a room with a shut window. Take plenty of good plain food and a certain amount of exercise. You are going to be needed."

Winn drew a deep breath.

"It's a funny thing," he said, turning toward the door, "but somehow I believe in you."

Dr. Gurnet shook hands with him cordially.

"In a sense, I may say," he observed, "in spite of your extremely disappointing behavior, that I return the compliment. I believe in you, Major Staines, only—" Dr. Gurnet finished the rest of the sentence after the door had shut behind his patient. "Unfortunately, I am not sure if there are quite enough of you."

CHAPTER XXIX

When the Staineses gave an entertainment it was to mark their contempt for what more sensitive people might have considered a family catastrophe.

They had given a ball a week from the day on which Dolores ran away with the groom. A boat-race had been inaugurated upon the occasion on which Winn lost his lawsuit; and some difficulty (ultimately overcome) between James and the Admiralty had resulted in a dinner followed by fireworks on the lawn.

When Winn returned from Davos, Lady Staines decided upon a garden party.

"Good God!" cried Sir Peter. "Do you mean to tell me I've wasted that three hundred pounds, Sarah?" Sir Peter preferred this form of the question to "Is my boy going to die?" He meant precisely the same thing.

"As far as I know," Lady Staines replied, "nobody ever dies *before* causing trouble; they die after it, and add their funeral expenses to the other inconveniences they have previously arranged for. Can't you see the boy's marriage has gone to pot?"

"I wish you wouldn't pick up slang expressions from your sons," growled Sir Peter. "You never hear me speaking in that loose way. Why haven't they got a home of their own? You would ask them here—nurse, bottles, and baby like a traveling Barnum's—and Winn glares in one corner—and that little piece of dandelion fluff lies down and grizzles on the nearest cushion—and now you want to have a garden party on the top of 'em! Anybody'd suppose this was a Seamen's Home from the use you put it to! And of all damned silly ways of entertaining people, a garden party's the worse! Who wants to look at other people's gardens except to find fault with 'em?

"Besides, unless you want rain (which we don't with the hay half down) it's tempting Providence. Nothing'll keep rain off a garden party except prayers in church during a drought.

"What the hell do you expect to gain by it? I know what it all means—Buns! Bands! high-heeled kick-shaws cutting up my turf! Why the devil don't you get a Punch and Judy show down and be done with it?"

"Of course you don't like a garden party," said Lady Staines, smoothly, "nor do I. Do you suppose I care to be strapped tight into smart stays at my age, and walk about my own gravel paths in purple satin, listening to drivel about other people's children? We must do something for the neighborhood sometimes, whether they like it or not. That's what we're here for—it's the responsibility of our position. Quite absurd, I know, but then, most people's responsibilities are quite absurd. You have a son and he behaves like a fool. You can leave him to take the consequences of course if you like—only as some of them will devolve on us, it is worth a slight effort to evade them."

"For God's sake, spit it out, and have done with it!" shouted Sir Peter. "What's the boy done?"

Lady Staines sat down opposite her husband and folded her hands in her lap. She was a woman who always sat perfectly still on the rare occasions when she was not too busy to sit down at all.

"What I hoped would happen," she said, "hasn't happened. He's presumably picked up with some respectable woman."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Sir Peter. "I never knew any one as cold-bloodedly immoral as you are, Sarah. Did you want the boy to pick up with a baggage?"

"Certainly," said Lady Staines. "Why not? I have always understood that the Social Evil was for our protection, but I never believed it. No woman worth her salt has ever wanted protection. It's men that want it. They need a class of creature that won't involve them beyond a certain point, and quite right too. Winn seemed to see this before he went off—but he didn't keep it in mind—he ran his head into a noose."

"Has he talked to you about it?" asked Sir Peter, incredulously.

"I don't need talk," said Lady Staines. "I judge by facts. Winn goes to church regularly, his temper is execrable, and he takes long walks by himself. A satisfied man is neither irate nor religious—and has nothing to walk off. Consequently it's a virtuous attachment. That's serious, because it will lead to the divorce court. Virtues generally lead to somebody trying to get out of something."

"Pooh!" Sir Peter grunted. "You've got that out of some damned French novel.

You must have virtue, the place has got to be kept up somehow, hasn't it? If what you say is true—and I don't for a moment admit a word of it—I don't see how you're going to sugar things over with a couple of hundred people trampling up my lawn?"

"Estelle likes people," Lady Staines replied. "My idea is to make her a success. I will introduce her to everybody worth knowing. I'll get some of our people down from town. They'll hate it, of course; but they'll be curious to see what's up. Of course they won't see anything. At the end of the day, if it's all gone off well—I'll have a little talk with Estelle. I shall tell her first what I think of her; and then I shall offer to back her if she'll turn over a new leaf. Winn'll do his part for the sake of the boy, if she meets him half way. I give religion its due—he wants to do his duty, only he doesn't see what it is. He must live with his wife. His prayers will come in nicely afterwards."

Sir Peter chuckled. "There's something in your idea, Sarah," he admitted. "But it's a damned expensive process. All my strawberries will go. And if it rains, everybody'll come into the house and scuttle over my library like so many rabbits."

"I'll keep them out of the library," said Lady Staines, rising, "and I shall want a hundred pounds."

She left the library after a short series of explosions, with a check for seventy-five. She had only expected fifty.

The garden party was, if not a great success, at least a great crowd.

The village was entertained by sports in a field, backed by beer in tents, and overseen by Winn with the delighted assistance of the younger Peter.

Lady Staines, in stiff purple satin, strode uncomfortably up and down herbaceous borders, exposing the ignorance of her fellow gardeners by a series of ruthless questions.

Charles and James, who had put in an intermittent appearance in the hope of a loan from Sir Peter, did their best to make things go. Charles had brought down a bull terrier, and the bull terrier brought down, first one of the donkeys that was to take part in the sports, but was permanently incapacitated from any further participation either in sport or labor, then two pet lap dogs, in a couple of sharp shakes on the lawn, and crowned his career of murder with the stable cat, in an

outhouse where Charles had at last incontinently and a little inconsiderately, as far as the cat was concerned, flung him.

Isabel and her husband had driven over from a neighboring parish.

Isabel liked garden parties. She made her way at once to a group of clergy, her husband dangling meekly in her rear; and then told them in her quarter deck style exactly what she thought ought to be done with their parishes. Sir Peter remained in the library with the windows open and his eye upon passing clouds.

Several of his friends joined him, and they talked about Ulster.

Everybody was at this time talking about Ulster.

Most of them spoke of it as people talk of a tidal wave in China. They did not exactly wish the wave to destroy the whole of China, but they would all have felt a little annoyed if it had withdrawn without drowning anybody.

"The Government has been weak," said Sir Peter sternly; "as weak as a soft-boiled egg! What Ireland wants is a firm hand, and if that's not enough, a swift kick after it! Concession! Who wants concessions? A sensible man doesn't make concessions unless he's trying to bluff you into thinking he's got what he hasn't got, or is getting out of you what he hasn't right to get!

"But people oughtn't to import arms. I'll go as far as that! It's against discipline. Whether it's one side or the other, it ought to be stopped.

"There'll be a row, of course—a healthy, blood-letting hell of a row, and we shall all be the better for it! But I don't approve of firearms being let loose all over the place—it's un-English. It only shows what the poor devils at Ulster must have suffered, and be afraid of suffering, to resort to it! That sort of thing is all very well in the Balkans. My son Winn's been talking about the Balkans lately—kind of thing the army's always getting gas off about! What I say is—let 'em fight! They got the Turk down once, all of 'em together, and he was the only person that could keep 'em in hand. Now I hear Austria wants to start trouble in Serbia because of that assassination in June. What they want to make a fuss about assassination in that family for I can't think! I should look upon it as an hereditary disease and leave it at that! But don't tell me it's anything to worry about compared to Ulster. What's the danger of a country that talks thirteen languages, has no non-commissioned officers, and always gets beat when it fights? Sarah! Sarah! Get the people in for tea. Can't you see there's a shower

coming? Damn it all! And my second crop of hay's not in yet! That's what comes of giving garden parties. Of course I'm very glad to see you all, but you know what I mean. No shilly-shallying with the English climate's my motto—it's the only dangerous thing we've got!"

Lady Staines disregarded this admonition. The light clouds above the elms puffed idly in the heavy air. It was a hot bright day, murmurous with bees and the idle, half notes of midsummer birds.

Estelle, in the most diaphanous of blue muslins, held a little court under a gigantic mulberry tree. She had always intended marriage with a Staines to be like this.

Winn was nowhere to be seen, and his mother plodded patiently to and fro across the lawn, bringing a line of distinguished visitors to be introduced to her.

They were kind, curt people who looked at Estelle rather hard, and asked her absurd questions about Winn's regiment, Sir Peter's ships, and her baby. They had no general ideas, but however difficult they were to talk to, Estelle knew they were the right people to meet—she had seen their names in magazines. None of her own family were there; they had all been invited, but Estelle had preferred their remaining at home. She had once heard Sir Peter refer to her father as "Old Moneybags." He had apologized afterwards, but he might do it again.

Lady Staines was the only person who noticed the arrival of two telegrams—they were taken to Charles and James, who were at that moment in the refreshment tent opposite the claret cup. The telegrams arrived simultaneously, and Charles said, "Good Lord!" and James said, "My hat!" when they read the contents, with every symptom of surprise and pleasure.

"I shouldn't have supposed," Lady Staines thought to herself, "that two of my boys would have backed the same horse. It must be a coincidence."

They put the telegrams rather carefully away, and shortly afterwards she observed that they had set off together in the direction of the village sports.

The long golden twilight drew to a close, the swallows swooped and circled above the heavy, darkened elms. The flowers in the long herbaceous borders had a fragile look in the colorless soft air.

The garden party drifted slowly away.

Lady Staines stopped her daughter-in-law going into the house; but she was destined never to tell her what she thought of her. Estelle escaped Nemesis by the turn of a hair.

Sir Peter came out of the library prepared to inspect the lawn. "What's up with those boys?" he demanded, struck by the unusual sight of his three sons advancing towards him from the river, their heads bent in talk, and not apparently quarreling.

Lady Staines followed the direction of his eyes; then she said to Estelle, "You'd better go in now, my dear; I'll talk to you later."

Sir Peter shouted in his stentorian voice an appeal to his sons to join him. Lady Staines, while she waited, took off her white kid gloves and her purple bonnet, and deposited them upon the balustrades.

"What are you up to," demanded Sir Peter when they came within earshot, "sticking down there by the river with your heads glued together like a set of damned Guy Fawkeses—instead of saying good-by to your mother's guests—who haven't had the sense to get under way before seven o'clock—though I gave 'em a hint to be off an hour ago?"

"Helping villagers to climb greasy poles, and finishing a sack race," Charles explained. "Lively time Winn's been having down there—I had no idea our second housemaid was so pretty."

"None of that! None of that!" said Sir Peter, sharply. "You keep to bar-maids, young Charles—and manicure girls, though there ought to be an act of Parliament against 'em! Still, I'll admit you can't do much harm here—three of you together, and your mother on the front doorstep!"

"Harm," said James, winking in the direction of his mother; "what can poor chaps like us do—here to-day and gone to-morrow—Mother'd better keep her eye on those near home!"

"Off to-night you might as well say!" remarked Charles, glancing at James with a certain intentness.

"Why off to-night?" asked Lady Staines. "I thought you were staying over the week-end?"

"Winn's put us on to something," explained Charles. "Awfully good show, he

says—on at the Oxford. Pretty hot stuff and the censor hasn't smelt it out yet—we rather thought we'd run up to-night and have a look at it."

Winn stuck his hands in his pockets, set his jaw, and looked at his mother. Lady Staines was regarding him with steady eyes.

"You didn't get a telegram, too?" she asked.

"No," said Winn. "Why should I?"

"Not likely," said James, genially. "Always behindhand in the—"

"Damn these midges!" said Charles, hurriedly. James stopped with his mouth open.

"Army, you were going to say, weren't you?" asked his mother, suavely. "If you are my sons I must say you make uncommonly poor liars."

Sir Peter, whose attention had wandered to tender places in the lawn, looked up sharply.

"What's that? What's that?" he asked. "Been telling lies, have they? A nice way you've brought 'em up, Sarah! What have they been lying about? A woman? Because if they have, I won't hear a word about it! Lies about a woman are perfectly correct, though I'm hanged if I can see how they can all three be lying about one woman. That seems a bit thick, I must say."

To Sir Peter's surprise, nobody made any reply. Charles yawned, James whistled, and Winn kept his eyes steadily fixed on Lady Staines.

"Those were orders then," Lady Staines observed in a dry quiet voice. "I thought it very likely. I suppose it's Germany. I felt sure we should have trouble with that excitable young man sooner or later. He had too good an opinion of himself to be an emperor."

"Not Ulster!" exclaimed Sir Peter. "God bless my soul—not Ulster!"

"Oh, we can take on Ulster afterwards," said James reassuringly. "Now we'll see what submarines can do; 'member the Japs?"

"Winn," said Lady Staines, "before you're off, say good-by to your wife."

Winn frowned, and then he said, "All right, Mother," and left them.

It was a very still evening, the scent of new mown hay and the mysterious sweetness of the starry white tobacco plant haunted the delicate air.

Winn found Estelle lying down by the open window. He had not been in her room for some time. He sat down by the sofa, and fingered the tassels at her waist.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked coldly.

He had only himself to thank that she was cold—he knew that. He saw so plainly now, all the mistakes he'd made, that the ones Estelle had made, receded into the distance. He'd never been gentle to her. Even when he thought he loved her, he wasn't really gentle.

Gentleness was superlative kindness, and no woman who had not had just that sort of kindness from the man she married, could help being rather nasty. He had owed it to Estelle—no matter whether she told him the truth or not.

"Look here, Estelle," he began. "I want our boy to go to Charterhouse."

It wasn't exactly what he meant to say, but it was something; he had never called Peter "our boy" before. Estelle did not notice it.

"Of course, I should prefer Eton," she said, "but I suppose you will do as you like—as usual!"

Winn dropped the piece of tassel, but he persevered.

"I say," he began, "don't you think we've got rather off the track? I know it's not your fault, but your being ill and my being away and all that? I don't want you to feel sore about it, you know. I want you to realize that I know I've been rather a beast to you. I don't think I'm fitted somehow for domestic life—what?"

"Fitted for it!" said Estelle, tragically. "I have never known one happy moment with you! You seem incapable of any kind of chivalry! I never would have believed a man could exist who knew *less* how to make a woman happy! It's too late to talk of it all now! I've made my supreme sacrifice. I've offered up my broken heart! I am living upon a higher plane! You would never understand anything that wasn't coarse, brutal, and low! So I shan't explain it to you. I know my duty, but I don't think after the way you have behaved I really need consider myself under any obligation to live with you again. Father Anselm agrees with me."

Winn laughed. "Don't you worry about that," he hastened to assure her, "or Father Anselm either; there isn't the least necessity—and it wasn't what I meant."

Estelle looked annoyed. It plainly should have been what Winn meant.

"Have as much of the higher plane as you like," he went on, "only look after the boy. I'm off to London to-night, there's probably going to be some work of a kind that I can do. I mayn't be back directly. Hope you'll be all right. We can write about plans."

He stood up, hesitating a little. He had an idea that it would make him feel less strange if she kissed him. Of course it was absurd, because just to have a woman's arms round his neck wasn't going to be the least like Claire. But he had a curious feeling that perhaps he might never be alone with a woman again, and he wanted to part friends with Estelle.

"I wonder," he said, leaning towards her, "would you mind very much if I kissed you?"

Estelle turned her head away with a little gesture of aversion.

"I am sorry," she said. "I shall not willingly allow you to kiss me, but of course you are my husband—I am in your power."

"By Jove," said Winn, unexpectedly, "what a little cat you are!"

They were the last words he ever said to her.

CHAPTER XXX

For a time he could do nothing but think of his luck—it was astounding how obstacles had been swept aside for him.

The best he had expected was that in the hurry of things he might get back to India without a medical examination, in the hope that his regiment would be used later. But his work at the Staff College had brought him into notice, a man conveniently died, and Winn appeared at the right moment.

Within twenty-four hours of his visit to the War Office, he was attached for staff duty to a British division.

Then work closed over his head. He became a railway time-table, a lost-luggage office, a registrar, and a store commissioner.

He had the duties of a special Providence thrust upon him, with all the disadvantages of being readily held accountable, so skilfully evaded by the higher powers.

Junior officers flew to him for orders as belated ladies fly to their pin cushions for pins.

He ate when it was distinctly necessary, and slept two hours out of the twenty-four.

He left nothing undone which he could do himself; his mind was unfavorable to chance. The heads of departments listened when he made suggestions, and found it convenient to answer with accuracy his sudden questions.

Subordinates hurried to obey his infrequent but final orders; and when Winn said, "I think you'd find it better," people found it better.

The division slipped off like cream, without impediment or hitch.

There were no delays, the men acquired their kit, and found their railway carriages.

The trains swept in velvet softness out of the darkened London station through the sweet, quiet, summer night into a sleepless Folkestone. The division went

straight onto the right transports; there wasn't a man, a horse, or a gun out of place.

Winn heaved a sigh of relief as he stepped on board; his troubles as a staff officer had only just begun, but they had begun as troubles should always begin, by being adequately met. There were no arrears.

He did not think of Claire until he stood on deck and saw the lights receding and the shadow that was England passing out of his sight.

He remembered her then with a little pang of joy—for suddenly he knew that he was free to think of her.

He had thought of her before as a man registers a fact that is always present to him, but in the interval since he had seen her his consciousness of her had been increasingly troubled.

Now the trouble was fading, as England faded, as his old life was fading.

He had a sense that he was finally freed. It was not like seeing Claire again, but it was like not having to see anything else.

"Until I'm dead I'm hers, and after I'm dead I'm hers, so that's all right," he said to himself. "I haven't got to muddle things up any more."

The sea lay around them at dawn like a sheet of pearl—it was very empty but for the gulls' wings beating to and fro out of the mist.

Winn had lived through many campaigns. He had known rough jungle tussles in mud swamps, maddened by insects, thirst, and fever; he had fought in colder, cleaner dangers down the Khyber Pass, and he had gone through the episodic scientific flurries of South Africa; but France disconcerted him; he had never started a campaign before in a country like a garden, met by welcoming populations, with flowers and fruit.

It made him feel sick. The other places were the proper ones for war.

It was not his way to think of what lay before him. It would, like all great emergencies, like all great calamities, keep to its moment, and settle itself. Nevertheless he could not free his mind from the presence of the villages—the pleasant, smiling villages, the little church towers in the middle, the cobbled streets, the steep-pitched, gray roofs and the white sunny walls.

Carnations and geraniums filled the windows, and all the inhabitants, the solid, bright-faced people, had a greeting for their khaki guests.

"Voilà quelque choses des solides, ces Anglais!" the women called to each other.

Winn found himself shrinking from their welcoming eyes. He thought he hadn't had enough sleep, because as a rule a Staines did not shrink; but when he slept in the corner of the hot jolting railway train, he dreamed of the villages.

They were to attack directly they arrived at their destination. By the time they reached there, Winn knew more. He had gathered up the hastily flung messages by telegram and telephone, by flying cars and from breathless despatch riders, and he knew what they meant.

They had no chance, from the first, not a ghost of a chance. They were to hold on as long as they could, and then retreat. Part of the line had gone already. The French had gone. No reinforcements were coming up. There were no reinforcements.

They were to retreat turn and turn about; meantime they must hold.

They could hear the guns now, the bright harvest fields trembled a little under the impact of these alien presences.

They came nearer and the sky filled with white puffs of smoke that looked like glittering sunset clouds, and were not clouds. Overhead the birds sang incessantly, undisturbed even by the occasional drilling of an aëroplane.

In the plains that lay beneath them, they could see the dim blue lines of the enemy debouching.

They made Winn think of locusts. He had seen a plague once in Egypt. They came on like the Germans, a gray mass that never broke—that could not break, because behind it there were more, and still more locusts, thick as clouds, impenetrable as clouds.

You killed and killed and killed, and yet there were more clouds.

Every now and then it ran through his mind like a flame, that they would spread this loathsome, defiling cloud over the smiling little villages of France.

Fortunately there was no time for pity; there were merely the different ways of meeting the question of holding on.

It was like an attempt to keep back a tide with a teaspoon.

Their guns did what they could, they did more than it seemed possible guns could do. The men in control of them worked like maniacs.

It was not a time to think of what people could do. The men were falling like leaves off a tree.

The skylarks and the swallows vanished before the villainous occupation of the air. The infantry in the loosely built trenches held on, breathless, broken, like a battered boat in a hurricane, stout against the oncoming waves.

The stars came out and night fell—night rent and tortured, darkness assaulted and broken by a myriad new lights of death, but still merciful, reassuring darkness. The moment for the retreat had come.

It was a never-ending business, a stumbling, bewildering business. The guns roared on, holding open indefatigably, without cessation, the way of their escape.

Much later they got away themselves, dashing blindly in the wake of their exhausted little army, ready to turn at command and hold again, and escape again, and once more hold the unending blue lines, with their unnumbered guns, unwinding like an endless serpent in their rear.

The morning showed them still retreating. Sometimes they were miles ahead and could see nothing but the strangely different barred and shivering villages, small settlements of terror, in an untroubled land.

There were no flowers flung upon them now, only hurried gasping questions, "Are they coming?" "How far are they behind you?"

Sometimes they were halted for half an hour at a time, and sat in hedges and ate, or meant to eat, and slept between the bites.

Occasionally they surprised small bands of wandering Uhlans, and if there was time took them prisoners, and if there was no time, shot them in rows against white walls.

Once they met a troop out of one of their own divisions, led by a solitary subaltern of nineteen, with queer fixed eyes, who didn't know who he was. All he could say, "I brought them out."

Despatch riders hurled themselves upon the Staff with orders; very often they

had conflicting orders; and they always had dust, trouble with horses, trouble with motor ambulances, trouble with transport. Enraged heroic surgeons achieving hourly physical miracles, implored with tears to be given impossible things like time. Of course they couldn't have time.

Then in the midst of chaos, orders would come to hold. The guns unlimbered, the transports tore madly ahead. Everything that could be cleared off down the road was cleared off, more rough trenches were dug, more hot and sullen hours of waiting followed, and then once more the noise, the helpless slaughter, the steady dogged line gripping the shallow earth, and the unnumbered horde of locusts came on again, eating up the fields of France.

Sometimes whole regiments entrained under the care of fatherly French railway officials, curiously liable to hysteria on ordinary excursion days, but now as calm as Egyptian Pyramids in the face of national disaster. They pieced together with marvelous ingenuity the broken thread of speech presented to them by the occasional French scholars upon the British Staff; but more often still they shook polite and emphatic heads, and explained that there quite simply were no trains. The possible, yes; but the impossible, no. One could not create trains. So the men went on marching. They did not like retreating, but they moved as if they were on parade in front of Buckingham Palace, and when they held, they fought as winners fight.

It was not until they reached the Marne that Winn found time to write to Claire. "We are getting on very nicely," he wrote. "I hope you are not worrying about us. We have plenty to eat, though we have to take our meals a little hurriedly.

"There is a good deal of work to do.

"This war is the best thing that ever happened to me—bar one. Before I came out I thought I should go to pieces. I feel quite free to write to you now. I do not think there can be any harm in it, so I hope you won't mind. If things do not seem to be going very well with us at first, remember that they never do.

"Every campaign I ever went in for, we were short-handed to start with, and had to fight against odds, which doesn't matter really if you have the right men, but always takes longer and looks discouraging to outsiders. The men are very good and I am glad the War Office let me commandeer the boots I wanted—the kind they offered me at first wouldn't have done at all for this sort of work. It is rather hard not being with the men more, but the work is very absorbing, so I do not mind as much as I did.

"I think the regiment will come out later, and they have promised to let me go back into it. I am sorry about the villages. It's a pity the Germans slopped over into France at all. I found two Uhlans yesterday in a farmyard; they had been behaving badly, so I did them both in.

"One very seldom sees any of them, worse luck.

"I hope you are taking great care of yourself and not worrying. Your loving Winn."

In the weeks that followed, Claire got many letters. They were short letters, written in flying motors, in trains, in outhouses, in romantic châteaux; but they all began in the same reassuring way. "I am very well, and we are getting on quite nicely."

The Allied line was being flung out in wild curves and swoops like the flight of a dove before a hawk; from Soissons up toward Calais they fenced and circled.

They retook Rheims, they seized Amiens. Lille fell from them and Laon.

The battle of the Aisne passed by slow degrees out of their hands, and the English found themselves fighting their extraordinary first fight for Ypres. They stood between the Germans and the Channel ports as thinly as a Japanese screen, between England and the Atlantic. The very camp cooks were in the trenches.

Time fled like a long thunderous hour. It was a storm that flashed and fell and returned again.

Winn was beginning to feel tired now. He hardly slept at night, and by day his brain moved as if it were made of red-hot steel, flying rapidly from expedient to expedient, facing the hourly problems of that wild and wet October, how to keep men alive who never rested, who were too few, who took the place of guns. He wrote more seldom now, and once he said, "We are having rather a hard time, but we shall get through with it."

Fortunately all Englishmen are born with a curious pioneer instinct, and being the least adaptable people in the world, they have learned the more readily to adapt the changes of the hour.

They remade their external world, out of this new warfare.

They remade it at the cost of their lives in Flanders, in the face of incredulous

enemies and criticizing neutrals, painstakingly, without science, doggedly out of their own wills. They held Ypres by a thread, and when it seemed that nothing could keep it, one cold and dreadful day along the Menin road came up their reinforcements.

First one group and then another of tall, dark people, silent footed as falling leaves, turbaned black faces, eyes of appalling and unearthly gravity, hearts half like a rock and half like a child, alien captive people of another blood, took their place silently, regiment by regiment blocking up the dreadful gaps with their guns, their rifles, and the free gift of their lives.

"Lionel has come," Winn wrote, "and all my men. I never was so glad of anything, but you. Send me all the warm things you can. The winter will be quite jolly now when the men get used to the trenches. It's a funny thing, but they've given me command of the regiment. I hadn't expected it, but I've always liked handling Sikhs. Whatever happens, you'll remember that I've been an awfully lucky chap, won't you?"

CHAPTER XXXI

Lionel and Winn talked of the regiment and the war; these two things filled the exacting hours. In a world a very long way off and in the depths of their hearts were England and Claire.

They spent three weeks in the trenches, blackened and water clogged and weary.

It was the darkest time of a dark December, the water was up to their waists, there was no draining the treacherous clay surfaces. The men suffered to the limit of their vitality and sometimes passed it; they needed constant care and watching. It had to be explained to them that they were not required to give up their lives to spirits, in a land that worshiped idols. Behind the strange lights and noises heralding death there were solid people who ate sausages, and could be killed.

One or two small parties led in night attacks overcame the worst of their fears.

Later on when the mud dried they could kill more; in the end all would be killed, and they would return with much honor to their land of sunshine.

To the officers who moved among them, absorbed in the questions of their care, there was never any silence or peace, and yet there was a strange content in the huddled, altered life of their wet ditch.

Every power of the will, every nerve of the body, was being definitely used. Winn and Lionel felt a strange mood of exultation. They pushed back difficulties and pierced insoluble problems with prompt escapes. Only from time to time casualties dropped in upon them grimly, impervious to human ingenuity.

In the quieter hours of the night, they crouched side by side formulating fresh schemes and going over one by one the weak points of their defenses.

They hadn't enough guns, or any reinforcements; they had no dry clothes. The men were not accustomed to wet climates or invisible enemies.

They wanted more sand-bags and more bombs, and it would be better for human beings not to be in trenches for three weeks at a time in the rain.

They sat there pitting their brains against these obstacles, creating the miraculous ingenuity of war. Personal questions dropped. Lionel saw that Winn was ill beyond mending, but he saw it without definite thought—it was one more obstacle in a race of obstacles. It wouldn't do for Winn to break down. He fitted himself without explanations, selflessly, with magnificent disinterestedness, into his friend's needs. He was like a staff in the hand of a blind man.

Winn himself had begun to wonder, moving about in his sea of mud, how much worse you could be before you were actually done. His cough shook him incessantly, his brain burned, and his hands were curiously weak. He was conscious that he had to repeat to himself all day long the things he had to do; even then he might have forgotten if there had not been Lionel. He might have forgotten to give orders. In spite of everything a strange inner bliss possessed him which nourished him like food. He had Claire's letters, they never failed him, they were as regular as the beats of a heart. Something in him lived that had never lived before, something that did not seem likely ever to die.

It was helping him as Lionel was helping him to get through things. What he had to get through was dying. It was going to be quicker than the way they had of dying in Davos, but it mightn't be quick enough; it might drive him out of his last fight, back to an inconceivable stale world.

This must not happen. Lionel must live and he must die, where he was. You could bully fate, if you were prepared to pay the price for it.

Winn was not sure yet what the price would be, he was only sure that he was prepared to pay it.

They were to be relieved next day. The men were so worn out that they could hardly move. Winn and Lionel found their own bodies difficult to control; they had become heavy and inert from want of sleep, but their minds were alive and worked with feverish swiftness, like the minds of people in a long illness, when consciousness creeps above the level of pain.

Winn had just returned from his evening round of the trenches. Lionel was resting in his dug-out; he heard Winn's approach. Winn was coughing again—a little choking, short cough.

He bent double and crouched down beside Lionel without speaking.

"Well," said Lionel, "to-morrow we'll be out of this. About time too—with that

cough of yours."

Winn was silent for a moment, then he said, "I suppose you know I'm nearly done?"

Lionel bowed his head. "Yes," he muttered, "I suppose I know it."

After a pause Winn began again.

"There isn't much good talking, of course. On the other hand, you may as well know what I feel. I've had tremendous luck in one way and another. I never expected to get the regiment, for instance—and your coming out here and all that. I've seen how jolly things could be."

"You haven't had them," said Lionel in a low voice. "The things you wanted most, I mean. Your pitch was queered too soon."

"I don't know," said Winn, painstakingly. "In a sense, of course, you haven't had things if you've only seen 'em. Still when you come to think of it, you partly have. Look at the Germans; we've worked considerably into them without seeing 'em, haven't we? What I mean is that I appreciate goodness now; I see its point. Not that I'd have kept clear a moment by myself. I hope you quite understand that? I've been a blackguard and I'd have been a worse one if I'd had the chance. But I'm glad I hadn't the chance now. I don't know that I'm putting the thing straight—but you know what she's like? Thank God I couldn't alter her!"

They listened for a moment to the night. Their ears were always awake, registering sounds from the sodden, death-ridden fields beneath them, and above, but they heard nothing beyond the drip of the rain, an occasional groan from a man tortured by rheumatism, and the long-drawn scream of a distant shell.

"You can call yourself what you like," said Lionel at last. "I know what you are, that's enough for me, and she knew it; that's one reason I got to caring for her.

"I dare say that seems a rummy thing to you, to care for a woman because she cares for another man. But it's a fact."

Winn moved uneasily. Then he said abruptly, "Look here, young 'un, I was wrong before when I asked you to step in instead of me, but I'm not wrong now. You can take it from me she'll marry you in the end. She's young; be patient. I dare say she'll think for a time she's had enough, but she hasn't. There's no good

living a lonely life. We may both get done in, of course. But I don't fancy we shall. I want you to promise me not to get killed if you can help it.

"Keep away from me if you think I'm getting into trouble, because I sha'n't be getting into trouble, I shall be getting out of it, d'you see?"

The guns sounded nearer, a machine gun rattled sharply in their ears, as if it had been let off in their dug-out.

"I sha'n't care for anybody else," said Lionel, quietly, "and I shall wait all my life for her. As for not being killed—you don't want me to shirk my job, of course; bar that, I sha'n't ask for trouble."

Winn said, "All right—then that's that! I'm going to sleep."

They neither of them slept.

It came very quickly and confusedly toward dawn. The silence was rent across like a piece of torn silk. The crash of bombs, the peppery, sharp detonation of rifles broke up the sullen air. Out of the dark, vague shapes loomed, the trench filled with the sound of deep breathing and scuffling, and the shriek of sudden pain.

Death and mud and darkness closed together.

It was all over in half an hour, the attack was driven out, and the men moved uncertainly about, trying to discover their dead, and relieve their wounded.

The dawn was gray and in the half light, Winn saw Lionel's eyes open and shut; the blood was pouring from a hideous wound in his side.

"You've got to live," Winn said grimly, bending over him. "No damned nonsense about it! You've got to live." Lionel's eyes closed again and he knew nothing more of the rough bandaging, the endless waiting in the sodden trench while Winn sat motionless beside him, watching his flickering breath. In the hours of the interminable journey, Lionel roused himself sometimes and heard again like a perpetual refrain, "You've got to live." The motor ambulance jarred and bumped it, the wheels of the train echoed it through the fever in his brain. He woke in England knowing that he was going to live.

"You've got to live," said Winn, bending grimly over him;
"You've got to live!"

A few hours later Winn went to see the general of his division. "I want you to let me have another twenty-four in, sir," he explained. "They won't expect an attack so soon. I know my men are not very fresh, but it'll wake them up. They've stood a good lot. I've been talking to 'em. They want to get a bit of their own back. That trench of theirs is too near us in any case. They'd be better pushed back."

The general hesitated, but Winn's fiery sunken eyes held and shook him.

"Well, Staines," he said, "you know what you can do with your men, of course. Have it your own way. When do you want to attack?"

"Soon as they've settled off to sleep," said Winn, "just to give 'em a night-cap."

"Don't lose too many men," said the general, "and above all come back yourself."

"That's as may be," said Winn. "If I can get the men over quietly in a bit of mist, I sha'n't lose too many of 'em. I've told them if they're too fagged to stand, they'd better fight. They quite agree about it."

Winn led the attack with the last of his strength, and in the fierceness of his rage with life.

A white fog hung over the fields like the shadow of a valley filled with snow.

The men fought like demons—strange shapes in the fog, with here and there as the flames shot up, the flash of their black faces, set to kill.

Winn's voice rallied and held them above the racket of the spitting rifles, and the incessant coughing of the guns. It was the Staines voice let out on a last voyage. To have gone back against it would have been more dangerous than to go on against the guns.

They seized the trench and held it, there were no prisoners taken in the dark, and after the first light they ceased to hear Winn's voice.

The sun came out and showed them all they had won, and what they had lost.

Winn lay peacefully between the old trench and the new, beyond resentment, beyond confusion, in the direct simplicity of death.

THE END

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