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The CLUTCH of CIRCUMSTANCE

Marjorie Benton Cooke

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THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

BY

MARJORIE BENTON COOKE

AUTHOR OF "RAMEL," ETC.

NEW YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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CHARACTERS

LADY ROBERTA TRASK, *called Lady Bobs.*

LADY CECILY HARRISON, *Lady Trask's best friend.*

THE HONORABLE MILDRED DOWNER.

THE DUCHESS OF WROWE.

LORD ASHTON TRASK.

CAPTAIN LARRY O'TOOLE.

TED CARTER, *American boy in English Flying Corps.*

LORD KENDRICK, *of the War Council.*

LIEUTENANT IVAN INSULL, *of the English Secret Service.*

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PART ONE

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INVICTUS

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced or cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY.

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THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

"Is Lady Trask at home, Brooks?" Sir Ashton Trask inquired of the butler as he entered his own drawing room.

"Yes, Sir Ashton, Lady Trask is in, I believe, sir."

"Send her word that I am here, please."

The servant withdrew, and Sir Ashton took a few turns up and down the room, nervously engrossed in his own thoughts.

At the sound of Lady Trask's entrance, he turned and watched her come toward him, across the long room. She was tall and gracious and beautiful. She moved with a large slow dignity, which always delighted him. She wore a deep toned velvet gown befitting a prin-

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cess, and smiled her welcome. Lady Trask's smile was famous.

Sir Ashton held a hand to her, and she laid her own in it, but her thoughts were not with him, she was intent on something else.

"Why didn't you bring him with you?" she asked.

"He was busy at the War Office when I left. He is coming along presently."

"He may change his mind——"

"Oh no. I hope you haven't asked people to lunch," he added with quick suspicion.

"One or two."

"Roberta, not a party!"

"No. Cecily, Mildred Downer, Ted and Larry. That's all."

"He certainly would bolt it, if he thought it was a party. He hates them, you know."

"The man is the supreme egotist of the world!" smiled Lady Bobs, as she was known to her familiars. "You would think he conferred eternal distinction upon us, and our house forever, by breaking bread with us."

"I merely asked him to drop in for lunch."

"Stop bothering. If he objects to some amusing women and two nice men, he can depart."

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"Mildred Downer amusing?" inquired Trask.

"She amuses me. She's new, modern, queer."

"Queer? Why not? Her father was a man and so was her mother."

Lady Bobs laughed.

"I'll put Mildred the Manling next you for punishment."

"When is O'Toole's leave up?" he inquired.

"I haven't asked him."

"He manages to be about London a good deal."

"Don't fuss about Larry. He's perfectly charming, even if you don't like him."

Brooks entered and offered Lady Trask a letter. She opened it, looked through it, a slow flush rising to her face. She glanced at her husband and turned to the butler, who waited at the door.

"Did this come by messenger, Brooks?"

"Apparently, Lady Trask. It was pushed under the door."

"There is no answer."

"Has Kendrick changed his mind?" asked Trask amusedly.

"No," she said.

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Lady Harrison was announced at the moment. Cecily Harrison was typically English. Tall, thin, with sandy hair, which was waved back from a lovely brow. Emerald green eyes gave her face its distinction.

"Morning, Bobs. How-do, Ashton?" She looked about. "I knew you were spoofing, Bobs, when you asked me."

"Did you? Well, wait and see whether I was spoofing or not," retorted her hostess. "My word, look at her mufti, Ashton."

"Yes," said Lady Cecily, "I'm dressed for conquest. He may hate women, but no man could hate this frock."

"Cecily, you're terrifying in all your glory!" her host remarked.

"Ashton is in a funk because I called you up and asked you to lunch. He's afraid Lord Kendrick will blame him for my indiscretions."

"Nice of you, dear, to call me an indiscretion. I hope you didn't ask any one else."

"Mildred, Ted and Larry were coming anyway."

"Why Mildred?"

"That's what I said," remarked Sir Ashton. "Purposes of contrast. Besides, I like her." Ted Carter, a young American, serving in

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the English Flying Corps, in London on sick leave, came in with Captain Larry O'Toole, who carried his left arm in a sling. They were familiars in this household, and great favourites with both the ladies.

O'Toole struck an attitude, as of one blinded, before the two women who stood together.

"Aren't you very splendid, you two?" he asked.

"We are, Captain O'Toole. We are perfectly splendid," answered Lady Bobs.

"Do say something pretty, O'Toole. They've been forced to admire themselves for several minutes, the vain things," teased Ashton.

"Are you paralysed, too?" inquired the American.

"Entirely."

"When did you come back, Sir Ashton?" asked O'Toole.

"A day or so ago."

"Lord Kendrick came back with you, I hear."

"Yes. We were together a week at the front, and came home together."

"Preparations for a big spring drive, I hear. I hope to Heaven I get back in time for it," said Carter.

The Honourable Mildred Downer was an-

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nounced and advanced quickly. She was small, alert, sexless. She wore tailored clothes, and was utterly unadorned. She gave Lady Trask's welcoming hand a short, hard clasp and offered a curt greeting to the others.

"Where is he?" said she.

"Here I am," smiled O'Toole, advancing gallantly.

She gave him a scornful glance, and no reply.

"Late. He waits for an entrance." Bobs replied.

"Are we waiting for the King?" asked O'Toole.

"Lord Kendrick," announced Brooks.

The tall figure halted a moment at the threshold, swept the room with a quick glance, and advanced toward the group as toward a hateful duty. Lady Trask went to meet him.

"You are very welcome, Lord Kendrick," she said.

"Thank you."

She presented him to the others. He bowed formally, making no reply to their greetings. Mildred Downer advanced and held out her hand. He took it for a brief moment, looking at her keenly.

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"Don't act as if you didn't know me," she said.

"Certainly I know you," he replied.

He turned to Trask.

"We must be in our seats at two-thirty. The Premier speaks at three."

There was an awkward pause, broken by the announcement—

"The Duchess of Wrowe."

"The Devil!" ejaculated Lady Bobs audibly, whereupon Kendrick flashed a smile of amusement at her.

The frumpy well known figure puffed toward them.

"Roberta, I've come to lunch. I'm not invited, but I've come."

"How enchanting of you, Duchess," said Bobs.

"Ashton, you ask me to parties that bore me, and when you give one that interests me, I have to come unasked."

He bowed over her hand.

"Unasked, possibly. Never unwelcome."

She nodded to the others.

"Duchess, if you weren't asked, you will have to do without your entree. As the youngest present I refuse to give up mine to you.

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"I should never expect you to give up anything, Cecily. Giving up is not your special talent," retorted the Duchess. She turned to Kendrick. "I heard you were lunching here, that's why I came."

"I'm flattered, Duchess," he said.

"I want to know all the inside news from the front," she began.

Luncheon was announced, and Lord Kendrick led the way with Lady Trask.

"It serves you right," said he.

"For what?"

"Luring me here under false pretences."

"Ashton invited you——"

"An hour ago—to drop into lunch, *en famille*."

"You would have preferred me, alone?"

"I expected to talk shop with your husband," he evaded.

"That's not a pretty speech."

"I'm not a pretty speechmaker, Lady Trask."

"The men were lunching here. I asked Mildred and Cecily, because I thought they would amuse you."

"Who is Cecily?"

"Lady Harrison. She's next you."

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He turned to look at his neighbour, and encountered her eyes. He looked through her, and it was not until he was attacking his fish that she spoke.

"Don't you ever smile?" she inquired suddenly.

"I do when I'm amused."

"Go on with your fish, until I think of something amusing," she said, turning her attention to O'Toole, on her other side.

"Perhaps you would have preferred the Duchess," said Lady Bobs to him.

"I don't object to the green-eyed woman," he replied.

Lady Bobs laughed.

"You are an ogre,—but you don't terrify me."

"I haven't tried to."

"You think you could?"

"Must I think about it?"

The Duchess leaned forward.

"Lord Kendrick, what are they going to do next in France?"

"I don't know, Duchess."

"You must know what we're going to do."

"If I did, I should not tell."

"I hear the French and English have done

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great work along the Somme," said Carter.

"Yes. While we were there they worked out a new plan of advance. Our forces would effect a lodgment, and work zig-zag, widening the front of penetration. The Boche couldn't get on to it.

"I don't understand that. Tell it in words of one syllable for an old woman, Ashton," the Duchess commanded.

He took out a pencil and started to draw a diagram on the tablecloth.

"Trask, don't do that!" objected Kendrick.

"Here, among my intimate friends? Why, I trust them as I would myself."

"I beg your pardon," said Kendrick briefly.

"I see why they call you Silent Kendrick," said Lady Bobs.

"Silence and soldiering go best together."

"Is that why you dislike women, because they chatter?"

"That's one reason."

"Are there many?"

"There are enough."

His smile came again.

"You look quite human when you smile."

"I have very little time to be human,

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Madame. Are you an American?" he added abruptly.

"I was born in New York. My father was one of the Hancocks—an old American family. Why do you ask?"

"You look un-English. The boy is American, too?"

"Boy?"

"The adoring lad on your other side."

"Fancy your noticing that," she laughed.

"Noticing is my chief talent, Lady Trask."

"Do notice me!"

"I have."

Lady Cecily claimed his attention.

"I've thought of it."

"What?"

"The something amusing."

"Ah."

"You must say, 'What is it?'"

"I prefer not to risk it."

"It is *very* funny."

"Well, get ahead with it."

"It is your retort to the Queen."

"My what?"

"You don't know about it! It is the one moss-grown anecdote always told about you. The Queen said——"

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"What Queen?"

"Victoria. Don't interrupt. She said, 'Lord Kendrick, I hear that you have no love for the ladies.' You said, 'For one only.' 'Who is she?' asked her Royal Highness. And you retorted, 'Your Majesty!' "

"Why do you think that is funny?" he inquired.

Lady Bobs was listening to them, and at this juncture she and Lady Cecily burst out laughing.

"The true tale goes thus," said Bobs. "The Queen: 'Lord Kendrick, I hear you have no love for the ladies.' Lord Kendrick: 'Ah!' The Queen, archly: 'Not even for *one?*' Lord Kendrick: 'None!' "

He turned his glance from one laughing face to the other.

"How can any one take you seriously? You're like kittens, chasing a bright coloured ball."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lady Bobs.

"Brute!" ejaculated Lady Cecily.

He rose.

"There is a sweet to come, and coffee," objected his hostess.

"I regret that I must go."

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CHAPTER II

LADY ROBERTA TRASK had an interesting heritage. Her father was the son of a long line of men who had made history in America. Her mother had been a famous beauty, Adelaide Brück, born in New York but of German parentage. Roberta could scarcely remember her, for she had died in the girl's early childhood, never having recovered from the birth of her child.

Hancock, who had been madly in love with her, laid her death at the door of his daughter, and never forgave her. He saw as little of her as possible. So it was that the picturesque and dominating figure of her childhood and youth had been her German grandfather, Heinrich Brück. He was an impelling personality, utterly devoted to his grandchild and his Fatherland. He lived in the United States for the greater part of his life, from thirty to seventy, but he never became an American citizen in any sense of the word.

He had poured his passion for German ideas

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and ideals into the plastic mind of his grandchild. He spoke only German to her, and she grew up in the knowledge of German literature, philosophy and politics. Her grandfather was her idol, and she gave him her complete devotion.

When she was fifteen the old man died. After a period of fierce rebellion and grief, the normal interests of the school girl absorbed her, until at eighteen she lost her father. Almost at once she married a friend of her father's, a man many years her senior, a rich New Yorker.

At twenty she was a widow, enormously rich and very handsome. It was on the Riviera, a year later, that she met Sir Ashton Trask. After a doggedly determined courtship, on his part, he won and married her.

In London she "got on" with the right people. Her wealth and her beauty were a ten days' sensation, and then she and her charming husband found their house the centre of an interesting group, literary, artistic and political. They had been fifteen years in London when the Great War broke out.

"Lady Bobs," admired and adored as she was, had never become an English citizen at

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heart. She was fond of her associates, she enjoyed her life, but there was in her a sort of reserve of amusement at the peculiarities and foibles of the English people. It never crystallised into active criticism or antipathy, but it just lurked there in the depths of her mind. She thought of herself as American, she was spoken of always as such. Any lack of formality or convention on her part was forgiven her on the ground of her "Americanism."

But with the coming of the Great War, when nationality became a fierce passion in the hearts of men, there stirred in her an ancient loyalty. It was instinctive, primal. It was not to England, not to America, it was to Germany. It was deeply Teutonic, anti-Saxon. It startled her, as thoroughly as it terrified her. The thought of all such allegiance must be slain, she said to herself, it made her position too unbearable. So she fought it down and held it back during the first months of the war.

With the rest of the world she was shocked at the invasion of Belgium, but not as her husband was shocked. As she pointed out to him, if France was to be invaded, it had to be through Belgium, no other way could have succeeded. This was War.

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Her mind, like the mind of the world, concentrated on the momentous events of the fall of 1914. In her groping for light on her own situation, she summoned the memory of Heinrich Brück. She recalled his dreams of a triumphant world conquest of German "Kultur"; his belief in the power of organised thought, nay, the super-power of organised forethought. He held that a Teutonic civilisation would follow the Anglo-Saxon, and after that a Slavic.

In the midst of her soul-searchings it seemed to her that the form of her grandfather appeared to her, that he spoke again in his well remembered compelling way, of the ideals of a nation which was working out for itself a union of the practical and the ideal, which was trying to put imagination into the economic processes. He pointed out to her the weaknesses of the Anglo-Saxon mind. She communed with his spirit, drank deep of his enthusiasm, and found herself more terribly perplexed.

Her affection for Ashton Trask was very real. She knew the depth of his devotion to her, even while she cultivated the American fine art of coquetry. The love of many men had played a part in her life. She had played

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at love. She admired and liked Ashton, but she had never known the grand passion. On the whole, she preferred not to.

She went over all this, trying to get her mind clear. Like all Britons, Ashton Trask felt his country to be the very root of his being. She knew that and respected him for it. But she knew that he would never understand nor forgive this hybrid allegiance on her part. Where did her duty lie? Should she tell him, and go? Should she be silent, and live falsehood?

It was six weeks after England entered the War that there came the first of the mysterious messages, calling on her, as the granddaughter of Heinrich Brück, to serve the Fatherland. Where they came from, or how, she did not know. They were just there, as by magic, on her dressing table, in her motor car. They urged her, in German of course, to send the information at her command to her own people, to serve her grandfather's ideals.

She was told that a man stood always on guard of her house. When the hour came for her to prove herself, a small British flag, hung in her bedroom window, would bring an ac-

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credited agent of the Fatherland to her door immediately.

It was the bold delivery of such a message, the day that Kendrick came to lunch, that had alarmed her. It was a threat. What if one of these communications fell into Ashton's hands, or those of the servants? The danger was as great as the nerve strain was racking. How could she stop them? These were the problems that nagged her mind night and day.

She threw herself into every form of activity, as a means of escape. There was but little entertaining in this the third year of the war, and so fewer outlets than usual for overcharged nerves. But she kept her house full, and she forced herself to take part in the innumerable war activities carried on by women, pending her decision as to her own ultimate position.

The first year and a half she had ignored her orders from abroad. The late winter of 1916 was now upon the world, and the cause of the Allies hanging in the balance. The message delivered the day of the Kendrick luncheon was not friendly in tone. It announced that victory of the Central Powers was assured, and that she was needed for an act of great service. She must no longer delay. Had she forgot

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that Germany could ruin her? No traitor to the Fatherland would be spared!

The cold hand of Fear seemed to shut down on her. It was a week or so after the receipt of the threat, that Lady Cecily induced her to go to a big public meeting where the Premier was to speak. She did not want to go, but anything was better than the company of her own thoughts.

The great hall was crowded with people of every class and kind, when they arrived. The two women sat where they could sweep the crowd with their eyes.

"How tense their faces look—how restless they are," Lady Bobs said.

"Yes. They are like people frantically clutching at this or that to save themselves."

"Poor wretched souls!" sighed Lady Trask.

"What do they make of it all, Bobs? Do they *believe* that we are fighting because Belgium was invaded?"

"They believe what they're told."

The chairman and the speakers appeared, greeted with loud applause. The meeting came to order. Announcements were made, the first speaker introduced. Lady Bobs did

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not listen. She looked down at the crowd with its glittering eyes and tense faces.

"We have only to have a chance of even numbers, or anything approaching even numbers, to demonstrate the superiority of free thinking, active citizens, over the docile sheep who serve the ferocious ambitions of drastic kings!" shouted the speaker, stabbing Lady Bobs' attention. She looked around again. Were these "free thinking, active citizens" down there? Did they conceive themselves to be such?

Her mind went off down long avenues of speculation. It shuddered away from the past, it peered into the future. The crowd below filled the universe, the ignorant, the exploited, the enslaved. Who and what were "drastic kings"? Were they individuals or systems?

There was great applause, and her eyes came back to the spectacle below. The Premier was being introduced. He began to speak. She did not hear him, she heard her grandfather saying, "The nation that is to live must become the master of tools. A militant idealism must conquer the common life. The energy of this idealism must be turned into the power of

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tools. . . .” The Premier’s voice drowned him out:

“We are fighting against barbarism, against a selfish and material civilisation. They cannot comprehend the action of Britain at the present moment; they say so. They say, ‘France we understand. She is out for vengeance; she is out for territory, for Alsace-Lorraine.’ They say they can understand Russia. She is fighting for mastery—she wants Galicia. They can understand your fighting for greed, for vengeance, for territory, but they cannot understand a great Empire flinging its resources, the lives of its children, its very existence to protect a little nation that seeks to defend herself——”

The crowd interrupted with wild applause.

“That is what we fight, that claim to predominance of a material, hard civilisation which, if it once wins, sways the world. Liberty goes, democracy vanishes, and unless Britain and her sons come to the rescue, it will be a dark day for humanity.”

A slow anger welled up in Roberta. France, Italy, Russia, were they not busy rescuing humanity? Surely Britain and her sons were not alone in their nobility!

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"We shall need all our qualities, every quality that Britain and its people possess, prudence in counsel, daring in action, tenacity in purpose, courage in defeat, moderation in victory, and in all things faith."

As he sat down the crowd below beat its hands, stamped its feet, waved its arms and shouted. They liked this picture that he drew of them, they liked to believe that they alone could save a tottering world. With his usual discrimination, Lloyd George had struck the popular note. Fury with their blindness mounted to Lady Bobs' brain. She longed to cry out to them, "Fools, fools, when will you learn to think for yourselves!"

As she stood looking at them as they left the hall, she suddenly looked down into the eyes of Lord Kendrick. There was an exchange of thought between them, before they greeted each other. She turned quickly to Lady Cecily.

"Remarkable speech, wasn't it?" Lady Cecily said.

Lady Bobs turned startled eyes upon her. She saw her friend thrilled, moved. She made no answer, just turned and led the way out. It was slow going, because of the crush. They

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met some people they knew on the way, and stopped to talk. Everywhere the verdict was the same, it had been a great meeting.

At the door they met Lord Kendrick. He had evidently waited for them. He bowed gravely and walked beside them. He glanced at Lady Trask a second time.

"Are you ill?"

"No. The air in there was vile. I shall be all right when I get some fresh air and tea."

He engineered them through the mob, found Lady Bobs' car, put them into it. He gave the chauffeur an order and got in after them.

"Are we commandeered?" inquired Cecily.

"Yes," said he, "for tea."

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CHAPTER III

HE took them to a quiet tea shop, and found a retired corner. Lady Cecily chattered on about the meeting, the Premier and his speech, the enthusiasm of the crowd. Lord Kendrick listened without reply. He turned his glance upon Lady Trask.

"What did you think of the speech?" he inquired.

"I shouldn't have gone. I hate patrioteering," she evaded.

"It has to be done."

"Maybe. Why are we so smug, we Anglo-Saxons? England and America are so sure that they are God's anointed."

"They are," he said simply.

She smiled.

"It is comfortable to be a bigot," she teased him.

"It is essential. In times like these you must have no doubts. Your country is the best, your cause the holiest."

"That's a very long speech for you, isn't it?" said Lady Cecily.

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He swept her with his absent gaze.

"He has forgotten me again," she sighed. "Harrison is the name, yclept Cecily."

He made no comment on that.

"Why were you so profoundly moved?" he asked Roberta.

She gave him her startled gaze for a second.

"I am too tired. It is the spring, I suppose. I must get away to-morrow."

"What do you do to rest yourself?"

"I dig."

"Do you? Excellent."

"What are you talking about? Would you mind acting as if I were here in the flesh, and not in the astral only?" begged Lady Cecily.

He looked at her then.

"How you do love the spotlight," he remarked.

"I do, and so do you."

"No. I dislike it, but I endure it."

"Pooh! You'd die without it. You're made up for the spotlight all the time—heroic gestures all ready for action."

"Who is this silly woman?" he inquired of Lady Bobs.

"She isn't silly. She's profoundly wise——"

"You mustn't be misled by my blond hair,"

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she advised him. "I don't know why it is so startling to find brains in a blond woman, do you?"

"I never did," he replied.

"Really, you are brutal. Do you *want* people to hate you?"

"People—what people?"

She leaned toward him.

"The earth is densely populated with animal life, called human. If you should happen to look about you, you would note the presence of these creatures——"

"She's like a phonograph," protested Lord Kendrick. "Can't she be shut off?"

"No, I always play a full programme, including Donna e mobile, and airs from Traviata."

"Cecily, don't tease him," begged Roberta. "You have Bobs on your side."

"Who is Bobs?"

"Roberta Trask. We all call her Lady Bobs."

He nodded.

"What do you dig," he asked, "and where?"

"Mother Earth, in Surrey."

"It is the only way, isn't it?"

She looked her question.

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"To get back, by physical contact, with the roots of things."

"Yes. I often wish humans lay down in the warm, sweet smelling earth in the fall, like the leaves, and came out renewed and green in the spring."

"We do—eventually."

"Worms is all I get out of this," protested Lady Cecily.

"Do you dig?" Lady Bobs asked him.

"I do. Religiously, devoutly, fanatically."

"Bigot even in gardening?"

"That's why my geraniums are the finest in England."

"You haven't any sense of humour at all, have you?" said Lady Cecily sweetly.

"No. I despise it."

"No wonder you're a great man—you make an asset of your faults."

"It is the sign of strong men to use their faults wisely. It is weak men who have vices."

"I do hate this man, Bobs. He's like a British Tank."

Kendrick's sudden burst of laughter startled them both.

"My God," exclaimed Cecily, "I feel as if I'd been struck by lightning!"

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"Cecily," laughed Bobs, "you blessed goose! Tell me about your geraniums, Lord Kendrick. Why did you choose to cultivate them?"

A shadow crossed his face, before he answered briefly.

"They were the favourite flower of—some one I cared for. I acquired a taste for them young."

"I should have expected you to raise cactus," said Cecily.

"There is no use trying to talk with this 'enfant terrible' on our hands. Couldn't you take Lady Trask's car and go for a drive?" he inquired.

"No. I won't go home. I like it here."

"Do you see anybody about you'd like to talk with?" he inquired.

She looked about mischievously.

"Interesting looking man by the door, with the longish face——"

"And longish hair," added Bobs.

Lord Kendrick strode across the room to the table indicated. They saw the man's startled look, his nod, his smile. He rose at once and came back with Lord Kendrick.

"He's captured him," exclaimed Cecily.

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"You didn't think he'd fail, did you?" was Bobs' amused comment.

Just before they came to the table they heard Lord Kendrick say:

"By the way, what is your name?"

The young man answered, and Lord Kendrick said:

"Lady Trask, may I present Mr. Basil Languedoc. Lady Harrison, Mr. Languedoc."

They bowed to him, and Lord Kendrick waved him to a seat.

"Play something for him, Lady Harrison. Try Traviata," he chuckled, turning his full attention upon Lady Trask.

Lady Cecily looked at the young man and laughed. He smiled back at her.

"Do you know him?" she asked.

"Every one does, more or less."

"Does he know you?"

"I suspect he does not."

"What did he say to you?"

"For God's sake, come and talk to the pretty blond woman at my table, young man."

Lady Cecily's laugh chimed merrily.

"I ought to tell you, that he gave me my choice of the whole room, and I picked you."

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"Why?"

"Because of your hands. What does one do with hands like that?"

"The usual stupidities, such as washing the face."

"Do you paint?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Must I show my label?"

"Not at all. I shall think of you as a plumber, and be quite content."

"Excellent profession, I'm told. What do you do that is interesting?"

"I do good work, and war works. I amuse my friends, and bedevil my husband—is that enough of my label?"

"Yes. I shall think of you as a green-eyed yellow butterfly, and be quite content."

She smiled.

"Repeat 'Jesus Repose' for me."

"You do know, then?"

"Of course. Say me your charming verses."

He repeated them softly, dramatically. His voice was like honey.

"Le sacrifice est consommé. Jesus repose.

Mourons pour la Patrie et pour sa sainte cause,
Le sacrifice est consommé. Jesus repose."

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Kendrick turned to them.

"What's this?"

Lady Cecily's eyes were dim.

"You did very well for me. You picked a poet. He has made me cry, and I'm going home."

They all rose, and the poet made his farewells, and stayed on.

"Perhaps when I come back from Surrey, you will come and talk gardens with me again, Lord Kendrick," said Bobs as they went toward the door.

"Thank you."

"If you should suddenly find yourself with a longing for my society, come and see me," said Cecily.

He bowed.

"You might, you know. A taste for me is like a germ, men have died of it."

"Of the taste or the cure?"

"Both. I could read up on a seed catalogue, but you may as well know that gardening is not a passion with me."

"Good afternoon," said he, closing the motor door.

"Shall we drop you somewhere?" asked Bobs.

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"No. I prefer to walk."

They marked his tall military figure as he swung away from them.

"He's a dear," said Cecily.

Bobs laughed.

"How was the poet? It was *the* Languedoc, wasn't it?"

"Umhm. He left a sweetish taste in my mouth, after Kendrick."

"Why isn't he in khaki?" asked Lady Bobs, idly, avoiding silence.

"I didn't ask him. I should think probably because he would faint at the sight of a gun. He's beautiful, in an exotic way——"

"Umhm——"

"If only some one in my infancy had taught me to grab what I want, as Lord Kendrick does."

"My dear, you get what you want. If you mean the lovely poet, he came willingly enough——"

"If he hadn't he would have been dragged."

Lady Bobs nodded.

"It's an enviable sort of mind to have, the Kendrick kind. It shuts, automatically, like a steel safe around the body of its convictions, and no disturbing light gets in."

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"No woman ever had a mind like that, Bobs. Nearly all of us have a sense of humour, which is your 'disturbing light.'"

"If you had heard him on gardens, you would know why he succeeds at everything. Top-soils and sub-soils, fertilisers, tools, theories of cultivation, all arranged in his mind for use."

"How dull to know where everything is, in your mind!"

"It would be interesting to sweep into such a place, like a whirlwind, and mess things up, wouldn't it?" she mused.

"Rather. Have a try at it, Bobs, and tell me about it."

"Have a try yourself."

"Couldn't manage it. I never would get inside, and if I did, I'd only kick up a bit of dust. You're the one. I've always said you'd be a regular simoon, if you ever started to blow."

"I don't want to start, thanks, it's too upsetting."

They were at Lady Cecily's door and she stepped out of the car. She put a saucy face in at the window to add:

"Go ahead, Bobs, and simoon him!"

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At home Lady Trask went at once to her own rooms. This sitting room and bedroom of hers were very characteristic of her. They were cool and large, with space and simplicity as their keynote. The neutral coloured walls seemed to open out, never to shut in. The notes of colour were concentrated here and there, in a lamp, a bowl of flowers, or a shelf of deep blue books. Her piano was here, its rack filled with the music she loved, and an open fire burned on the hearth.

It rested her always like the presence of a friend. To-day she was in special need of such help. She was literally worn out with the emotions of the afternoon. She undressed and put on a loose negligee gown. She selected a book with care, and sat down by her fire to read. After a bit she admitted that her eye obeyed orders and read words, but her mind was blank.

She went to the piano, and let her fingers choose the way, rather than her brain. A flood of ideas and reactions poured through her consciousness like a searchlight. The Premier's speech—how strange that it should have made her so angry. . . . . She smiled at the memory of Cecily's amusing audacities, and the way they plagued Lord Kendrick. What strange

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silences the man fathered—what a surprise his laugh was. What sort of human was he? She must find out. He attracted her immensely. Was it in the power of any woman to "simoon him" in Cecily's ridiculous phrase? . . . What was it he had said to her? "You must have no doubts. Your country must be the best, your cause the holiest." What if he knew what dangerous advice that was to give her at this moment?

She was aware now of the thing she was playing, an old favourite of her grandfather's. It brought him close to her, so that she felt him. She closed her eyes that she might not lose him. He released her battered spirit from the world of flux she lived in, he gave her the sense of an ordered world.

Back over the years that held him, her spirit trailed, the years of her childhood when he had been both father and mother. How sure his understanding had been, how true his devotion. His deep-throated laugh sounded again. . . . Her hands dropped from the keys and she felt drowsy, relaxed at last. She went to the couch and lay down, thinking she would sleep.

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"Grandfather Heinrich," she whispered, "what shall I do?"

She lay quite still, straining to catch his answer. She was neither asleep nor awake. She heard the clock tick, and a log fall, burned through, in the fireplace. And yet she was not in that room. She sensed a rustling, as of unseen presences. She felt as if finger-tips touched her eyes. She was cold with terror, yet filled with hope.

After what seemed a long time, she opened her eyes. In a stream of light that came in her window, from a street lamp outside, she saw, distinctly, Heinrich Brück standing. He came slowly toward her, and she raised herself on her elbow to greet him. He carried what seemed to be a flaming sword, laid across his two hands, palms open and upturned. She felt him lay the sword across her knees, she felt his hand on her hair, his breath on her cheek. She heard him say:

"Für das Vaterland, meine grosse enkelin!"

She lay staring at him, speechless, terrified, longing yet unable to speak. In a second he was gone, and she knew she was too late. She

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lost consciousness for a period of time. But the thundering of her heart finally awakened her.

The room was empty, the window closed. She looked at the clock, it was only a quarter before seven. Her breath came suffocatingly, in sobbing gasps. Slowly she sat up, and with startled remembrance her eyes turned to her knees, where the sword had been laid. A little British flag lay in her lap.

She did not question any more. She did not hesitate. She rose, went to the window of her bedroom, and pinned the flag to her shade. Then she dressed in a feverish hurry. She was subconsciously glad that extra work at the War Office would keep Sir Ashton late. Not that it mattered now. . . . She went down stairs. To Brooks she said that she was expecting a message and she wished to speak with the messenger.

Then she went into the drawing-room and forced herself to sit down and wait.

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CHAPTER IV

It might have been ten minutes, it might have been æons which passed while Lady Bobs sat there waiting. Then she heard the bell, there were voices in the hall, footsteps came toward the drawing-room door. Brooks ushered some one in, and she forced herself to turn and face the messenger. There stood, smiling his gayest smile at her, Captain Larry O'Toole. She stifled an hysteric exclamation and tried to get her nerves in hand.

"A very good day to ye, most lovely av ladies!"

"Oh, Larry, I'm not at home," she said.

He came to stand in front of her.

"I think you're at home to me."

"But I'm not. I have a business appointment, besides it is too late for tea here, so run along, Irishman."

"Come now, ye wouldn't be drivin' out your own Larry——"

"Larry, I'm serious," she began.

A sudden change came over the laughing face.

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"So am I," said he.

"I'm expecting——"

"A messenger," he finished.

She flushed and stared.

"How did you know?"

"I am he."

"Larry—you!"

He slipped off a seal ring he wore, opened it with a spring, took out a tiny, folded paper, spread it on his palm. He took up a magnifying glass from a table and offered it to her. She peered at the miniature identification of Captain Larry O'Toole as the agent of the Imperial German Government. She raised her eyes to his face, literally speechless with astonishment. He hastily replaced the dangerous scrap of paper in its hiding place.

"Larry, I just cannot grasp it."

"It's not so difficult."

"But gay happy you, playing around, and making love to all of us——"

"That's how I serve the one I love best av all!" he said passionately.

"You mean?"

"I mean Ireland."

"But your commission. Didn't you have to swear allegiance——?"

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"I never knew where my allegiance lay until this war began," he said.

"How strange. That happened to you, too?"

He nodded.

"I've always loved Ireland. I've always wanted her to be free, but I left the freein' av her, for the most part, to the other fella'. I stood for England's muddlin' stupidity in our affairs up to the toime when she goes to war for the avowed protection av the integrity av little nations, up to the toime she shoots down the revolutionists, in the streets, without so much as a court martial trial! When England starts out preachin' an' crusadin' fer freedom, by God, I'll call her attintion to Ireland at her door."

"But how can Germany help you?"

"Germany will win the war, an' free Ireland."

"Are you sure?"

"Av course I'm sure. I'm riskin' me loife on ut."

"But is there an agreement?"

"There is. The revolutionists in Ireland have an agreement with Germany. Nothing could humiliate England so much as for Ger-

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many to give us our freedom. That's why there is a whole rigimint av us scattered about in the British service."

She considered that a moment.

"You don't hate the work you have to do?"

"Hate ut? It's the breath av loife to me. I've been av considerable service, thanks to me irreproachable connections here. No one else can do what I do. My bit has a special value."

"You aren't afraid?"

"Afraid? Of what? Death? Who's afraid of death now? We face it every day at the front, it's as ordinary as breakfast."

"I see. You count yourself as an infinitesimal unit of service?"

"That's it."

He looked at her intently, waiting.

"How did they know about me?"

He smiled at that.

"Lady Bobs, they are like God! They know ivrything. They knew the status and whereabouts of ivry man, woman, and choild av German, Prussian, or Austrian descent, livin' in England, and They had it down in books, long before the war was dreamed av by the rist av us."

"How incredible."

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"Nuthin' is incredible with Them. To an Irishman loike me, with thought for the wan day only, They're terrifyin', for They think in centuries. How can They fail to conquer a haphazard world like the rist av us live in?"

"Have you known that They were sending me messages?"

"I have not."

"How did you come to-day?"

"I came on orders."

"From whom?"

"From Them."

"They told me that a man watched my house day and night. They told me the signal that would bring an agent——"

"You gave the signal?"

"Yes."

"A messenger brought me orders to come here and show you my credentials. I couldn't believe it, but I came."

"My grandfather was a German."

His eyebrows went up.

"Trask knows?"

"About my grandfather? Oh, yes. At least I told him when we were married."

"He never saw him?"

"Oh, no. He died when I was fifteen."

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"Your mother's father?"

"Yes. Heinrich Brück."

"But your mother was American born?"

"Yes, as I was. My father was American many generations back."

"You're always spoken of here as American."

"Yes."

"Wonderful! You have not mentioned the Brück ancestor since war began?"

"Naturally not."

"When did you decide?"

"To-day, this afternoon," she said in a low voice. "I've known for months that deep in my soul was loyalty to the ideals of my grandfather. I've fought the knowledge, I've denied it. I've told myself over and over that I owed Ashton my full allegiance, but I know now that it doesn't count, that nothing counts except freeing myself for service——"

"What was it that clinched the determination?"

"Cecily and I went to-day to hear Lloyd George rouse the populace. I couldn't bear it, his denunciation of us as barbarians, because we make war like ruthless gods. I couldn't endure his calm assumption, but that for Eng-

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land the world would be a ruin and a waste."

"I know—I know," he said.

"We had tea with Lord Kendrick later. He assured us seriously that the Anglo-Saxons were God's anointed."

He smiled at that.

"God with the Kaiser, God with the Angles, poor, distracted God!"

"I came home terribly wrought up. I lay down to quiet my nerves, and I had a sort of vision of my grandfather. I don't know how it was, I can't explain it——"

"Don't try. All the Irish believe in ghosts."

"He has appeared to me several times since the war began, but never so plainly as he did to-day. Larry, I'm not an hysterical person, am I?"

"Ye are not."

"I saw him, I heard him speak. I cried out to him for counsel and he bade me serve the fatherland. I thought he laid a sword on my lap, but when I woke I found it was the signal flag. Larry, how could that be?"

"I'll niver tell ye. Things are as they are, Lady Bobs. . . . What did ye do, then?"

"I went and hung the signal in the window, and now I am free."

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She drew a deep breath, and impulsively he laid his hands on her shoulders.

"Lady Bobs, ye may be settin' yer feet on the path to destruction," he said gravely.

"Then I'll tread it gladly."

Brooks entered, ushering in Mildred Downer and Ted Carter. Just for a second Lady Trask looked at them and did not see them. But they saw Captain O'Toole's hands drop from her shoulders. The Irishman recovered first.

"Ah, Lady Bobs, here are some other stragglers hunting belated tea."

Miss Downer's direct glance went from one to the other of them swiftly.

"I'm afraid we intrude," she said.

"Not at all. How are you?" said Lady Bobs, forcing herself to give attention.

"Well. I met Mr. Carter on the doorstep."

"How do, Teddy?" smiled Lady Bobs.

He clung to her hand like a grateful puppy.

"Just came in to say good-bye," he said.

"You're off?"

"Yes. Orders came at noon to-day. I go to-night."

"Good news, isn't it?" said Miss Downer.

"Rather," grinned the boy.

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"When is your leave up, Captain O'Toole?" she inquired.

"I wish you'd ask the War Office," he smiled.

"Do you want tea?" asked Lady Bobs.

"I've had mine," said Mildred.

"And I mine," echoed the Captain.

"None for me, I hate the stuff," said Carter.

He deliberately attached himself to Lady Bobs, leaving the Irishman to Mildred.

"You haven't paid any attention to me for weeks," he complained.

"Haven't I, Teddy?" she smiled, with an attempt at lightness.

"No, and right now, when I've come to say good-bye, you wish I were in Halifax."

"That isn't true," she replied.

"Is it O'Toole you care for?" he demanded.

"What foolishness, Teddy."

"Why does he stand with his hands on your shoulders, like your lover?"

"He was, in fact, giving me disinterested and fatherly advice."

He shrugged his impatient disbelief, and turned to mark that O'Toole was showing Mildred some war cartoons at the other end of the room.

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"Maybe I shan't see you again," said the boy.

"I won't believe that, Teddy."

"I've got a hunch, I'll get mine, this go."

She laid a hand on his arm.

"Don't."

"Would you care?"

"Of course I'd care."

"You'd say that to any poor devil, who was going out!" he cried. "You mean everything to me. I love you so that I have to lock my mind against you when I fly, for fear I'll forget what I'm doing. The last fall was because I forgot."

That roused her.

"Oh, Teddy, dear, it mustn't be like that!"

"I know, but it is. I've felt a dirty cad, coming here to Sir Ashton's house and seeing you, but I've never said a word, and I wouldn't now, if it wasn't for the hunch."

"Don't go, Teddy, don't go back," she said impulsively.

"I've got to go. You see, there's England——"

"But England isn't your mother country."

"No, but she's my grandmother. If my own country won't come in, why then, by God, I'll

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fight with the next best. We've got this job to do, you know. I like to think I'm doing it for you."

Larry and Mildred came toward them. The boy gave an angry exclamation.

"The extraordinary thing to me is, how do they run their spy system?" Mildred was saying.

"Seems to be a good one," agreed Larry.

"I saw Arnold Gregg yesterday, invalided home from the Somme front. He told me that our men had a certain new method of attack that was working fine, and all of a sudden the Boche got on to it. I had reason to be interested and I asked him what was the date that the Boche got on to it, and it was the day after that luncheon here, when Kendrick came, and Sir Ashton showed us the diagram——"

"Diagram?" said Lady Bobs.

"Don't you remember? He started to draw it on the tablecloth and Lord Kendrick stopped him."

"My good St. Patrick, do ye suppose we had a spy among us? Lady Bobs, are ye sure av the Duchess?" demanded O'Toole.

They all laughed at that, but Lady Bobs' heart beat in her throat.

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Sir Ashton came in at the moment, with the Duchess.

"I picked Ashton up on the street, and brought him home. No, I won't sit down, thanks. I'm cross as an old crow and I'm going home to vent it on the Duke."

"What's the trouble, Duchess?" asked Bobs.

"Trouble? England's the trouble. We're a muddlin', half-hearted lot. We fight like a lot of old ladies! We listen to labour, we dilly and we dally, and look at us. We should have crushed these Huns and been through with it, in three months."

"Oh, Duchess, not three months! There would never have been any fun in three months," protested Carter.

"This is not a Bank Holiday organised for your sole amusement, young man. If that country of yours was where she should be, she would be fighting shoulder to shoulder with us at this moment."

She went on scolding them. O'Toole and Lady Bobs drew an infinitesimal place outside her circle.

"We must not be seen talking alone together hereafter," he said in a normal conversational tone.

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"Are we to meet somewhere?" she asked, following his lead.

"Never. We must be like this always. If you speak in a natural voice no one pays attention."

"I must have a word. Stay on after the others go. I'll manage Ashton somehow——"

He turned back to the others.

Carter came to Lady Bobs' side.

"May I have a few moments alone with you, before I go?"

She looked troubled.

"Oh, never mind," he said.

"Yes, yes, of course, Ted. I'll go to the door with you, and we'll have a moment or two——"

He went to Sir Ashton.

"Good-bye, Sir Ashton, I'm off to-night."

"Are you, my boy? Good luck to you," said the older man with a firm handclasp.

Carter bowed before the Duchess, who gave him her hand.

"Good-bye. I'm proud of you, and I apologise for abusin' your country."

"Thanks. I won't hold it against you."

He shook hands with Miss Downer and O'Toole. Lady Bobs laid her hand on his arm, and walked with him out of the room.

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"That boy is scandalously in love with Roberta, Ashton," remarked the Duchess.

"Poor lad—can you blame him?" he smiled at her.

But when Lady Bobs came back his quick tender glance swept her face. The Duchess ordered them all to go home because Roberta looked tired, and they drifted toward the hall. Ashton, the Duchess and Mildred Downer walked together. O'Toole sauntered behind with Roberta. Once Mildred Downer looked back at them.

"Larry, I'll make my plans to leave tomorrow."

"Leave?"

"Certainly. I cannot stay here, in Ashton's house."

"My dear, They'll require that of you."

"Oh, no!" she cried, off guard.

"Take care! . . . That is why you are valuable to Them. It is your position here, your sure sources of information that They want."

"Oh, but it's too hideous——"

"You are committed now."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Too late."

"You mean They would ruin me?"

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"Without a doubt."

The others would be at the door now, in a minute. She drew a deep breath, and said slowly:

"Very well, the die is cast. What am I to do?"

"Bobs, my dear, the Duchess is going," said Sir Ashton.

With a smile at O'Toole, Lady Bobs joined her guests.

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PART TWO

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PART TWO

CHAPTER I

THE night and day which followed Lady Trask's interview with Captain O'Toole were so full of conflicting emotions that the second night found her nerves at the breaking point. One moment she was hot with fury at herself that she had walked into a trap, during the half hysterical trance when her grandfather had appeared to her: the next moment she was glad the matter was settled once and for all. She saw her decision as inevitable—irrevocable.

But when her mind came back to the necessity of staying on in her husband's house, playing him false—that thought flagellated her. And yet, what constituted the treachery? Ashton served his country, she served hers, why should an equal devotion alter their personal relations so deeply? If she were a Catholic, and Ashton a Protestant, each serving his own church, although they were enemies, this divergence of creeds would not forbid their living

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together. Why did the world lay such furious stress upon "patriotism"? What did the word mean? She found herself in a position now, where, if she stayed on, she was disloyal to Ashton, if she disobeyed Them, and left, she brought ruin on them both.

No orders or messages came during the forty-eight hours subsequent to her talk with O'Toole, so in order to escape for a little from Ashton and her intimate friends, she had a bag packed, and went off to their country place, leaving word for her husband that she had acted upon an impulse, and run away for a sniff of spring in the country.

"Ah, Lady Trask, Ma'am, ye look as if ye was in sore need of the country," said old Mrs. Mallory, the housekeeper, when she arrived at Trask Hall.

"Yes, Mrs. Mallory, I am. I need a good dose of fresh air and quiet, and growing things."

"The garden do be lovely, Ma'am. Mallory says it's wunnerful growin' weather now. Will ye have your lunch on the terrace, Ma'am?"

"I will, thanks."

"I hope Sir Ashton is well, Ma'am."

"He's terribly overworked."

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"'Tis dreadful times we be livin' thru, Lady Trask."

Lady Trask nodded, looking off over the gardens.

"And earth keeps up its terrible composure," she said softly.

"When ye think of all the dyin', over there in France, an' the sufferin' here at home, ye'd think they'd had enuff by now," the old woman ran on.

"They have, Mallory. But this war is like a huge magnetised ball, that rolls and rolls, and clutches men and nations to it by irresistible force. No one can stop it——"

"Mr. Lloyd George can, can't he?"

"It seems not. Let's make a compact not to speak of the war while I'm here. I want a vacation from it."

"All right, Lady Trask. We don't speak of it much, Mallory an' me. We got no sons to go, an' things is about the same down here."

"Yes, thank God, they seem the same down here," said Lady Trask fervently.

She gave herself up to this illusion with passion. She sank deep into the lap of Surrey, and emptied her mind of everything save the event of the minute. The first day she tramped with

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her dogs, and later rode for hours across the peaceful country. No wonder poets sang of this lovely England, no wonder soldiers died with her name on their lips. Loyalty to the beauty of England, she understood that.

The second day she made a friend. She was pottering about the garden, with old Mallory, when a very small, very red-cheeked youngster of three joined them.

"Good morning," said Lady Trask to the intruder.

He smiled engagingly. He displayed an old lard bucket and a battered spoon.

"That's Hughie, the chuffer's boy," explained Mallory.

"Dig?" said Hughie.

Lady Trask nodded, and showed him a safe place for his operations. He began with vigour to make the dirt fly. Old Mallory laughed at him and went on with his work, singing in a cracked voice a tune which he seemed never to complete. The sun was warm on their backs, the garden was sweet and still. The old man and the tiny man were soothing companions. Lady Bobs almost forgot.

"Hughie dig deep, d-e-e-p hole," bragged the infant.

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Lady Bobs inspected it. She tossed in two or three lumps of dirt.

"There are my troubles, Hughie. Bury them deep for me."

"Lady plant flowers?" inquired Hughie.

"Do you suppose troubles do blossom into flowers, Hughie?"

Hughie considered it, but came to no conclusion.

"Hughie plant all nice," he promised, putting back the earth, and patting down with a chubby fist.

"Mallory, doesn't your back get tired?" Lady Bobs demanded after a while.

"No, Lady Trask. My old back has been bent over these beds for thirty year. It's standin' up straight that tires my back!" he chuckled. "You an' Hughie better set down in the shade, an' rest yourselves."

Hughie accepted the invitation and they made some botanical investigations under a nearby tree. They watched a bird, and investigated an ant hill. Hughie could not be called fluent in conversation, but he was appreciative. His smile was ready, his attention was rapt. There was something very restful about Hughie. Lady Bobs caught herself

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wishing that she might have had a son of her own, but as memory thrust at her the face of her present, she shuddered away from the thought of a child. She concentrated again on the sunny garden.

"My mon, John, what can the matter be?" wheezed the eternal question of old Mallory.

"What is the next line, Mallory?" she asked idly.

"I dunno, Lady Trask. Hughie he can sing it. Sing 'My mon, John,' Hughie," he ordered.

So Hughie lifted voice in an unintelligible jargon, but in the true spirit of song:

"Ma mon, Jawn, wot can'a matta be,
At I sd'luve lady fair, an she sd'nowt luv me——"

Several days came and went, days spent in the open, with these two pleasant comrades. Nothing happened. Lady Bobs slept at night, she enjoyed her meals. Surely this was truth, the outer world of war, and death and intrigue was the dream. The week slipped by, and Friday brought Ashton and Lord Kendrick to spend the week end. The sight of her husband

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brought back the old misery, and his pleasure in her improved health and colour, intensified it. As for Lord Kendrick, his coming surprised her as much as it pleased her.

"I hope you were not misled this time," she challenged him. "You knew that I was here?"

"I believe Trask did mention it," he replied.

"No," she laughed, "I did not think you came on my account!"

"I came to talk over important matters with your husband," he answered simply.

"Will you take time to look at my garden?"

"Certainly. Gardens interest me."

She left them to their own devices, after this broad hint from her guest. But he came upon her, the next day, down on her knees, grubbing away, with Hughie in attendance. He stood looking down at her for several seconds, but she merely nodded and went on with her work.

"That's good," he said. "Hello, Boy, who are you?"

"Hughie—go away."

Lady Bobs laughed.

"Hughie has a frankness akin to your own."

"Who is Hughie?"

"I don't know exactly. It seems to be a generic term. He's very comfortable is

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Hughie, like a collie pup, only less bother."

He smiled at that.

"Let me show you a quicker and a better way to do that," he said, and knelt beside her.

"That's your secret, isn't it? You always know a quicker and a better way," she remarked.

He proceeded with the demonstration. He instructed her and included Hughie in the process. Presently they were all working happily, silently. Lady Bobs glanced occasionally at the strong brown hands which worked so deftly at the roots of things.

"You look almost benevolent," she teased him. He ignored that. He called Hughie to see something he had unearthed, and knelt with his arm about the boy, as he explained it. The man was big and kind and elemental. How could he be at the same time, as ruthless as she knew him to be? It was the sheer power of him that fired her imagination.

Lord Kendrick summoned Mallory for a consultation in regard to a certain bug which nibbled plants that spring. He agreed to send him a solution for a spray.

"Eternal struggle in gardens," she said.

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"Eternal struggle in the universe," he amended.

"It must be."

"Certainly. Star against star, planet against planet, animal against animal, man against man. How else would the fit survive?"

She made a sound of agreement that caught his attention.

"What kind of woman are you?" he asked.

"I'm the kind of woman that you are a man."

"You think you know what kind I am?"

"Certainly. I belong to your kind."

"What is it?"

"Conqueror!"

"So?"

"Decide what you believe to be the ultimate good, for your country, for the race, perhaps for the world. Then march toward it. Kill, conquer, take—ruthless, if you like, but in the end, victorious. That's your creed, and mine."

He stared at her intently, and she gave him back his look.

"I've known one, maybe two women like that, in savage tribes."

"I belong to a savage tribe."

"Indians, eh? Chippewa-Apache?"

"Who knows. I've reverted, that's all."

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She went back to her grubbing and he followed suit. But they both knew that something had happened between them.

He rather avoided her after that. It was as if she had scaled his wall, invaded his tent, he tried to push her out. He wanted none of her. She knew perfectly what was in his mind, but she no longer resented it. He would not acknowledge it, but he was flying a danger signal. He did not know, as she did, that she was already upon the rocks of destruction, that she need not heed his warning. He protected himself with Sir Ashton, but when he thought her unaware of him, he looked at her all the time. If she lifted swift, comprehending eyes to him, he looked away, angrily.

Sunday brought Cecily Harrison and her newest cavalier, the poet Languedoc. They motored from the Harrisons' place unannounced, for luncheon.

"You remember Basil Languedoc, Bobs? Well, well, if it isn't the gruff griffin!" she smiled, into Kendrick's frankly annoyed face. "I won't talk to you," she soothed him, "I won't even look at you."

"Thanks," said he.

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He shook hands with Languedoc, with an expression of amused pity.

"I'm very much indebted to you, Lord Kendrick," said the poet.

"I wonder if you are!"

The great man took refuge with his host, while the others chatted and laughed.

"It is very beautiful here," said Languedoc. "Beauty is the one thing war cannot destroy."

"It destroys Venice," protested Lady Cecily.

"Nothing can destroy Venice. Venice is the dream of all the ages. If a Doge's Palace, if St. Marks is bombed, then the genius of all the world must dream it again, greater, truer, nearer perfection."

"We must dream the whole shattered world so," said Lady Cecily earnestly.

Sir Ashton led his unwilling guest back to the terrace where the others sat.

"That is the whole question. Who will dream it nearer the true perfection, Teuton or Anglo-Saxon?" Lady Bobs said.

"You haven't any doubt, have you?" the poet inquired.

"I'm not so sure as the rest of you are, that

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truth, wisdom and uprightness lie with our race alone."

"Is my unruly wife attacking the Angles again?" smiled Sir Ashton. "True American though she is, she takes a delight in belittling our race."

"I don't belittle the race. I belittle the race's vanity. I question the effectiveness of a democracy. I dislike muddled thinking, half-baked idealism. I abhor doing the selfish thing, under the guise of great altruism, as England and America so often do. I have more respect for silent, ruthless grabbers, myself."

"Prussian, for instance," suggested Kendrick coldly.

"Prussian isn't a system, or a country—it's a state of mind. You are Prussian," she challenged him.

"Oh, my dear Roberta!" protested Ashton.

"Certainly he is. I've read my history. He has spent his life taking what he thought good for England. He has taken it ruthlessly, silently, often cruelly, that is why he is a great man. I say he has done well."

"Even if he is an Angle," laughed Ashton. "Roberta, dear, these good friends may mis-

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understand you. She shares the belief of many people that democracies are too undisciplined. It may be one of the lessons of this war, that our democractic governments must be reorganised."

"The Germans are disciplined, and look at the result," said Kendrick. "The danger to the world of that autocracy lies here, that it has taken away from its disciplined masses the power to make their laws and choose their rulers."

"But England refuses several hundred million individuals, of every colour and race and religion, the right to make their laws and choose their rulers. England does not count herself a menace to the world. No, my dears, we, in England, grab two entire continents and part of a third, protesting that it is for the good of the world at large. The enemy grabs without oratory," she laughed. "If grabbing is wrong, isn't it wrong for everybody?"

"If you had ever seen a Malayan prison, if you had ever gone among aboriginal tribes as I have, if you knew the wrong and oppression of tyrants of their own race, you'd know that England civilises where she conquers," Lord Kendrick said.

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"I don't doubt that for one minute. You said a moment ago that good government could never be adequate substitute for self-government, and I agree with your statement. I even go so far as to say that if that is true for the German autocracy, it is equally true for the English and American democracies. America is true child of England, you know. She grabs and orates, too."

"What am I going to do with her?" begged Sir Ashton.

"You ought to send her to the House of Lords, and let her talk," laughed Cecily.

"Thanks, I 'll choose my own tomb," protested Lady Bobs.

"We cannot measure nations by their deeds alone, any more than we can in the case of individuals," said the poet. "England civilises where she goes: America dreamed a great dream of a free country, a harbour for the oppressed. She has made a great governmental experiment, run for the people and by the people. She has tested and proved a whole new set of principles——"

"I wish she'd hurry and fight for them," grumbled Lord Kendrick. "If she don't, she'll lose them."

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"Oh, but she will fight," cried Languedoc. "She's thousands of miles away, she's slow to anger, but when America sees this, as a war for human liberty, she will sweep into Europe, an army with banners."

"Hear him, Bobs. Isn't he a proper spokesman for your country?" said Lady Harrison.

"He is," admitted Bobs smilingly; "no American could do better, not even Teddy Carter."

"I suppose most of us think of the faults of England or America, as we do of the faults of our mothers," said Sir Ashton. "We may be aware of them, but we do not get excited over them, as people outside the family may. I think the world has fallen into ruins, because we have all our values wrong. Not only here in England, but all over the whole world. We put the emphasis upon systems and things, not on the human individual. We must scrap a good part of what we have accumulated, and begin again. I disagree with Roberta, because I feel that we must build on greater freedom, not on less, as a foundation. We must make a world with human welfare as the standard. England and America will see this need, because it is part of the vision they both saw,

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before they got off on the wrong track. If freedom and self-government for their colonies is the next step, they will take it. If they are, as we believe, the forward looking nations of the earth, they will not hesitate."

Sir Ashton paused a moment, and turned his earnest face toward his wife.

"You see, dear, it really *is* like the belief you have in the basic goodness and understanding of your mother."

"Perhaps it is because I cannot remember my mother that I am so Philistine," she answered him, with equal earnestness.

"Oh, Ashton, don't convert her," begged Cecily. "It is so nice to know somebody who still says 'German' and 'Prussian' right out loud with no apology, like Bobs. I've adopted it, myself. I go round now, telling everybody I am pro-German. It makes an awful splash."

"Cecily, your love of a splash will get you into trouble one of these days," Sir Ashton warned her.

A servant came across the terrace, with a note for Bobs.

"By messenger, Lady Trask. He did not wait for an answer. Luncheon is served, Madam."

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Lady Bobs took the envelope. She knew what it contained.

"Come along, friends, and have some food. Let us forget our national troubles. The sun shines, and there is to-day," Bobs said, leading the way, with Lord Kendrick.

"A truce, a truce," she smiled at him, as she tucked the unopened message into the lace at her breast.

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CHAPTER II

THE dreaded orders had come. She was directed to get from Lord Kendrick certain facts in regard to tactics in the Somme region, and report at once. It had been impossible to arrange for a word alone with her guest, and obviously out of the question to extract even an opinion from him, in general conversation. So Lady Bobs went back to town and sought counsel from O'Toole.

He came at once to see her, apparently by accident, at Lady Harrison's. She explained to him the utter folly of trying to get any information from Lord Kendrick. She knew the man. It was useless to try, as well as dangerous.

"My dear lady," said O'Toole, "you will soon be learnin' that our present masters never heard that word 'impossible.' It doesn't exist in their language. When They order a thing done, it is done. If They have asked that information, ye must get ut. If not through the silent Kendrick, through some other reliable

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authority. My advice is, waste no toime sayin' it can't be done—just go ahead an' do it."

They were interrupted at this point and it was not until somewhat later that he drifted to her side again.

"We must be careful about meetin'," he warned her.

"I think the less careful we are, the better. You might develop a sudden passion for my society, Larry. My flirtatious past, and yours, would prove an alibi."

"Delighted," he smiled.

"I shall not hold you strictly to account in matters amorous, but your reputation as Lothario will help us."

"The affair is on!" he grinned.

In the weeks that followed, the flirtation of Lady Bobs and Larry O'Toole amused all their intimates, and set some tongues a-clacking outside their own group.

"What is this boy and girl affair, Bobs? You'd think you and Larry were seventeen."

"Takes an Irishman to rejuvenate you," nodded Lady Bobs. "Love with a brogue is delicious."

"I shall dismiss the Languedoc and get me

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an Irishman. Basil is too lyric. I need a Celtic renaissance, myself."

"Yours is the international soul we hear so much about, Cecily," laughed Lady Bobs.

Tea and banter and laughter camouflaged much serious planning between Lady Bobs and her cavalier. The information about the Somme front she obtained and forwarded. They worked together on most of their "assignments," as they called them.

Lady Trask's connections branched in every direction. She knew the Americans who lived in London, she met those of importance who came there on business, or pleasure. Frequently she was able to shed light on English and American diplomatic relations which was very helpful to Königstrasse.

She hated with every fibre of her being the equivocal position she was in, but having walked into it of her own volition, she hardened herself and went ahead, in what she believed to be her highest duty.

One day as she was walking home, she met Mildred Downer, who fell in step beside her.

"Where have you been hiding, Mildred? We haven't seen you for ages," Lady Trask said to her.

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"Oh, I've been about," the girl answered evasively.

"Busy, I suppose."

"Awf'ly. What are you doing with yourself?"

"The usual things. Odd how we get adjusted to war, as if it were our natural state."

"Yes, queer nation, we are. They say we're not adaptable, but look at us. Wonderful, I call it."

Lady Trask made some reply, but the girl broke in on it.

"I have been wanting to see you."

"I've asked you to dinner twice," Lady Trask reminded her.

"I know," uncomfortably.

"Why didn't you come?"

"I—couldn't."

"You mean you were engaged both nights?"

"No. I cannot endure some one who was sure to be there!"

"How ridiculous! Who was it?"

"Captain O'Toole."

"You dislike Larry? You unnatural woman! I didn't suppose it could be done."

The girl's ugly face flushed.

"I think he's a sneak and a bounder."

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"Really, Mildred, he is a friend, you know——"

"That's why it is so difficult. Because I like you better than any woman in London," she added miserably.

Lady Trask turned an amused glance upon her, but the real feeling in Miss Downer's face stopped her.

"Thank you, Mildred. Because you like me, is no reason for your liking all my friends. I'm sorry Captain O'Toole keeps you from coming to us, for Ashton and I are both fond of you."

"Do you know about Captain O'Toole?" Mildred asked.

Lady Trask looked at her quickly.

"Know what about him?"

"He keeps a mistress."

"Does he?"

"He makes love to you in public——"

Lady Trask flushed.

"My dear Mildred, nobody takes the Irish seriously, except the Irish! Larry O'Toole and I amuse each other. He makes love as a baby cries, or a bird sings. It's his native speech."

"Oh, I know you don't care anything about

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him. It's just that I cannot bear to have him make you ridiculous," Mildred protested.

"My child, you're the only person he is making ridiculous. Put poor Larry out of your mind. His fascinations will not be fatal to me, I assure you."

"I'm not so sure."

Again Lady Trask glanced at her.

"Why do you hate him so?" she inquired.

"I hate palaver. I distrust all of his countrymen, but him in particular."

"He hasn't given you any specific cause to hate him?"

"He has offered me his insulting homage, as he does all women——"

"Pooh, where's your sense of humour? Forget him."

"I wish I could!" exclaimed Mildred Downer passionately, and with a hasty farewell she turned and walked away.

Lady Trask looked after her in sheer amazement. Later the talk recurred to her, and she spoke to Larry about it. He laughed.

"It might prove serious, Larry. What did you do to her?"

"I courted her, at a dull house party, and kissed her on the stairs."

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"It must have been dull! Did she mind?"

"She did. She took me seriously."

"Larry!"

"I had to tell her the plain truth, poor soul. She's got no sense of humour."

"Make no mistake, you have an enemy there, and she is no fool."

"I'd rather have her as an enemy than have to kiss her again."

"What did you do it for?"

"Experiment. She looked so unkissed."

"For a clever man, you're stupid sometimes."

He shrugged impatient shoulders.

"Even clever women fall into that blunder. Let's drop Miss Downer and talk of something interesting."

As the Captain was leaving, he met Sir Ashton at the door. When the Irishman had gone, Trask came quickly across the room to Roberta and put his arms about her.

"Ashton?" she said, surprised.

"Dearest, I want to say something that is in my mind. You will not misunderstand if your heart beats against mine."

She stood still in his embrace.

"Is it about Larry?"

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"Do you find him so amusing that you cannot do with less of his society?"

"You think I see too much of him, Ashton?"

"It is what other people think, dear, who do not know you as I do."

"Do they matter?"

"I think your dignity and fineness matter. I cannot bear to have your name rolled over on many tongues."

She freed herself from his arms, but he drew her back with tenderness.

"Roberta, if I could only fill your whole heart and mind as you do mine."

"Ashton, please——" she said, in protest. "I will, of course, see less of Larry, if you object."

"Don't put it so—'if I object'—I merely call your attention to the fact that people talk, and I leave the matter to your own good taste, my dear."

"Thank you," she said. Then, that she might not pour out to him the whole wretched story, she turned and left the room without a word.

Sir Ashton watched her go with a sigh. The slight frown that creased his forehead deepened. There was in Sir Ashton Trask a deep, instinctive reverence for women. He had no

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understanding of the modern free and easy relationship between men and women. While he was in no way so old-fashioned that he insisted upon a pedestal for "the sex," his modernity wanted to add to all the old courtesies and tenderness, natural toward women, the new mental companionshp.

He marked with dismay the younger generation's desire to take full advantage of the comradeship, but to be excused from all the old observances, which had been the perquisites of what they now scornfully referred to as "chivalry." He saw that women, even so fine a woman as his wife, did not resent this, but rather encouraged it.

It may be, that when reverence for women survives in a man of Sir Ashton's type, it means that he has been deeply influenced at some youthful period, by a worshipful woman, a mother perhaps. It was so in his case. His mother had been an unusual woman of strong character and distinguished mentality. Her friendship with her son had been based upon mutual respect and admiration. To the outsider they might have seemed undemonstrative, but there were fine shades of understanding

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between them, that needed no words. Theirs was a true oneness of spirit.

The one great and poignant sorrow of Ashton's life had been her death, which happened two years before his marriage. She had given her son the fine inheritance of a courteous mind, and a human sympathy, so broad that it knew no confines.

He had become philosopher, thinker, almost ascetic, when the beautiful Roberta had so upset his poise. His passion for her, so swift and consuming, was a total surprise to him, overwhelming in its consequences.

It made of him an irresistible lover. His ardour and his perfect breeding had satisfied two needs in Roberta's nature. She was still a girl when she married him, at twenty-two, a little bewildered by his courtship.

In the years that followed he never loved her less. He assayed her nature, as the miner does his gold dust. The pure metal he treasured, and from the alloy he courteously looked away.

He came to know that she had known for her background traditions very different from those of his mother, and that her values were consequently often puzzling. He learned that

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he did not fill her imagination as she did his, and while her incurable coquetry troubled him, he did not permit himself to judge her for it. It was something he could not understand, possibly a trait due to her American birth and training—he had noticed it in other American women. It was a wound in his heart always, but he never let a hint of it pass his lips or even creep into his eyes.

It was, then, a special anxiety that had broken his reticence in the matter of Captain O'Toole, and his too obvious admiration. Sir Ashton had an apperception of a certain shadow of distrust which, to his sixth sense, began to settle about Captain O'Toole, as indistinguishable as a colour spectrum, as indefinable as an aura.

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CHAPTER III

LADY BOBS warned Captain O'Toole that they were overplaying the comedy of love, since people were talking about it, and they agreed to let their "affair" drop into the background,—planning their "casual" meetings more carefully. It interfered somewhat with their work, not to see each other daily, but it was only one of the many and growing difficulties which beset their path.

It so happened that Lady Trask encountered Lord Kendrick several times, quite by accident, during these days which followed his visit to them. On each occasion they spoke to each other a language shorn of trivialities. Lady Bobs felt no voluntary response in him, but rather an instinctive one. She was, as she had said, of his kind.

He fired her imagination completely, and the thought of him began to dominate her mind. She wanted to break down his reserves, to penetrate his mystery, to see him surge to the full tide of himself.

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She began to deliberately plan to see him. It was easy to inform herself of his probable whereabouts, so long as he stayed in London. She learned what an exhausting proportion of his waking hours he spent in the War Office. He allowed himself no relaxation. Once she met him on the street and he walked with her a little way. She urged him to go away and weed geranium beds.

"Cannot be done."

"The life you lead will kill you."

"Why not? That's not the worst that may come to a soldier. You cannot get an army of five million men, out of peaceful England, without effort."

"Come with us to Surrey for the week-end, or ask us to come with you."

"You want to see my place?"

"Yes."

"I'll try to manage it. Can you come on short notice?"

"Give me ten minutes."

"Good, no foolishness about you."

"Oh, yes, there is—much," she replied.

To her surprise and deep satisfaction he summoned them on Saturday and drove them out himself.

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"It will be dull for you. I've asked no one else," he explained to Lady Bobs.

"I like you better when you assure me that I am incidental—a side issue to your war talk with Ashton."

"Women have to be side issues in war time."

"What pleasant old-fashioned talk is this?" inquired Sir Ashton. "Women are as important as men in this war."

"They only talk more during this war. They have always carried on the civil life while men fight."

"But civil life has never been so complicated as it is now, Kendrick. This war could not have been fought without our women."

"You cannot eliminate us from your universe, Lord of Creation. We're just as essential as you are," laughed Roberta.

"Hm—" said he, unconvinced.

Lord Kendrick's country place was one of his hobbies. He frankly delighted in it, as he did in his geranium beds. Lady Bobs thought that his house expressed him, in its simple, almost military, uprightness, no soft effeminate trifles here, but always a fine sense of values. The things he had about him were choice.

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They sat long after dinner, talking. Lord Kendrick was at his ease and at his best, as host. He liked Ashton Trask, and his eyes were often upon his beautiful wife. He told of some of his experiences in Egypt. He piled up Arabian Nights adventures for their delight, as simply as one tells fairy tales to children. In spite of his modesty, Lady Bobs saw always the dominant central figure, moulding events to his purpose. He was the hero of her thoughts, not this gracious host.

The next day he showed them his gardens. While Lady Bobs wandered there, her husband and their host talked over their many joint problems. At sunset they motored back to town, and for the first time in many weeks Lady Bobs felt at peace. Lord Kendrick drove the car and she sat beside him. She liked to turn and look at him, straight and concentrated on the task in hand. The road was wet from rain and he gave his full attention to the car and not to her. But she did not mind.

It seemed to occur to him finally that he was a neglectful host.

"I'm not much of a cavalier," said he.

"I prefer the roundhead!" she retorted and was happy at his laugh.

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When he left them at their door, she felt that these two days marked a new era, they were friends now.

That night she went over every word, every look they had exchanged, like a school girl. Her heart beat at the memory of his smile, even while she told herself that this was folly.

She induced Ashton to ask Lord Kendrick to dinner once or twice, in the days that followed, and he came. She knew that he went nowhere else and she tried to find in that fact something for her growing madness to feed upon.

The nights when he came she spent hours on her toilet. She asked no other women guests, although Cecily and the Duchess berated her for it. She guarded her tongue because she knew he disliked chatter. She called up every resource she had into battle line, for deep in her heart she knew that this man stirred her as she had never been stirred before—that life could hold nothing for her so wonderful as his capitulation.

She looked in vain for signs of special interest on his part. He looked at her, he listened to her, once in a while he laughed at her, but there was no lingering touch of hands, no

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caress of the eyes to treasure. She was not even sure that he was sufficiently aroused to protect himself against her.

Into this growing absorption came the sharp and constant rap for attention from Them. They grew greedy of news, and exacting. Sudden and exhausting hot weather descended upon London, and Lady Bobs began to show the terrific strain she was living under. Ashton begged her to move into the country but she dared not, lest Königstrasse order her back to town.

"Really, Bobs, you may not care about your health, but haven't you any vanity?" demanded Lady Cecily, who spent an occasional day in town.

"Am I as bad as that?"

"You are. You look fifty—a haggard fifty."

"Cecily, you brute!"

"Is anything the matter, old dear?"

"Only that 'the world is out of joint.'"

"But you weren't 'sent to make it right.' It's out of joint for all of us, but I don't let that interfere with my facial massage."

Roberta smiled at her. Cecily seemed like a child, laughing in a tornado, while the great

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forces were swinging her, Roberta, in ever widening circles.

"Come back with me, Bobs, and spend a week in bed. I'll let you alone."

"I cannot, dear."

"But what is there to keep you in this furnace?"

"I keep busy."

"We work in the country, too. Red Cross and knitting and the rest of it. We're not abandoning England."

"I feel that I must stay on a little longer. Later I will come, if you will have me, and collapse upon your hospitality."

Lady Cecily was obliged to abandon her, but she telephoned Ashton her opinion that Roberta looked a wreck. She passed on her anxiety to the Duchess of Wrowe, her neighbour in the country, and she, too, made a visit to Roberta Trask.

"I've come to take you home with me," she announced.

"Cecily told you I looked a fright?"

"She did."

"She's a cat! She ought to know that the news that you've lost your looks runs faster

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than the news that you've lost your morals," protested Lady Bobs.

"You can't hide from me behind epigrams, my dear. I'm an old woman and I've gone through nearly everything. I know that people only look as you do when it's a sickness of the mind. Why not let an old friend share her experience and donate her wisdom?"

"Thank you, dear Duchess," said Roberta, really touched. "It's only the cosmic sickness, and the heat, I do assure you. I will run away soon. You and Cecily must not worry about me."

The Duchess shook her head, and patted Lady Bobs' cold hand.

"How's the amusing Irishman?"

"Larry? The heat rather melts his wit, I'm afraid."

"He's still in London?"

"Yes."

"Very long leave, isn't it?"

"It seems to be."

"Too bad we can't have only the dull people sacrificed in the war, and start the new world with the witty ones," said the old woman.

"Wouldn't a uniformly witty world be dull, Duchess?" objected Roberta.

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So she kept up her guard until her visitor left, but when she was gone she acknowledged to herself how she wished they would let her alone. Larry's phrase "The path to destruction" was often in her mind these days. If her feet were being whirled down that path, she must not drag her friends with her, if she could help it.

She sat in the half darkened drawing-room, where the Duchess had left her, her hands clasped over her eyes. She did not notice Brooks' entrance, nor grasp his announcement. It was only when she looked up and saw Lord Kendrick standing before her that she came to herself. She did not rise, nor apologise for the attitude of dejection in which he had surprised her. A deep flush crept up over her pale face and dyed her neck, that was all.

"Are you ill?" he asked, without greeting.

"My mind is ill."

"What ails it?"

She made no reply for several seconds.

"What do you conceive to be the highest human loyalty?"

"A man's loyalty to his country," he answered promptly.

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"Deeper than his duty to his wife—to his mother?"

"His country is his mother."

"You'd have him sacrifice his mother to his country?"

"If need be—yes."

Another silence came upon them, and again she broke it.

"What is the matter with the world, Lord Kendrick?"

"Stupidity. Humans always pay for it with blood and tears."

"Are you sorry for them, when they pay?"

"Not very. There is no law requiring stupidity, you know."

He wandered across the room, and his voice came out of the shadows like that of an implacable Fate.

"You're like the God of the old testament—a pitiless god of vengeance. Your name is Baal."

"Do you prefer a sentimental God, weeping over Israel?"

She closed her eyes and made no answer. Her heart beat so loud she feared he would hear it. She noted his quick step, now here now there, in the room. He was perturbed.

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He had come to her of his own accord. If she could know one moment of his love, then let his god of vengeance strike! So absorbed was she in her own imaginings that his voice startled her out of the shadows.

"I came for a special reason."

"Of course."

"I am sailing at dawn——"

"For France?"

He ignored the question.

"It so happened that the last casualty list came to my hands, and I saw a name that I knew would hurt you. I came to tell you——"

"Yes?"

"It was Carter, the young American. They downed him, after a brilliant fight on his part. He got his enemy, but he lost his life doing it."

He waited and she groped in her mind for something to say, because he expected it of her.

"Teddy—Teddy Carter," she repeated stupidly.

"Yes."

"Poor Teddy! He felt this would be his last flight," she said.

"He came to save me pain, he came to save me pain." Her mind beat it over triumph-

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antly. She forgot Teddy's death in the happiness that swept over her.

"Is that all you have to say?" he demanded.

He stood over her now, and she looked at him.

"What do you want me to say?"

"This boy loved you. He wore the fact on his face for every one to see——"

"Poor Teddy!"

Why didn't he let her alone? Why did he pump her mind for words about Teddy Carter?

"*Poor Teddy,*" he repeated. "That's a fine epitaph for a good soldier from the woman he loved."

"Why do you bother about him so? I did not want him to love me—I did not love him."

"That needs no saying," scornfully.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Your kind never knows love."

If he had looked at her he might have seen the danger signals, but he did not; he went on:

"You're all alike, vain, empty-headed peacocks, using men for your purposes——"

She laughed at that, with a sound that stopped him.

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"A lecture on passion from a human machine," she taunted him.

"I've had no time for emotion, but I'm no machine. When my woman comes, if she does come, I'll love her as——"

"You need not tell me how you'll love her—I know! It will be like a hurricane that will toss you hither and thither, sweeping everything before it. It will lay waste forests and mountain tops. It will be like fire that sears; like thirst in the desert. It will be a scourge, and a blinding light, and a glory!"

She stood before him now, trembling with the emotion that shook her.

"How do you know?"

"Because I am your woman, and I love as you love!"

"Good God!" he muttered and turned away from her swiftly.

She waited, and he came back at last.

"You are very beautiful and very terrible," he said slowly. "You've played at love all your life. You've pinned it, like a ribbon, on this lapel and on that. I know your kind, battening on the love and admiration of men, giving nothing in return. If this passion you

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have played with has turned on you, it is only justice."

Lady Trask was like an avenging goddess. She surcharged the air about her with her fury.

"You—you pitiless——" she cried, incoherent with passion.

"I have pity for one person only, for my good friend Ashton Trask, whose honour is in the hands of a wanton woman," he said, and turned and left her swiftly.

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CHAPTER IV

AFTER a while Brooks came into the room and aroused her.

"I beg pardon, Lady Trask, I thought you'd gone," he stammered, staring at her ravaged face.

She passed him without any answer. She dragged herself to her own rooms and walked back and forth, back and forth, in agony. She was sick from head to foot with fury and humiliation. She felt that her life force, which should have swept on like a majestic river in its pride and beauty, had been dammed within her, a fetid stream now, to poison and destroy.

What were these forces that were sweeping her? Having flung from her one established loyalty, was she thereby cast loose from all loyalty? Where was her judgment, that she had let her own desires so blind her? How could she have failed to see that the time to speak had not come?

For a long time she kept her mind running, so that she might not remember what he had

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said to her, how he had despised her. But the words began to pour back upon her brain, like molten lava. "Battening on the love and admiration of men, giving nothing in return . . . a wanton woman . . . a wanton woman. . . ."

She caught sight of her own face as she swept by a mirror, and she stopped to stare at herself. Her face was swollen and out of shape. She looked like a mad woman.

"Wanton woman . . . wanton woman. . . ."

What was she to do, living in a world with this man who had insulted and humiliated her? She could not endure that, she would destroy herself rather than meet his eyes again. It would be hard on Ashton, but he was better without her, since "his honour was in the hands of a wanton woman." If only she had had the power to strike Kendrick dead, as he stood there, condemning her, like God!

Another thought of death lifted its head, like a serpent in her mind. She turned away from it, shuddering, but it swayed there, twisting and turning to focus her attention.

Suddenly Ashton stood in her sitting-room door and spoke to her. His pleasant, usual

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voice called her away from the ugliness that threatened her.

"This is the night I dine at the club, dear. What are you doing with yourself?" he asked her.

"I have a headache. I shall dine up here and go to bed."

"Oh, I'm sorry," he said, coming to bend over her, where she sat, deliberately turning her face away from the light. He touched her hair with his lips, then her cheek. She held herself perfectly rigid, not to scream. "Bobs, there is bad news about young Carter," he added gently.

"Yes, I know."

"You saw the list?" surprised.

"Lord—Kendrick came to tell me."

"Oh, that was kind of him. Did he tell you he was leaving in the morning?"

"Yes, on the Lancashire."

"No, the Hartshire," he corrected mechanically. "My dear, I should not have said that!" he added quickly. "Forget it, please. What made you think it was the Lancashire?" curiously.

"I must have heard some one say she was sailing——"

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"Did Kendrick tell you the name of the ship?"

"No. I jumped at the conclusion, I suppose. Does it matter?" wearily.

"Your poor head! Can't I do anything for you?"

"No, thanks. I need quiet and some sleep."

"You must go to the country, Roberta, really——"

"All right."

He kissed her cheek.

"Go to bed, old dear. I won't disturb you again."

He went out, closing her door gently. She sat still turning her eyes in upon herself again. The serpent which had lifted its head was still there. It held her with its cold eyes—it was golden and beautiful.

Her maid came to ask her about dinner. She sent her away, saying she wanted no food. Later she heard Ashton tap lightly at her door. She made no answer, so he tip-toed off to keep his engagement.

Her mind seemed to be working independently of her, now. She took up her telephone and called Captain O'Toole. She knew in advance that he would answer it himself. She

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urged him to come to her at once. He demurred about the wisdom of it, but at her insistence he finally agreed. She bathed her face, smoothed her hair, and sat waiting until he was announced.

"I told Captain O'Toole I thought you were out, Lady Trask," said Brooks.

"I am to any one else. I will see Captain O'Toole for a few moments. When he goes, Brooks, put out the lights."

"Very well, Madam."

When she came into the room, Larry took her hand, and stared at her.

"Lady Bobs, ye beautiful Bobs!"

"Evening, Larry."

"How is it ye're all lee alone, woman?"

"Ashton is at the club. I have a headache."

"Is it safe for ye to be seein' me here?"

"Probably not."

"Another assignment?"

"Yes."

"Difficult?"

"Yes."

"Ye want my help?"

"I've got the facts."

"Good for ye, ye're a wonder, Lady Bobs."

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"I've never done Them any service equal to this," she said, dry lipped.

He looked at her tense face and burning eyes.

"What is it They're askin' av ye, Mavourneen?" he asked softly.

"The name of the ship upon which Kendrick sails at dawn."

"God!" he exclaimed. "Ye've got it?"

She nodded.

"He is your friend and Ashton's. This is a terrible thing They're askin' av ye, now!"

Still she did not speak, and he continued his scrutiny of her storm-swept face.

"Lady Bobs, ye're not lovin' the man!"

"No." She forced her lips to form that one word, and hold back the stream of hate that threatened to follow it.

"Ye are a wonderful woman, Lady Bobs." He bent his ear to her lips. "Now, tell me the name of the ship."

"The Hartshire, sailing at dawn," the obedient lips repeated.

He lifted her two hands and pressed his lips to their palms.

"By God, Bobs, I adore you!"

"Don't!" she said sharply. "Good night."

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"Ye've done the greatest service yet, in the history of the war. Ye're a great patriot, Roberta Trask."

He hurried away, and Lady Trask went to lie upon her bed and watch for dawn.

The next day she went from one thing to the next feverishly. She met Mildred Downer, and asked her to come to dinner, laughingly assuring her that Captain O'Toole would not be there. Lady Cecily called up in the afternoon, saying that she had come to town on an errand and would stay the night, if Bobs would put her up. Lady Trask agreed enthusiastically. Anything to fill up the endless horror of this day.

She telephoned Ashton to get some tickets to a comic play, and find some men to join them at dinner. His voice was calm, there was evidently no news yet. She kept herself occupied, her mind locked tight, until it was time to dress. She startled her maid during that process by laughing suddenly. It struck her as funny that she should be giving such attention to her toilet. She stopped as suddenly as she began, because she knew that if she started she would never stop, she would laugh herself to death, or to sheer madness.

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When her guests arrived she scarcely noted what men these were whom Ashton had obligingly provided. They were Cecily and Mildred Downer's concern. Lady Bobs, however, was never so the centre of the party. She was more beautiful than any of them had ever known her to be, and her spirits were wilder. She was witty, brilliant, electrical.

"What's happened to Bobs, Ashton?" Cecily asked him curiously.

"She is wonderful, isn't she?"

"But it's feverish, it isn't normal. The woman is ill. She's like a guttering torch."

"A blaze, I should say."

"The torch is brightest before it goes out," she warned him.

"She's a bit overdone, I think. She promised me last night to go to the country."

"Thank Heaven," she exclaimed with such relief, that he patted her hand affectionately.

"Good old Cecily."

"Is Lady Trask always like this?" asked her neighbour of Mildred Downer. "I never saw or heard anything like her."

"She is marvellous, isn't she?" answered the girl, who scarcely took her eyes off Lady Bobs' glowing face.

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The comic play went on and on. When there was laughter, Lady Trask laughed, but she heard not one word of that silly farce. In the intermissions she took up her leadership, keeping them all in a ripple of laughter.

Later Ashton proposed supper and they went off to the Savoy. There were several parties of people they knew, so many people were kept in town late by war work. The men from nearby tables visited them. All eyes were on Lady Bobs to-night.

Half way through supper the major-domo of the dining-room bent over Sir Ashton's shoulder and gave him a message. Trask apologised to his guests and went out hastily. Lady Bobs talked on. Across the room she caught the eye of Captain Larry O'Toole, who nodded and smiled.

When Sir Ashton came back they all saw that something serious had happened. His face was white, the line between his eyes deep with suffering.

"There is bad news for England, my friends. Terrible news," he said in a low tone, as he took his seat. "The warship Hartshire has been torpedoed or sunk by submarine, off a nearby coast——"

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"Many lost on her?" asked one of the men.

"They think the biggest man in England was lost on her," replied Ashton, "Lord Kendrick."

"No," came the breathless chorus. Lady Bobs gave a sort of exclamation, which no one noticed in the excitement.

"But that man is necessary to us, he cannot be dead!" cried Mildred Downer.

"There is one chance in a thousand that he was picked up, but the crew is reported lost."

"It isn't believable!" said Lady Cecily. "When did you see him last, Ashton?"

"Several days ago. But Roberta saw him yesterday."

They all looked at her.

"Did he tell you he was going to France?" asked Mildred.

"He told me he was leaving England."

"Was it chance, or did the Huns know he was on that ship?" Mildred asked Ashton.

"We'll never know," he answered.

"But how could they know the name of the ship?" said Cecily. "It must have been an absolute secret, so much depended on it. How could any one have found out, Ashton?"

"They could not unless some one in the War

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Office told," said Sir Ashton, and all at once his eyes rushed to Roberta. She met them steadily, but Mildred Downer, in a flash of intuition, guessed the truth. Lady Trask had known the ship Kendrick sailed on, because Sir Ashton had told her! Mildred's glance slid across the room to Captain O'Toole, who was apparently enjoying his supper.

"Let's go home—this is awful!" said Lady Cecily.

They rose and made their way toward the door. On the way they passed the table where Larry O'Toole sat, and he rose to intercept them, and say good evening. He was in high spirits. He walked with them toward the foyer, until he had a chance to catch Lady Bobs' attention. He lifted his eyebrows and she nodded.

"Congratulations," he said to her with a smile.

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PART THREE

CHAPTER I

MILDRED DOWNER spent a perfectly sleepless night after the supper at the Savoy, where the news of the sinking of the Hartshire was announced, and the ugly certainty had come to her that Roberta Trask knew in advance the name of the ship on which Lord Kendrick went down.

At first she tried to dismiss the whole thing from her mind. It was not unnatural that Sir Ashton should have told her the fact, by accident, or in confidence. It had no bearing on the ultimate tragedy. Never for an instant did any doubt of Lady Trask's loyalty enter her head.

But in regard to Lady Trask's intimate friend, Captain O'Toole, she had an accumulation of impressions, not yet sufficiently definite to be called suspicions.

She had begun by hating O'Toole for personal reasons. An ugly woman, unused to any

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amorous attentions from young men, she had mistaken the handsome Captain's attempt *pour passer le temps* at a dull house party, as a genuine infatuation. Her hurt pride and fury at him when she learned the truth were sufficient groundwork for her hate. In her queer way she cherished a deep admiring devotion for Lady Trask. Her beauty, her fascinations, her quick wit, these were the supreme gifts to the mind of plain Mildred Downer. It disgusted her to have her ideal waste time with Larry O'Toole. It was partly in the spirit of wishing to save her friend future chagrin that she began her investigations of Larry.

She had been characteristically thorough in her efforts. She made inquiries about him in the Irish town where he was born. She followed his record in school and college. She found no disgraceful facts about the handsome Celt, but certain indications of a happy-go-lucky laxity kept her on the trail, until she discovered the mistress in London. This seemed to her sufficient evidence to convince Lady Trask of his undesirability. She was shocked at the apparent indifference of her idol to this revelation.

It was a little after this interview with Lady

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Trask that Mildred came upon the fact of O'Toole's connection with the Sinn Feiners. The Casement execution had apparently put an end for the time being to Irish-German intrigue, but the discovery of this revolutionary alliance of his threw some light, she thought, on one or two coincidences, which had come to Miss Downer's attention. There was the matter of the zig-zag British advance, which Sir Ashton had mentioned at his own luncheon table, and which was in the hands of the enemy next day.

What if Lady Trask had been indiscreet in regard to the name of Kendrick's ship, in the presence of her admirer? Would it be possible that O'Toole could have used information acquired that way?

She went over it, all night long, in an agony of distrust and terror. Hers was a consuming devotion to England and its cause. She would not hesitate one second to sacrifice Captain O'Toole, if the good of England required it. But what about Lady Trask? Suppose O'Toole were a spy, and that it could be proved that he learned his facts from Lady Trask, who in turn obtained them from Sir Ashton, a member of the War Cabinet! It would mean ruin

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and disgrace for both her friends. Surely England could not ask that of her!

But as if the Fates conspired to make her go ahead on this path of discovery, two nights later, the Duchess of Wrowe came up to town and opened her house for a distinguished French general, who was in London on diplomatic business. She heard, during the evening, O'Toole discussing with the guest of honour the matter of the general direction of the allied forces. There was some argument, into which several of the men were drawn, and some facts were dropped in regard to future plans. It was all general enough, but the stand which England and France would take in the matter was fairly well indicated, if not stated.

Somewhat later in the evening, she was standing in the supper room with a dull companion, when O'Toole joined Lady Trask, standing nearby. He spoke to her in a casual tone, but Mildred's ears, sharpened by suspicion, listened.

"Did you get it?" inquired the Captain.

"No."

"But you must," forcibly.

Lady Trask laughed.

"Any plans?"

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"Not yet."

O'Toole was summoned by the Duchess, and Mildred's partner turned an astonished face to her sudden remark:

"But it isn't possible!"

"I assure you it is," said he, thinking she challenged him. He stared at her almost hysterical laughter.

Two days later it became evident that Germany knew the attitude of England and France in regard to the general direction of the allied forces. Mildred Downer assured herself that it was coincidence, but the affair tormented her so that she could neither eat nor sleep.

Finally in desperation she went to an old friend of the family, a man of authority and position in public affairs. She poured out to him the whole miserable story of her suspicions. She did not even spare herself the confession of why she began to hate Captain O'Toole. Her friend listened attentively, and asked some questions about Lady Trask. Mildred repeatedly stated her belief in Lady Trask. She was a coquette, flattered by the attentions of a witty rogue.

She explained how she had tried to keep the

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affair to herself because of her affection for Sir Ashton and Lady Trask. She was afraid that disgrace for O'Toole might incriminate them. But when she thought of the sacrifices that were being made for England, she thought that maybe this one was demanded of her. Was there some way that the Irishman could be watched, without drawing the Trasks into it?

"You say you warned her that the man was a libertine?"

"Yes."

"Does Trask make no objection to the fellow?"

"I don't know."

"Suppose I put a secret service man on him, and if I get confirmation of your suspicions, warn Trask that Lady Trask is—indiscreet."

"Yes, that would be a good way to manage it. Would my name have to be used?" she asked anxiously.

"I should think not—not unless something develops where we would need your testimony."

"It has been a relief to talk to you."

"You have done a plucky and a patriotic

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thing, Mildred. England may have cause to thank you for a real service."

"I'd do anything to help."

"I know that. Thank you for coming to me. You may be sure that we will shield the Trasks in every possible way."

She left his office relieved of responsibility but not of anxiety and foreboding. If it should be her duty to bring sorrow and disgrace to Lady Bobs!

These were days of hectic activity for Lady Trask. The days she managed somehow, but the nights could not be escaped. Surrender to sleep meant visions of slowly heaving waves, and drowning men. . . . Sir Ashton finally carried her off to the country, on the plea that he needed rest. She went willingly enough. It seemed to make no difference to her, and he wondered why she had persisted in remaining in town.

They spent a week together, mostly out of doors. They rode and golfed. Lady Bobs tried to garden, but there was a ghost in the garden now, who always stood behind her, or worked beside her. It had brown deft fingers which patted down the earth. Even Hughie's prattle and old Mallory's song could not drive

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him away. So that happy refuge was taken from her. She no longer set foot on Mallory's well-trimmed paths.

"Ye notice how Lady Trask never digs no more in yer garden, Mallory?" his wife inquired.

"Ladies gets whimsies for work. Gardenin' ain't no bank holiday," was his answer.

"She ain't the same wommun. I wunder sometimes does Sir Ashton see it like I see it."

"He sees what is under his nose, don't ye fret."

Sir Ashton, in fact, thought Roberta very nervous and over-tired. He discouraged their having any guests and urged her to relax and rest. She smiled at that. She was ever on the alert for orders from Them. The difficulties and dangers of transmission were greater here in the country. She was planning how to meet Sir Ashton's sure objections, and go back to town with him, when he went.

Lady Cecily arrived one day, bringing two men. Ashton took charge of one of them. He made no impression on Lady Bobs although he told her he was an old friend of Mildred Downer, and had heard much from her of Lady Trask's charms. The other man was a Captain

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Ivan Insull. He was a big, magnificently proportioned young man, with laughing blue eyes, and abounding vitality.

"Captain Insull gave me no peace, until I brought him here, Bobs. There are men who worry along for a day with my poor charms, but not the Captain," complained Cecily.

"What can a man say to that?" he asked, with his big boy smile.

"If you only spare us the 'How happy would I be' couplet," suggested Bobs.

"You are spared," he assured her.

"And don't bother about calling us the horns of your dilemma——"

"Ladies, you have elected me the King of Bromidia! Accept in return the neighbouring provinces of Sulphitia."

They laughed at his nonsense, and Lady Cecily went to speak to old Mallory.

"Why did you want to come and see me?" inquired Roberta idly.

"Because you are the most beautiful person I have ever seen. You were pointed out to me in London."

"That is manna from Heaven to a tired woman feeling middle-agish."

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"I'm an antidote for that feeling. Do try me," he urged her.

"My case would demand your constant attention," she warned him.

"Your case would get it," he replied with decision.

"Are you an Englishman?" she asked.

"Canadian."

"Ah, yes, that's it."

"May I ask what is that, that's it?"

"Hm—you've got the look of a man whose eyes have swept broad spaces. I knew you were no dweller in cities."

"I'm a rover—no dweller long in any place. Like Satan 'I walk up and down the earth.' From Singapore to London is a step."

"You wear seven league boots, then. That's who you are, of course. The Giant in the Fairy Tale."

He laughed at that.

"That's me. You haven't any prejudice against giants?" anxiously.

"Not if they make me laugh, and play, and believe in fairies."

"Oh, we do!" he assured her. "You may be the haughty Princess Irmingarde, and I will

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show you what a handy thing is a pocket giant."

"I think that must be what I need."

"I'm yours," he cried, with a low bow.

"Good, you are getting on!" commented Lady Cecily, joining them. "What are you going to do with the great creature, Bobs?"

"She's going to play with me," he boasted.

"Don't you ever go off to war and get shot," said Cecily, with eyes suddenly misted. "We do so need big boys who can laugh in England!"

So it was that Captain Insull came in to Lady Bobs' circle.

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CHAPTER II

LADY BOBS was finally forced to make Lady Cecily her long deferred visit. They met in town and Lady Harrison cornered her.

"Bobs, have you taken a dislike to me, or to the place?"

"Cecily, you foolish one! When do you want me?"

"When will you come?"

"My dear, I was never such poor company, to myself or to my friends."

"I'll risk you. Want to be alone, or shall we import some amusement?"

"For instance?"

"Some pleasant men—not husbands," laughed Cecily.

"Are you dispensing with husbands entirely?"

"Oh, no. We'll have them for week-ends. They can golf together—but they'll be no use to us. We can take Cecil and Ivan——"

"Cecil is lily-fingered poet, but who is Ivan?" inquired Roberta.

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"He'll tell me to give up—coffee."

"I'll prescribe for you. Give up—to-morrow."

"You mean——?"

"To-day is enough."

"*La Cigale et La Fourmi?*" she reminded him.

"Ah, yes, but give me *La Cigale*. She has her perfect day of sun and love, and then she goes out. That's my way. Isn't it yours?"

"Make me laugh, Pocket Giant, don't make me philosophise," she begged him.

"I wish I could make you forget," he said gently.

"Forget what?"

"The thing that drives you so."

They were sitting on the veranda, and he went to get a ukulele, and came to sit beside her. He sang her some aching Hawaiian songs, and then he broke off and made her laugh with an imitation of a Chinese boy, trying to sing a Chinese song, with one string of the instrument for accompaniment. These strange noises brought Lady Cecily and Languedoc to the spot.

"I have an inspiration," said Cecily. "Let's have a garden party and a concert for the ben-

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efit of convalescent Tommies. Basil could recite his poems, Ivan could sing, and I could provide the garden and the food."

"Must we?" sighed Captain Insull. "We've been so happy here in our quiet way. Why let the rude world in?"

"The rude world must pay well to get in," his hostess replied.

"Do vote against it, Lovely Lady Irmingarde!" Ivan begged Roberta.

"It is no use. I can see the idea growing like a plant, in Cecily's mind," she laughed, indicating Cecily's absorbed expression.

"We could get down some celebrities from London, and exhibit the Duchess of Wrowe," Cecily said.

"For a fee?" inquired Languedoc.

"They still pay to see a Duchess," she retorted.

"Are husbands to be exhibited, too?" asked Insull.

"Don't be cynical. What do you say to Saturday?"

"The day does not matter, it's the audience. Do you expect me to read my poems to the village green grocer on a half holiday?"

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"I do. It's part of your 'bit,'" cried Lady Cecily.

"Yes, and the green grocer's bit, too. He may stand under gunfire, but will he stand under Languedoc's poetry?"

"Hush, Saul, or I'll brain thee with a pebble," said the poet sweetly.

Roberta was right, the idea was fixed in Cecily's mind, and she marched them all toward her goal. Cards and tickets were sent out broadcast; people were asked down from London by telegram and telephone.

When she made out a programme for the two performers Basil protested.

"You treat us like two trained bears with rings in our noses."

"I haven't time to pet you now, but later my appreciation will embarrass you," she promised.

The day before the party they rifled the gardens and woods for decorations. They decided on the spots where the refreshments were to grow. They were as merry as youngsters preparing for a picnic.

"Are the village children to dance on the green?" asked Insull of Cecily.

"I had not thought of it."

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"They always do, in song and story."

"Do they? You and Roberta go and collect the village children, and engage them for tomorrow."

"No sooner said than done," cried Ivan, going after Lady Bobs. "Lovely Lady Irmingarde, we are ordered to the village to stage the Pied Piper," he explained.

They boarded Cecily's runabout, which Captain Insull drove, and started for the village. Ivan sang lustily, as they dashed along the country road. Bobs lay back relaxed, almost content. He threw her a smile, now and then.

"Comfy?" he asked.

"Hm. Sing that again."

So he sang it again.

The day of the lawn fête was a dispensation in weather. Everybody came from far and near, and Lady Cecily was so pleased, that Languedoc said to her:

"Madam, your triumph is offensive!"

The audience was as kind as the weather. They applauded Languedoc's poems politely, but they encored Captain Insull's songs until he was as hoarse as a tired crow. The children

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danced on the lawn, led by Lady Bobs and Insull, and every one was in high spirits.

The Duchess of Wrowe turned to Ashton after the children's games. Insull was bending over Roberta, who smiled up at him. The man's devotion was in his face, in the very posture of his body as he leaned toward her.

"Ashton, do make that girl of yours behave herself. That is not a proper tableau for a mixed, public affair like this. Who is Captain Insull?"

Sir Ashton shrugged his shoulders.

"He seems an agreeable fellow."

"Too agreeable by far, I should say. O'Toole, Lord Kendrick, Captain Insull—Roberta's list grows too long."

"My dear old friend, forgive me if I say that I cannot discuss Roberta's friends or her conduct with any one."

"Ashton, you're a fool!" snapped the old woman. "Why don't you make her love you so that she will give you her full attention?"

"I think the verb 'make' is never conjugated with the verb 'to love,' " he smiled at her.

Captain O'Toole stopped to say a word to them. He caught Roberta's eye and made a gesture which she knew. She paid no attention

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to it, so shortly he sauntered over and joined her. With a smile he held out his hand, and when she put her own in it she felt a tightly folded paper against her palm. She presented O'Toole to Captain Insull, and, after a few bantering words, the Irishman went on.

"Don't let him give you notes," said Insull.

"Why not?" she challenged him.

"He won't do. He's a second rater."

"Men never like him. He's an old pal of mine, and he has a perfect right to slip me billets-doux. Come along and be pretty to the Duchess."

"I prefer to stay with you. Why should I be pretty to an old grenadier with a black moustache?"

"Because you're such a kind pocket giant that you will like to give the grenadier a treat."

But Cecily arrived at the moment and ordered Insull to sing again, so Lady Bobs joined the Duchess and Ashton.

"Roberta, who is the handsome officer?"

"Captain Ivan Insull is his name."

"He's in love with you."

"Is he?"

"I tell Ashton he ought to put a stop to your philandering."

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Lady Trask looked at her husband.

"Why don't you?" she inquired.

He smiled at her, without reply.

"Irishman!" called the Duchess. "Take me to Cecily. I'm tired and I'm going home. Roberta, behave yourself."

"You don't mind her, dear? She's getting old and cranky."

"I wasn't thinking of her. Why don't you stop me, Ashton?"

"I have, I hope, never stopped anybody from doing anything that their natures or their pleasures dictated," he remarked.

"I wish I were the kind of wife you ought to have, Ashton!" she said with sudden feeling.

"Dearest, you are the only wife for me to have."

"How you do stand by!"

"You'll find me standing by, as long as we two are on this planet," he smiled.

He drew her hand through his arm, and led her toward the house.

"I wish I could make you as happy as you make me," he added with a sigh.

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CHAPTER III

LADY BOBS' "mission" brought her back to town. The remark of Captain Insull about notes from O'Toole recurred to her once or twice, but when she recalled his bland expression, she was sure it was a chance shot. At worst he would think Larry in love with her. They must be more careful, however. They had thought themselves very expert in this exchange business. There must have been something in action or expression which had caught the attention of Captain Insull.

She found herself refreshed by the normal healthy days spent at the Harrisons'. Her dread moment of reckoning seemed postponed, and life regained some of its savour. Ashton thought her much improved. He so enjoyed her society in his enforced stay in London, that he made no more protest to her remaining in town.

Captain Insull managed to see her every day. They walked or motored, or lunched or took tea together, and Lady Bobs leaned on his high spirits as on a crutch. He had an uncanny

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way of guessing her mood or her state of mind before she spoke, and with a sort of boyish tenderness he set himself to make her forget everything except the moment in hand, with its golden opportunities.

She gave his devotion little thought, save that it comforted her. She was fond of him as she might have been of a brother. She often longed to open her heart to him, to tell him about the tangled web she was caught in. She was so sure of his understanding and his help.

About this time the masters over sea began to make many and arduous demands upon her. Planning ways to get the required information, manipulating this friend and that, taking care to cover her tracks always, such were the devious trails along which she forced her mind. The service she had entered upon, in a moment of high feeling, had closed her in with prison bars. She no longer obeyed Them gladly—she obeyed because she must.

Heinrich Brück came no more in answer to her appeals for help. He sent no message of courage to sustain her dreams. Duty and Destruction were the ball and chain that clanked behind her every step during these days. No wonder that she turned to Ivan

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Insull as a prisoner turns toward an open door.

Mildred Downer came in to see her one day in July.

"What are you doing in town?" Lady Bobs asked.

"Working from eight to six, and sometimes half the night besides, with wounded Tommies," the girl replied cheerfully.

"Good for you. You look very fit."

"Never better in my life. I have never been too busy to think before, with work that counts. It is the answer to the whole thing——"

"The answer is not so simple for all of us," sighed Lady Bobs.

"Work from now on is to be my religion. It is the only way to forget the things you want and cannot have," said Miss Downer.

"I do not need conversion," smiled Lady Bobs.

"I can't imagine you working," said the girl. "You were just made to express beauty and wealth and leisure. But why do you stay in town this hot weather?"

"Ashton has to stay. I do not mind it."

"Is Sir Ashton well?"

"Fagged, poor dear."

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"Marvellous how the men stand the strain of it."

"How about the women? I'd go to the front, to sure death, in preference to the woman-job of waiting."

"Most of us are too busy to think."

"You and I have neither husbands nor sons out there. There's time to think for mothers and wives, Mildred."

"We're all living in Hell," the girl said.

"Let's talk of something else," Lady Bobs suggested.

"Lady Cecily told me that you had a new slave. Who is Captain Insull?"

"If you can imagine all of youth, and gaiety, a splendid body and a singing voice, in one goodly person, you have Captain Insull."

"Where did you find the paragon?" demanded Mildred.

"Cecily handed him over to me, and by the way, she had him as a present from a friend of yours," said Lady Bobs, mentioning the name of Captain Insull's sponsor.

At the mention of that name a strange thing happened to Mildred Downer's expression. Her skin went dead white, her lips looked blue,

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her eyes full of terror. Then a hideous flush spread over her face and neck.

"Mildred, what is it? Are you ill?"

"It's nothing. I'm all right. Heat, I suppose."

Lady Trask rang for a glass of wine, and urged her guest to go up-stairs and lie down. But Mildred refused. She seemed anxious to get away.

When she had gone Roberta tried to recall anything in their conversation which might have upset her guest, but it seemed to her innocuous enough. She decided that it was a case of overwrought nerves and too much heat, and let it go at that.

She telephoned Insull, but he was not at his club, so she started out on an errand, defying the sun, which was hot. She had not been gone from her house more than half an hour when Captain Insull rang her bell. Brooks admitted him.

"Lady Trask went out half an hour ago, Captain Insull."

"Did she say how long she would be gone?"

"No, Captain Insull, but she was walking, so she has not gone far, I fancy. Will you wait, sir?"

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"Yes, I will wait a bit."

"Very good, sir."

Brooks led the way to the darkened drawing-room.

"Muggy day, sir. You'll find it cooler on the balcony."

"Thanks. Anything new, Brooks?"

"Captain O'Toole yesterday, sir."

"Has he been here to-day?"

"No, sir. No one but Miss Mildred Downer to-day."

"Who is on duty outside?"

"Watts, sir."

"Did he go after Lady Trask?"

"Yes, Captain Insull."

"Keep your eyes open."

"I do, sir."

The bell rang and he started to answer it.

"That may be Lady Trask now, sir."

As he left, Insull stepped out on the balcony which ran across the end of the room, overlooking a tiny square of green at the back of the house. The three French windows that led out of the room were all standing open to let in the air. Presently he heard Lady Trask's voice.

"I am at home to no one, Brooks."

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"Yes, Madam, but if you please——"

"That will do. I don't want to be interrupted," she said curtly.

He heard Brooks go, and still he did not step into the room. Then he started as she spoke to a companion.

"I tell you I've reached the end of my endurance. They are killing me by inches. I won't stand it."

"Lady Bobs, dear, it is a hot day, an' yer nerves arr all a-jangle. I know how you feel, old dear. But don't decoide annything on a day loike this. It won't do," said O'Toole's caressing voice.

"It isn't the weather, it's the whole thing. They demand more and more. They are never satisfied——"

"But ye've done wonders, Lady Bobs. They are hard taskmasters, but They know what ye've done—what a grand patriotic service ye've given Them——"

"I tell you I'm through," she said wearily.

"Where is all that fine glow ye started in with?"

"I've learned to turn and twist, to equivocate, to pump my friends, to kill—— Oh, I hate myself!"

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"What is the difference what happens to you or me, Bobs, in this foight? Ye're workin' for the spread of all that's fine in the German ideals. I'm workin' for the freedom of Ireland. What do you an' I count, I ask ye?"

"But I want my own soul back!" she cried to him.

"It's too late. You're in ut, now, I tell ye. You an' I may have sold our souls, but we're in it now, and we must stay to the end."

"I can refuse to go on. There is no evidence against me. Ashton's position would protect me——"

O'Toole laughed unpleasantly.

"My dear girl, Ashton, nor Lloyd George, nor the King, nor anybody can protect you, once you make an enemy of Königstrasse."

"I can rely on the support of the strongest men in England——" she began.

"Can you rely on me?"

"Larry, you mean——?"

There was no caress in the voice now.

"I'd sell you an' the whole British empire to get the freedom of Ireland!" he warned her.

She made a little gesture of despair, of resignation. There was no sound for a few seconds, then Lady Trask said musingly:

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"How curious that what seemed the highest, truest instinct in me for service to high ideals, should lead through degradation to destruction."

"Don't psycho-analyse, Lady Bobs. Do the job and let the devil do the rest."

There followed a discussion of the best way to get certain facts. He left her with a word of advice and warning. Presently she dragged herself out of the room.

Almost at once Brooks entered hurriedly.

"Captain Insull, are you——?"

Insull appeared.

"All right, Brooks. They did not know I was there. Announce me to Lady Trask, please. Say it is very important."

When Brooks was gone, he went to the window and made a signal, which sent a man speeding down the street. Then Insull paced the room until Lady Bobs appeared. She came presently, very pale but perfectly composed.

"Bobs," he said, taking her two hands, and speaking her name so for the first time, "my poor Bobs."

"Ivan, what is it?" she asked him.

"How much do you care for O'Toole?"

"What has happened to Larry?" tensely.

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"He is in trouble with the authorities——"

"Oh!"

"Bobs, he has been your intimate friend, your companion in public places. He is facing disgrace. Go away, dear, now at once. Go to Lady Cecily for the night, there's a good girl. We will get you on a steamer for America——" he was speaking incoherently and she stared at him.

"But why should I?"

"Because—I cannot explain it now. I beg you to go away at once."

"Why do you want me to go?"

"Because I'd sell my soul to keep you from unhappiness!"

"Dear pocket giant, I cannot go."

Sir Ashton came into the room, and after a few moments Captain Insull left. She saw that Ashton was disturbed about something.

"My dear, may I ask that Captain O'Toole be dismissed from our list?"

"Why?" dry-lipped.

"There are some ugly rumours about the gentleman. It is unfortunate that he has been here so often——"

"All right, Ashton, I will not see him again."

Brooks came to the door.

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"I am very sorry, Sir Ashton, but there are some men here, who——"

Two military officers entered the room. Sir Ashton stared at them. They were strangers to him.

"You wished to see me?" he inquired.

"I am sorry, Sir Ashton, but we have a military warrant for Lady Trask," said the elder man.

Before Sir Ashton could reply, he stepped to Roberta's side.

"Lady Roberta Trask, you are under arrest," he said quietly.

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CHAPTER IV

"WHAT is the charge?" Sir Ashton brought himself to say at last.

"Offence against the Army Act."

"Your warrant, please."

"Under a special Espionage Act, Sir Ashton, military and police authorities are given power to arrest suspicious characters without a warrant. This is our order, and the charge sheet," he added, offering Sir Ashton these documents. They were signed by General Stoten.

"We are given time to get witnesses, to prepare a defence?"

"The court martial is set for eight o'clock to-morrow night, Sir Ashton."

"I guarantee Lady Trask's appearance at the court, at the hour appointed."

"Sorry, Sir Ashton, I am under orders to arrest her. If you will come with me to General Stoten, he may parole her in your charge."

"I will speak to the General on the telephone," said Sir Ashton.

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In a few moments he summoned the officer and, after a brief conversation on his part, over the 'phone, he returned and withdrew his fellow officer.

Sir Ashton crossed swiftly to Lady Trask and put his arms about her.

"Courage, dearest, this is some monstrous mistake. We must answer this summons, but we can set it straight at once. It is, of course, because of O'Toole——"

"You have not read that——" she said, indicating the charge sheet. "Ashton, whatever comes to us, I want you to remember this, that I have been true to the deepest instinct in me."

He laid his hand on her shoulder.

"That is all I ask, dearest."

"Thank you," she said softly, and turned to go.

"I will ask our attorneys to come here at once, Roberta. There is not much time to go into this——"

"I must go to——"

Her voice trailed off weakly, without finishing the sentence. Sir Ashton went to the telephone again. He succeeded in finding Sir Andrew Stark, the senior member, at home.

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He promised to get a colleague and come to the house at once.

Presently Lady Trask's maid ran down the stairs, and called to him.

"Sir Ashton, Lady Trask is very ill, I think."

He hurried up-stairs after her, and into his wife's room. She was in bed, white as chalk, and shaking with a nervous chill. She did not open her eyes when he spoke to her.

"She will not speak to me either, she just shakes like that——" the girl exclaimed.

Ashton summoned a physician and came back to sit with Roberta, until he arrived. She looked dead—it terrified him. The doctor seemed puzzled by her condition. Ashton told him she had sustained a mental and nervous shock, that she had been overwrought all summer.

"Frequent nourishment, absolute quiet. I will send a nurse and return myself at midnight," the doctor said.

Ashton remained until the nurse came and was installed. Roberta did not open her eyes in all that time, she would not answer his questions, and yet he knew that she was not asleep.

The attorneys were announced and he went

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down to meet them. He explained the situation, and his belief that O'Toole had involved Lady Trask as an unconscious victim of his treachery.

Sir Andrew read the charge sheet aloud.

"But that is utterly impossible," cried Ashton.

"That is what we must prove," said Sir Andrew, quietly.

"But why does she have to submit to a court martial? She should have a civil trial," protested Trask.

"I had General Stoten on the wire after I talked to you. I asked about that. Captain O'Toole naturally comes before a military court, and Lady Trask is accused of being his accomplice. The authorities thought that as a court martial could be conducted with absolutely no publicity, that out of deference to you as a member of the Cabinet it should be so conducted."

"My feelings are not to be considered. The utmost justice is what I demand for Lady Trask. There is no time in twenty-four hours to prepare a defence——"

"Pardon me, Sir Ashton, there is all the time we need. If Lady Trask will help us with the

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truth, we will stay here until we go to court to-morrow night."

"But Lady Trask is ill—she cannot speak."

"Then the trial must be postponed. However, we will stay on, until all hope of her help is futile."

"You advise me not to insist upon a civil trial?"

"If Lady Trask is innocent, as we all believe her to be, is it not better that the fact should be proved before a court sitting in secret, whose proceedings are never revealed? Why should all England blaze with this scandal?"

"If you think she will get justice——"

"I do."

With a sigh Ashton acquiesced, and they began to lay their plans for the defence. Frequently Ashton went up to see Roberta, to beg her to speak to him. At midnight the doctor returned, and reported no change. All night long, down in the library, the three men worked on the case of Lady Trask.

Morning came, still she lay like a dead woman. Ashton and the attorneys decided that if at three o'clock there was no change, then Sir Andrew would appeal to General Stoten for a postponement.

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A few moments before that hour Ashton went to Lady Trask's bedside. He laid his hand gently on hers, and she opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Dear——"

"Ashton, is it time to go?"

"Not yet. Could you see Sir Andrew Stark for a little and tell him some things he must know?"

"No, I cannot see any one. I want to be alone until I go."

"But, Roberta, we must know. How can we defend you unless you help us?"

"You cannot help me, Ashton."

She closed her eyes and would not speak any more. He reported this to Sir Andrew.

"This looks serious. Could this shock have unsettled her mind?"

"I think her mind was clear."

The doctor reported at three o'clock that Lady Trask's heart was normal, her brain clear. But she would not speak.

At seven forty-five, in silence, the two attorneys and Sir Ashton and Roberta drove to the court. They were a few seconds early. The President of the court martial, General Stoten, the prosecutor and the Judge-Advocate were

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consulting together. Mildred Downer and Captain Ivan Insull sat together, and beyond them Brooks, the butler. Several of the officers composing the court, in fact nearly every one in the room was known to the Trasks. It seemed a friendly gathering. Larry O'Toole sat with his attorney. He rose and smiled when Lady Trask bowed to him.

Roberta smiled and bowed to them all, and sat down. She felt slightly amused by the solemnity of the occasion. She seemed not to look and yet she saw how Mildred Downer wet her lips with her tongue continually, how Brooks cleared his throat. Why did they have Brooks?

The President of the Court took his place and called the court to order. Ashton and the attorneys came to sit beside Roberta. The names and rank of all officers composing the court were read. The Judge Advocate administered the oath to the President who repeated it solemnly:

"I do swear that I will not, unless it is necessary for due discharge of my official duties, divulge the sentence of this court martial, until it is duly confirmed, and that I will not,

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on any account, at any time whatsoever, disclose or discover the vote or opinion of any particular member of this court martial unless thereunto required in due course of law,

"So Help Me God!"

The oath was taken by each member of the court. Then the prosecutor read the charge. He first read the indictment against Captain Larry O'Toole, charged with being a spy in the service and pay of the enemy. A list of a dozen particular acts followed which gave aid and comfort to the enemy. There was no sound of breathing in the room, so tense was the attention.

The indictment was read against Lady Roberta Trask. She was charged with being a spy, in the service of the enemy, working in collaboration with Captain O'Toole. The specific act of treason was the revelation to the enemy of the name of the warship on which Lord Kendrick had sailed.

Roberta looked neither to the right nor the left. She could feel Ashton's body in the next chair tremble. She wished he need not suffer so; she had no sensation herself.

The court proceeded to satisfy itself that

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the charges brought were against offenders amenable to military law and the jurisdiction of this court. That each charge disclosed an offence against the Army Act.

Ashton leaned over and whispered to her.

"Say 'not guilty' when they ask you."

The prosecutor asked Captain O'Toole whether he plead "Guilty or not guilty."

"Not guilty," he replied in a steady voice.

"Lady Roberta Trask, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty," she said quietly.

Sir Andrew started up, but the President asked her if she understood the nature of the charge, and the general effect of pleading guilty. He explained at length and he advised her to withdraw the plea.

"Guilty," repeated Lady Bobs.

The prosecutor began an address. Roberta did not listen. She seemed to be back in New York, a child. She was in the big old-fashioned house where Heinrich Brück had lived. His voice was in her ears—"Deep, deeper than anything in your life is this love of fatherland. Give your love to this young America, liebchen, but let your deepest loyalty be for the

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traditions of your mother's race. Count no sacrifice too great, not even life itself."

There was some movement in the room, and Roberta's spirit came back. Mildred Downer was called and sworn, to give testimony against Larry O'Toole. How topsy-turvy life was! If Larry had not kissed her on the stairs, she might not now be swearing away his honour. It was a big price for a kiss. . . . Larry's attorney tried to get into the testimony the motive which caused her to set a watch on the Captain.

"Why did you collect evidence against Captain O'Toole?"

"Because I wished to rid my country of her enemies."

"It was patriotism alone which prompted your action?"

"Yes."

"Did you suspect that Captain O'Toole was working with the aid of Lady Trask?"

"I had no suspicion of Lady Trask."

"Yet you carried your suspicions to headquarters and had a secret service agent appointed to follow Lady Trask."

"I did not know that was to be done. I said repeatedly that I did not doubt Lady Trask!"

"If you had doubted her, your patriotism

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would not have driven you to give evidence against Captain O'Toole?"

"If I had doubted her, I would have given the evidence just the same. My country demanded that of me."

She was dismissed and Brooks was called and sworn. He stated his term of service to the Trasks and admitted that for the last six weeks he had been in the service of the government authorities.

He testified that Captain O'Toole was a constant guest at the Trasks' house. He had never heard any treasonable conversation between them until the afternoon before, when he had heard Lady Trask threaten to defy some authority which she called Them, and Captain O'Toole had threatened her with disgrace. He had never seen any exchange of papers or documents between them, etc., etc.

The various counts against O'Toole were established slowly and painfully.

"You wear the uniform of a British officer, Captain O'Toole. Were you ever loyal in heart and deed to England?"

"I am loyal in heart an' deed, to one country, and only one—to me own country—to Ireland!" he replied.

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He was asked if he would testify as a witness. He refused.

The case of Lady Trask was opened. The same technicalities were gone through with.

"Your nationality, Lady Trask?"

"German."

There was a stir at that. Sir Ashton protested, and was called to order.

"Where were you born?"

"In New York City, the United States."

"Your father's name?"

"Henry Hancock."

"His nationality?"

"American."

"Your mother's name?"

"Adelaide Brück."

"Her birthplace?"

"New York City."

"Why do you say that you are of German nationality when you were born in New York, of American-born parents?"

"Because I choose Germany as my fatherland. My birth in New York was an accident."

"Did you enter into marriage previous to your present union?"

"Yes. I married Andrew Bouton, an Amer-

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ican, when I was eighteen. He died when I was twenty."

"Did he have German sympathies?"

"No. He was very American."

"You married Sir Ashton Trask when?"

"In 1901."

"You became an English citizen, by your marriage to an English subject."

"I have never been an English citizen in my own mind."

"That does not concern us. You were such by law."

Roberta smiled at that.

"On what date did you begin collusion with the enemy?"

"In May, on the day the Premier spoke——" she gave the place and the date.

"Did anything said by the Premier on that occasion lead you to so act?"

"The whole mental attitude of the English people, for whom he was spokesman, moved me to the act."

"What mental attitude do you refer to?"

"The attitude of a superior Anglo-Saxon race, called upon to destroy barbarians."

"That is the belief of the entire world, Lady

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Trask, not only of 'a superior Anglo-Saxon race,' as you call us."

"It was against that belief that I rebelled."

"By what means did you establish communication with the enemy?"

"They had sent me many messages during the years of war, urging me to serve them. I was told a watchman guarded my house night and day. That when I had something to communicate, if I made a certain sign, an agent would be sent to me. I made the sign."

"Who was the agent who was sent?"

"Captain O'Toole."

Sir Ashton was asked to testify in regard to Lady Trask's German descent. He said that while she spoke sometimes in derision of British faults, and American faults, that she had never spoken in his presence, in defence of Germany, never admitted a basic devotion to the enemy's country.

"How did the name of the warship on which Lord Kendrick sailed come into your possession?" she was asked.

"By accident."

Sir Ashton asked permission to testify to that point and it was granted him.

"I take full blame for the fact that Lady

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Trask gained this information. She knew, because I told her the name of the ship."

"You knew that to be a state secret, Sir Ashton?"

"I did. In speaking of Lord Kendrick's departure, by a slip of the tongue, I spoke the name."

"You realised your mistake?"

"Yes."

"You warned Lady Trask not to repeat it?"

He hesitated a second.

"Yes."

"You had no reason to fear, at that time, that she would use the information?"

"No, none."

"You very gravely neglected your duty, Sir Ashton, by this breach of confidence."

"I know that, milord. I beg that I may suffer the full penalty of this breach. It was in no way the fault of Lady Trask. The possession of this knowledge was a terrible temptation put in her way."

Lady Trask was recalled.

"What motive inspired your action in regard to the *Hartshire?*"

"It was the greatest service I could do Germany."

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"Was there any personal reason why you wished Lord Kendrick destroyed?"

"I refuse to answer."

"Was Lord Kendrick your lover?"

"No."

Brooks was called. He reported that Lord Kendrick had visited Lady Trask the day before his death. He testified that they had quarrelled, that Lord Kendrick left in a fury, and that Lady Trask seemed like a crazy woman after he was gone. She dined in her room, but as soon as Sir Ashton was off to his club, she summoned O'Toole. They had a conference, which Brooks did not hear, and the Captain left hastily.

"Lady Trask, is it true that on the occasion of your last talk with Lord Kendrick you quarrelled?"

"I refuse to answer."

The prosecutor pointed out to her that this refusal to answer would be used against her. There was a whispered conference between the attorneys; they urged Lady Trask to tell the truth, but she refused. She was asked if she would call witnesses, and refused, again contrary to advice. Sir Ashton begged to be allowed to speak as witness to her character,

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and made an impassioned plea for her. She was high-strung, impetuous. An enemy, diabolic in its cleverness, had tempted her past endurance. A moment's impatience, a second of revolt against what she felt to be bigotry, had caused her to set her feet into the trap Germany had laid for her. Then there was no turning back.

He pictured the anguish of a sensitive person so caught and driven. He repeated the testimony, entered by Brooks, in which she had tried to defy her masters. She had not known what she was doing, she was victim, not criminal. Let the court order exile for life, for both of them, and he would take her to the ends of the earth.

There were tears in every one's eyes. Mildred Downer sobbed aloud. Roberta turned and looked at Ashton, as he sat, white, shaken and spent. How could he have sensed so quickly the Golgotha she had trod? His eyes were tender for her weakness, but she knew how he despised her crime.

Captain Ivan Insull was called and sworn. Roberta only half listened to his open statements, but suddenly her full attention focussed.

"I am in the secret service of the govern-

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ment, and I was assigned to the case of Lady Trask on June 8."

That sentence burned into Roberta's consciousness. She had been fooled, and duped by this man whom she had made her intimate friend! The whole thing came to her. His introduction to Cecily by the man to whom Mildred had carried her suspicions. But how could Ivan, the singing giant, be——?

He told in detail all the evidence which he had collected, including her intimacy with O'Toole.

"Yesterday I went to call on Lady Trask. She was out. Brooks ushered me in, to wait. I stepped out on to a balcony, which hangs outside the drawing-room. She came in, presently, with Captain O'Toole. Before I could announce myself, or make an escape, they began the conversation which Brooks has reported. They did not discover me. When they were gone, I made my report to headquarters and the arrests followed."

Roberta looked at him. He had much more the appearance of a man facing death sentence than did Captain O'Toole.

The president praised him for his work, and congratulated him upon the arrests.

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The evidence was all in now. The Judge Advocate asked Lady Trask if she wished to speak. She rose slowly and swept them all with friendly eyes.

"Milord, and gentlemen, and friends, I have nothing to say in my own defence. Two months ago I undertook a service, in which I was prepared to give my life, if need be. I undertook it, in a spirit of high resolve, and deep devotion to certain ideals which I believe to be of supreme value to the world. Now, in these days of war, when all values are obscured by fury, and hatred and passion, I know that these ideals are lost to view. But in the innermost heart of my fatherland they lie dormant, and when the world is rebuilt, they will be the steel girders of its framework. England and America and all the nations must make the contribution of their highest and best, too.

"What is this thing we call patriotism? It makes me sacrifice the closest human tie, to serve Germany. It makes Captain O'Toole ready to offer his honour, if only Ireland can be freed. It makes Mildred Downer sacrifice her friends, it sets Captain Insull as a spy in the house of his intimates!

"Surely if any one of these is treachery, then

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all of them are treachery. Yet the president of this court congratulates Captain Insull on his service to England. What makes the act good or bad, if the motive is service to an ideal? Why cannot this fierce passion, planted in each of us, be made to serve all of us more truly?

"For my own part, I have but one regret, that Sir Ashton Trask, whose patriotism and nobility of character is known to all of you, should be made to suffer so terribly in order that I may be true to my country.

"Whatever the sentence of this court, I shall abide by it as cheerfully as I may, in the knowledge that this court is actuated by high principles of justice and patriotism."

The Judge Advocate then summed up the case. The court retired into closed chambers to deliberate the findings. No one moved, or spoke. The tension was terrible. A clock jabbed the silence with its tick-tick. Roberta had no sense of being in that room, after a little. She was suspended somewhere in space —she was at peace.

Every person in the room sat with eyes on the closed door. The concentrated urgency of those eyes finally burst it open—at least so

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it seemed to the watchers. In solemn file the officers filed in again, and took their seats.

"We, the members of this court martial, find Captain Larry O'Toole guilty of treason, as a spy. The court sentences him to suffer death, at dawn, by being shot."

Roberta's eyes dragged themselves across to Larry's face. He was looking at her. He smiled and nodded gaily. The voice went on:

"We, the members of this court martial, find Lady Roberta Trask guilty as a spy, but in view of her relationship to a valued and patriotic British subject, whose services to England have been tireless and unremitting, we condemn Lady Trask to death by her own hand. If on the first day of July, of this year 1916, she be not dead, then this court sentences her to face a firing squad, and to suffer death by being shot.

"Lady Trask is hereby committed to the custody of Sir Ashton Trask. It shall be his duty to see that she has no communication with the enemy, from now until the day of her demise."

In silence the president of the court signed the sentence, and the Judge Advocate did likewise. The court was adjourned, and the officers marched out of the room. Larry O'Toole

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came across the room to Lady Bobs, his hands out.

"'Tis a foine woman ye are, Lady Bobs. I kiss yer hands. I'll be seein' ye soon, maybe."

"Good luck, and *au 'voir,* Larry," she answered calmly.

Mildred Downer, her face swollen with weeping, tried to speak to Lady Trask, but she broke down, and hurried away sobbing hysterically. Ivan Insull started toward her, his face grey and drawn with suffering, but she turned away deliberately. For him she had no pity.

They were all gone now, and with the last word of counsel from Sir Andrew she and Ashton were alone. He dropped into a chair, and laid his head on his arms, crossed on the chair back, and deep sobs racked him. For the first time Roberta felt, poignantly. She went to him, and bent over him, her hands seeking to comfort him.

"My dear—my dear, don't!" she begged. "It is all right, Ashton. Come home, dear, please."

He did not lift his head, and at the sound of her voice his agony mastered him.

"Don't cry. I'm not worth one tear, Ashton."

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When finally he gained control of himself, she found his hat and coat for him, she led him, as a mother her little suffering boy, out to the motor which waited for them. All the way home he held her close in his arms, and they spoke no word.

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PART FOUR

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PART FOUR

CHAPTER I

WHEN they arrived at home, after the brief silent trip in the motor, from the court room, Lady Bobs turned at the foot of the stairs, and waited until Ashton laid off his hat and coat.

"Would it help you if I—if we sat together for a while and faced this thing out?" she asked.

"You're very tired?"

"Yes, I am. But I want to consider you only——"

"Do you think you can sleep?"

"Yes. I have not slept for weeks, but to-night I think I can rest," she said slowly, her black circled eyes lifted to him.

"Go to bed, then, Beloved. We will talk to-morrow," he urged her.

"But will you sleep, Ashton?"

"No. I have some work to do. I will keep my mind busy on other things, until to-morrow."

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She laid her hands on his shoulders, as he stood below her.

"I can never say what your understanding, what your support to-night has meant——"

She broke off, laid her cheek for a second against his hair, and climbed slowly up the stairs and out of his sight.

He turned and walked quickly into the small study which he used as office. He carefully arranged the working light. He unstrapped and laid out his papers in order. He went to his cellarette and measured himself a stiff drink of brandy. Then, by a terrific exercise of will, he gave his attention to the work in hand. It was as if he forced himself into a tiny dark chamber of his own mind. He sealed the windows and doors that no air might come in, that no light from outside might penetrate. There in the darkness, he gave his full, concentrated attention to this business, which was England's business, and therefore required his best.

It was about three o'clock when the last period was placed. He ran his hand across his brow, and it came off wet. He felt himself hot and perspiring from the strain he had been under.

He turned off the light, and crossed the room

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to raise the shades and open the window. The daily miracle of dawn was at hand. London lay out there, half distinguished in the opalescent mist. Birds stirred and cheeped. The roar of the huge city was muffled, indistinct. The houses looked indefinite in the light, as if they might be the frail habitation of ghosts. And were they not? Was there a roof, in all those acres of dwellings, where a ghost of some kind did not lift its eyeless skull? How the agony of humanity outweighs its rapture! How, in these days, war laid its bloody hand on every human life. . . . Not only here, in this faint dream-city, which he looked upon, but in India, Australia, Canada, Italy, France, Russia, in Turkey, Greece, in Germany and Austria the same dawn ushered in the same terror, the same human suffering.

It was by such avenues that Ashton's tired thoughts journeyed back towards the tragedy which had suddenly smitten his life into ruins. A fierce rebellion against the anguish that was let loose in him, rose and choked him. The memory of the court room, the thought of Roberta, pilloried there with a common spy, like O'Toole, condemned to a hideous death—even as he was—it almost bereft him of reason.

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This woman, guilty of the most heinous crime in the history of the war, was his wife! Why could he not see her as she was, traitor to all he held sacred? Why could he not hate her and cast her from his thoughts?

At the same moment, his love, strong as it was tortured, hovered about the thought of her. Standing there, in the dawn, by the alchemy of his tenderness, he seemed to enter into the very soul of her, and know all its secrets. He understood her as no one else did, with her impetuous, passionate loyalties. If only those loyalties might have included him! He recalled that thought as unfair.

He visioned himself as married to Roberta, a native-born German citizen, and living in Berlin. He reversed the whole situation, with Sir Ashton Trask tempted to help England, at any cost. Suppose the chance came to him to connive at the death of Hindenburg! How could he say in the fervour to serve England that he would find strength to resist, because of loyalty to his wife? Where was the ultimate loyalty? Was it to wife, or to country?

The sun's rays were piercing the mists over London-town now. Banners and ragged

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scarves of light fluttered overhead. . . . He wondered how his mother would have met this catastrophe, had his own father been the victim? He knew her true sense of justice—but she had stricter standards of morality than he—she was not so dependent upon the people she loved. . . . But it was not her problem, it was his. His, and Roberta's for a little while, then his forever. At the thought of her going, he felt in himself the pangs of death.

The stir was beginning in the house about him. The clear bright sun of early morning streamed into the room. He went upstairs, had a cold bath and tried to rest. He stopped a second to listen outside Roberta's door, on his way down to breakfast. He took up his paper and tried to look at the news. Presently he was startled by her entrance.

"Roberta!"

"Good morning, Ashton. Ah, you did not keep your promise, my dear," she added, her eyes on his face, marked with suffering.

"I did my best. And you?"

"I slept."

The breakfast was brought, and he followed her deliberate lead into the protective conventions. Once or twice he looked at her, and

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wondered if the night before had been a hideous nightmare.

When the meal was over she rose at once.

"I have some letters to write, Ashton. Will you come to my sitting-room in an hour?"

He nodded. When she was gone he tried to busy himself for that hour. He was impatient for their talk, he dreaded it utterly. He tried in vain to read. In the end he paced up and down the library, at the mercy of his emotions. A hundred times he looked at his watch before it was time to present himself at Roberta's door.

He found her at her desk. She was calm, interested in her task. She glanced up and smiled.

"Sit down a minute, until I finish this, will you?"

He sat down on the couch and looked about him. The room was the same. Hundreds of times he had sat here, while Roberta played to him, hundreds of times they had sat here together, before her fire, and talked. He looked at her. She was the same gracious presence. It was not true that she was to die!

With a sigh she turned and came toward him.

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"Dear, we cannot escape this talk," she said. "I wish you might have had some rest to help you."

"I'm all right," he assured her.

"I have been going over my things——"

He laid his hand on hers in protest.

"Must you?"

"Dear, I have only twelve days, you know——"

"Oh, don't!" he begged her, his face in his hands.

"Ashton dear, I wish I could make you see it as I do," she said, her hand smoothing his bent head. "Can't we say that I have made a journey into a dangerous country, and given my life as forfeit?"

"No, no. It is not right—it is not 'justice, tempered with mercy.' We have mixed it all up somehow," he protested.

"Perhaps. The essential thing to us is, that the price must be paid."

He groaned.

"Ashton, the horror is all gone for me. I have paid for months a price that makes Death seem a trifle," she said.

He rose and faced her.

"My poor Roberta!"

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"No, no pity! I chose my path, I saw where it might lead, I have come now to that place. Sometime, before I go on, I want you to know every step of that road, but not now. Let us dispose of certain essentials, so that we need not mention them again——"

"As you like, dear."

"I have a list here of personal things to go to my intimate friends. We will, of course, decide on some cause for my death, to be made public. But let us arrange now that this list is in the top drawer of my desk, where you will find it."

"Yes," he agreed.

"My books and music I want you to have and anything else you would like——"

He turned away and she paused a second.

"I have made some legacies for the servants, and named some small possessions of mine which they might like."

"I will attend to it," he forced himself to say.

"Here is a list of people to whom I want to leave money, here my list of charities. My will is in the safety deposit vault, as you know. I want you to have as little trouble as possible——"

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"Oh, Roberta——"

She put her arms about him. He leaned his cheek on her hair, and they were silent for a little.

"We must face this last thing, Ashton—the manner of—my going."

"No, I cannot."

"It is infinitely harder for you than it is for me. I know that. My only desire is to spare you, if I can. What is your wish in the matter? Shall we decide now how I am to go, and when?"

"You will not go until you have to? You will give me these twelve brief days?" he begged her.

"Yes, dear, of course."

"Promise?"

"I promise. I have a feeling—can you bear this, Ashton?—a feeling that I owe it to the gods to shoot myself."

"No—no—no."

"How then?"

"Oh, must we decide this ghastly thing?" he cried, out of the bitterness of his agony.

"We need not, if it hurts too terribly. Suppose we leave it to me——"

"That is too damnable. Whatever it is, in

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the end, belovéd, let it be my responsibility. I could teach my hand to hold a revolver, to aim at you, to fire at you, if it would spare you one jot of the horror."

"Dear heart, it is not a horror! Look at it with me. Death is a friend come to lead me out of a tangle I could no longer stumble in. Let him free me the old Greek way, with a cup of hemlock. There's a sort of glory in that. Shall we say that we close this subject until the eleventh hour is come?"

"Yes, yes. I may find a little strength, if you will help me."

"I shall," she said gently.

"What would you like to do with these days?" he asked her.

"I should like to spend them quietly with you, in Surrey. Could you manage that?"

"Yes, it must be managed. Let us go to-morrow."

"Thank you."

She drew away from him and said:

"Ashton, do you want my word that my services to—to my country are at an end?"

"I do not need it."

"I feel certain that when Larry was arrested he sent Them word of our undoing."

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"Let us not speak of it," urgently.

"Not again. I wanted you to be sure of me, now."

He bowed, his face haggard with emotion and weariness. She scarcely dared look at him, so poignant was his expression.

"Ashton, this is not fair to you! I wish my soul had mounted this morning, with Larry's, so you might have been spared this."

"Don't say that—don't think it! You cannot know what this reprieve means to me. Twelve days, why Heaven and earth were made in less! Let us pretend that we have been offered twelve days in Paradise. Let not one word or thought penetrate there, which is not the child of happiness and love. Shall we make these twelve brief days of ours, a Golden Age, belovéd?"

She looked into his eyes, his stricken tender eyes, and her own filled with tears.

"Am I fit to enter Paradise with you, Ashton? Will not the Angel with the Flaming Sword cast me out?"

"No sword shall bar your way, my Roberta. Love guards our gate."

"Ashton, I'm so unworthy——"

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"My love, you are the heart of me!" he answered.

There came a knock at the door, and Roberta answered it.

"A package, by messenger, Lady Trask."

"Thank you."

She took it, closed the door, and turned to her husband, merely glancing at the address. She went white.

"Ashton, this is——"

"What is it?" he asked quickly.

"Will you open it?"

"But why?"

"It is from Them——!"

"Let me destroy it unopened," he counselled.

"No, please. Later, we will destroy it, if need be. Open it."

He tore off the wrapping and disclosed a small box. He opened that. There lay a ribbon and a cross. She took it up and turned it on her palm. It had an inscription:

"To a Patriot, Roberta Trask, for distinguished service to the fatherland"

It bore the Emperor's name.

They stood there silently, with the hateful

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symbol between them. It seemed to Ashton that he could not bear it—this last insult. Roberta saw it in his eyes.

"Don't hate it too much, dear. It is only the same old symbol of suffering, triumphant humanity—the cross of sacrifice."

"But I cannot, Roberta——"

"Do not try. This goes into the past with our memories, we shall carry none of them into Paradise, Ashton," she said, putting the decoration out of sight.

"I must go now, if I am to arrange our leave. You will not be lonely?" he asked her.

"Oh, no, I shall have much to do."

"Goodbye, for a little," he said, lingering as a lover does.

"No more goodbyes after to-morrow," she said, and too late saw her mistake. "There is no goodbye in the Golden Age, dear," she added steadily.

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CHAPTER II

After Sir Ashton left her, Lady Bobs returned to her desk. There were many letters to be written to many friends in many places and lands. She wanted these farewells said before she went into the country.

A telephone call from Cecily Harrison interrupted her labours.

"Bobs, the Duchess and I came in together for the day, and we want you for lunch."

"Delighted."

"We will pick you up at one. It is the Duchess's party and I do not know where she is taking us."

"I will be ready at one, thanks."

These oldest and best friends deserved the greatest part of her day, if they wanted it. She would not see them again, for those last days she meant to be Ashton's exclusively.

She dressed with great care. She wanted these two to remember her at her best. She selected a frock which Cecily especially admired. When she joined them in the motor the Duchess exclaimed:

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"Roberta, you look lovely!"

"Thank you, dear Duchess," she smiled.

"The more you abuse yourself, and stay on in this oven, the handsomer you get! It wrecks my beauty in a day," laughed the Duchess and they both joined her, for she was famous for her ugliness.

"It's that gown," remarked Cecily. "Bobs, I wish you'd sell me that dress."

"You shall have it."

"Make me a reasonable price, now, because I'm rather short. Why is it, do you suppose, that I am always short?"

"Because your extravagances are long, no doubt," replied the Duchess.

They lunched on the terrace, at one of the hotels. Every table was full, and there was an air of festivity, and many uniforms brightened the picture. The fountain sprayed and dripped refreshingly, while a stringed orchestra played softly. The food was of the best.

"Life is rather jolly, isn't it?" said Cecily, looking about her, and bowing to friends.

"It's the jolliest thing we know—there's that to be said," the Duchess answered.

"Of course, Heaven may be jollier still, but I've always been suspicious of that golden

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street and harp picture," Cecily continued gaily. "So dangerous to let every one experiment on the harp—difficult instrument, you know."

"Cecily, what an awful idea! Heaven a clamour of amateur harpists!" laughed Roberta.

"And crowns! You know how few people can wear a tiara."

"Stop at once, Cecily," ordered the Duchess. "I cannot afford to lose my religion at this late date. But I promise you here and now, that I will never wear one of their ready-made crowns, nor touch a harp."

"Bobs, the Duchess is a fallen angel. We three may be together after death," said Cecily, hopefully.

"I hope so," said Roberta with sudden earnestness.

"Will you tell me how we got on this lugubrious subject?" inquired the hostess.

"Need it be lugubrious? Isn't it an old tradition to surround death with horror?" asked Bobs. "With such multitudes clamouring at the door of Heaven I like to think in Cecily's phrase—maybe it's jollier there."

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"Heaven is an old tradition, Bobs, if you're going into that," said Cecily.

"So it is, and none of us believe in it——"

"I do," said the Duchess promptly.

"Not a static place of bliss, Duchess," protested Cecily.

"Certainly static. I hate being moved about. Since nobody knows anything about the place, you may as well pick out the kind of Heaven you like, and believe in that."

They laughed together at that.

"What kind would you decide on, Bobs?" inquired Cecily gaily.

"Mine is rather hazy in my mind. Not so unlike this, perhaps. Going on with your work, developing, loving, growing wiser."

"Any God in yours?"

"Oh, yes. God working, developing, loving, growing wiser through me, through all of us."

"What an idea!"

"Where do you go from here, Cecily?" asked the Duchess and laughed at her own slang.

"My faith paints a place rather like London, in the season, only with a pleasanter climate."

"No God in yours," laughed Roberta.

"Oh, yes. Some woman in a modern book—

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I cannot remember the name of it—defined it perfectly. She said Heaven was a place presided over by a distinguished old gentleman in evening dress, who had the right people to dine. That's where I belong."

"That will do for Heaven. Plain blasphemy!" sputtered the Duchess. "Roberta, how and where is the handsome Irishman?"

Roberta's mouth trembled, and she made an effort to hold her lips firm.

"Larry? It is difficult to say where Larry is——"

"I must get him down to the country. He always makes me laugh," the Duchess said. "And where is the other one?"

"Other one?"

"Insull is his name, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes. He is about, I think."

"Why don't you ask me about my beaux, Duchess?" inquired Cecily.

"Because your beaux don't interest me."

"But I have much choicer ones than Bobs."

"That white-livered poet, I suppose. No, you are a natural polygamist, Cecily, and I cannot bother with you, but Roberta's flirtations irritate me, because I think Ashton Trask is the finest man I know."

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"So do I," said Roberta simply.

"You don't act like it," bluntly.

"I am just crawling out from under that 'natural polygamist,' but I hope we are not turning from Heaven to monogamy!" said Cecily.

So they laughed and chaffed each other in the way of old friends. They finished luncheon and planned the afternoon. The Duchess had errands and they were going back to the country for the night, in spite of Roberta's urgent invitation that they stay with her. She wished, she said, to be dropped at the Downers'.

"How can you endure that girl, Bobs?" demanded Cecily.

"Poor Mildred—I like her."

"Don't discourage Christian charity, Cecily, it is rare enough as it is," cautioned the Duchess.

When the motor stopped at the Downers', Roberta bent and kissed the Duchess' withered cheek.

"It has been perfect, Duchess," she said.

"You two are priceless to me. You give my days savour," the old woman remarked with rare softness.

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Roberta caught a sob back into her throat, and bent to Cecily.

"Goodbye, old dear," she said.

"When are you going to the country?" Cecily asked, kissing her fondly.

"Ashton and I are off to-morrow for a while."

"It is high time," the Duchess remarked. "We will see you soon, Roberta."

"*Au 'voir,* dear friends," she said softly, and watched the motor slide away.

Miss Downer was reported out, so Lady Trask picked up a hansom and made a few calls, but found no one at home. She turned back to her own door.

"Miss Mildred Downer is in the drawing-room, Lady Trask. She has been waiting a long time," said the maid who admitted her.

Lady Bobs hurried into the room where Mildred sat. She surprised her in an attitude of complete dejection. At sight of Roberta she rose, suddenly flushed and embarrassed.

"Well, Mildred," said Lady Trask, her hand out.

"Oh, Lady Bobs," exclaimed the girl. Then, "You must wonder how I dared come here, after last night."

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"On the contrary. I went to see you."

"You did? Then you don't hate me?"

"No."

"I have not slept for nights because I hate myself so."

"You must not. You saw this thing as your duty. No one can think that it was pleasant for you, Mildred."

The girl fought for composure.

"What you said last night has upset my mind completely. Why are we all trying to serve, by destroying each other? If I have brought this on you unjustly, Lady Bobs, how am I to live?"

"If the whole world has 'its mind upset completely' there is some hope for the future, Mildred. According to the law of England, Larry and I were justly condemned as enemies, but my question is, isn't there a larger law of patriotism? Your love for England, mine for Germany, Larry's for Ireland, Ted Carter's for America—surely this is a divine instinct, it must be utilised in some bigger scheme of a universe."

"I see that, I want to work for that," the girl said earnestly. "Oh, it is sardonic that

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you should point the way to me when I have—have——"

"It is not sardonic, Mildred. You carry on the torch, that's all."

"I didn't know about Captain Insull until that day I was here. You thought I was ill——"

"Yes."

"I want you to know that I never suspected you, nor tried to impugn your loyalty."

"I'm sure of it."

"I've always cared 'bout you so much," she said haltingly.

"I am glad of that. I have been fond of you, too."

"Oh, I cannot bear it for you to treat me like this!" she burst out.

"My dear, how should I treat you? You did an unpleasant duty, so did I. I respect you for it. Is that surprising?"

"I don't see how you can help hating me," Mildred sobbed.

"It is unfitting for the dead to bear rancour," she said simply.

Mildred lifted a swollen face to her.

"There is that, too——"

"Yes, there is that, too. . . ."

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"I thought I should die this morning, at dawn, when I knew he——" Mildred could not go on.

"No, no. Think rather of the way he met his fate—smiling, I promise you. Flinging his soul forth, proudly, without a cry."

"I suppose you will not believe this, but I loved him. I know, now, why I wanted him punished. It was because I was humiliated that he did not want my love. Oh, Lady Bobs, now you will despise me!"

Lady Bobs put her arm across Mildred's shoulders.

"No, I do not despise you. I know how alike we all are, how far from civilised; how bound by old traditions that a woman must not offer her best gift. Some day surely, it must be otherwise, if the race is to climb. . . ."

"I should have known that he could not care for me," Mildred went on. "I'm so ugly and stupid, and he was so handsome, so happy. 'Son of the morning' I used to call him to myself. When he kissed me I thought I should faint with happiness——"

Lady Trask nodded.

"Afterward, when I knew he meant nothing by it, that he was just playing with me, some-

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thing inside me went mad. I thought I hated him. I thought I wanted to serve England, but last night I knew the real truth. I wanted to be revenged on him, because he had hurt me so. I loved him. I loved him! As dawn came on, I——" she choked and stopped, sobbing hysterically.

Lady Trask's eyes were full of pity.

"Do you think I ought to go and tell General Stoten that I killed Larry out of revenge?"

"That would not save Larry, Mildred. I think your punishment will come without General Stoten's help or direction."

"But I've always thought I was a decent person, with standards, and now I find I'm just a rotter!"

"I know. These instincts spring up to shame us, in crises. We never know they are a part of us even, until all at once they dominate us. It must be that you and I, and our kind, are second rate."

"Not you, Lady Bobs."

"Yes, I am thoroughly second rate. I know it, and I pay the price willingly."

"If I could only pay for you."

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"The ill ye do, by two and two,
Ye pay for, one by one,"

quoted Lady Bobs. "Never fear, Mildred, you will pay," she added.

Mildred rose to go.

"You have been fair to me, and very kind. I wish you could say as much for me. I'm glad I've known you," she said earnestly.

"Thank you, Mildred. Good luck."

They clasped hands firmly, like two comrades. Then with a groan Mildred turned and hurried out of the room. She did not see Sir Ashton, who passed her. She fled out the door and away, like one pursued by furies. Sir Ashton went to Roberta quickly.

"Did Mildred Downer presume to come to this house?" he said sternly.

"She is very unhappy, Ashton."

"She ought to be. Sneaking little informer!"

"Let us be a little kind in judging her, dear."

He kissed her, his eyes dim.

"We can go to-morrow, at noon, if you like."

"I do like," she assured him.

She sat late that night finishing up the many things there were to be done. "Balancing her

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book," as she phrased it to herself. At midnight her husband came to her door.

"I saw your light burning. Can you not leave these duties, whatever they are? Surely you should have some rest."

"To-morrow, dear, I shall shed my past like a cocoon. I want to start off a new being."

His hands rested on her shoulders, and she felt them tremble.

"Sit here, and read, if you cannot sleep," she suggested.

He sat down and tried to obey. At least he sat with her, he kept her in his sight.

The morning found her still resolutely herself. The moment came to take leave of this home she had come to, fifteen years before, as a bride. She sent Ashton off on some errand, that she might say her farewells alone.

She walked through all the familiar rooms, lingering now and then to touch some well loved object. Into Ashton's rooms she went with a heart that threatened to suffocate her. She sat down, impulsively, at his desk, and wrote him a letter. She tucked it away where some day, afterward, he might come upon it, and find comfort.

In her own rooms she lingered. Her piano,

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her books, all the intimacies of herself, held out hands to her. The sun streamed in, a flood of light. It was cheery, and real. No atmosphere of parting, this. Perhaps some day soon, she might slip back, on such a broad sunbeam, to visit her old belongings.

"The motor is here. Shall we go, Belovéd?" Ashton asked her, standing at her door, and sensing the anguish of the moment.

She smiled, and gave him her hand.

"Yes, let us go. No memories, no regrets. We go without impedimenta to find our Golden Age."

He smiled, bravely, too, and hand in hand they went down-stairs, and out of the door of their home.

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CHAPTER III

THE moment they left London a change came over Roberta. She was keen, interested, alive. Nothing on the road escaped her. She approved the day, which Ashton thought hot; she quoted poetry about the English fields, she repeated to him some of Cecily's absurdities. She was as light hearted as a girl on a holiday, and while Ashton marvelled, he delighted in her. How her beauty filled the eye, and satisfied it, with its rich maturity!

"Yes, Ashton?" she questioned, aware of his gaze.

"I'm wondering how you can be more beautiful than when I married you."

"What a pleasant thing to say."

" 'Pleasant' is a homely adjective," he protested.

"Vanity is a homely vice. Of course, you are glad to be told you grow old gracefully, but all the time you think back to your radiant youth, and you are not satisfied with 'gracefully.' "

"Strange. I've no regrets for my youth.

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"Grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be,
The last for which the first was made,"

he said, and turned away quickly at the thought that followed it.

"That is true of you, Ashton, as it is of few people. Some of us cannot risk old age—it is too trying."

"Think of the penalty of eternal youth," he suggested.

She recalled Ivan's phrase, "I protect my youth, where other people squander theirs." She frowned, and turned him out of her mind.

June was the loveliest month of all at Trask Hall. The rose gardens were an ecstacy of colour and scent. A rose-covered pergola fairly sagged with bloom, and a trellis which climbed to Lady Trasks' window sent roses creeping over the sill. She called Ashton's attention to it.

"Isn't that charming? It is like a votive offering from the good god Pan," she said.

"Take his offering, but do not listen to his piping, Roberta," he warned her.

She slipped her hand through his arm, and answered in the same spirit.

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"I cannot promise. Some day, if you should find me gone, you will know that I have answered his call."

"Where would he lead you, I wonder?"

"Back into the heart of nature."

"Then I should find you in sun, and wind and rain," he mused.

"Forever and ever."

So they spoke of their coming ordeal, but without bitterness or despair. There were no secrets or evasions between them now. There was truth and a new oneness, as if the flesh had actually fallen away, and they stood together, disembodied spirits.

The first two days were perfect with sun and soft airs. They spent them in the open, and most of the nights, too, for the moon rode the sky in full splendour.

Roberta's determination was strong to make these days a painless memory to Ashton. But one doubt was ever in her mind, was it his right to hear from her lips the whole story of her short-lived passion for Lord Kendrick? Was she letting herself off half the price she was to pay, by not telling him?

It seemed to her that Ashton had risen to heights of sacrifice during this ordeal. Never

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once did she forget how her actions had outraged all his standards of high honour, but in spite of that, his pity and his love had conquered every other emotion. She knew him now, for the finest type of manhood which his race produces. She had failed him all through their life together. How could she have missed seeing that he was all the things she had sought in other men, and more?

She saw now, in the light of their present, what she had made them both lose. He had known all the while that these possibilities of happiness lay in their grasp, and he had waited for the moment when she should give herself to him, wholly. Through her blindness he was never to know the realisation of that dream except for these few days. Should she poison the memory of them by making him father confessor for all her sins?

Peace came to her finally in the realisation that she had no right to ease her own burden of guilt by pouring it on to him. She determined, however, to write the story from its beginning. To tell the ugly truth about the affair with Kendrick, to spare herself nothing. She would leave this confession for him, and if he cared to read it, then, he had a choice.

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"What is it you are always writing on?" he asked finally, coming upon her repeatedly at this task.

She hesitated a second before she replied.

"It is a story which I have no courage to tell you now, which I think it is your right to know."

"You mean the story of—you?"

"Yes, I mean the story of me."

"You intend to bequeath it to me?"

"Yes. A sorry bequest, my dear."

"Is it nearly finished?"

"Yes."

He came to her side.

"May I have it now?"

A look of terror came into her eyes.

"Must you read it now?" she asked him.

"May I have it?"

"It is yours, Ashton."

He bent to take it from her, kissed her hair as he straightened up, and then with strong fingers, he tore the closely written sheets into bits. He laid it on her hearth, and set a match to them.

She watched him silently. All at once she put her face in her hands, and sobs shook her. She had not shed a tear before. But this fine

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gesture, with which Ashton swept the dross of her on to a sacrificial pyre, punished her cruelly.

He came and stood above her.

"So, dear, that is our past. Our present has no memories. Nothing shall spoil these days, nothing."

She took his hand and laid her cheek against it.

"If you knew what your love meant to me! How I cling to your tenderness, how I count on your understanding."

"What else is love, but these things, my Roberta?"

"I've stumbled along so many roads, and hurt so many people, to find out what love is," she said.

"I wish you might know——" he began and could not finish.

"I do," she answered him. She drew his face down to her and kissed him. "Oh, dearest, I've blundered so, and played with sacred fire. But deep in me I must have known how safe I was in your heart—that the time was to be, when I should know that my love was yours."

She felt his tears on her cheek, the beating of his heart, but there was no need of words.

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A great peace had come upon them, like the one "which passeth understanding."

From that time on there was no flaw in all their days. They were lovers on a transcendent honeymoon. Their talk ranged the universe. They rode, they motored, they walked, they gardened, with Hughie at heel, like a faithful puppy. There came a day of rain. Bobs proposed slickers and a cross-country tramp. They swung along deserted country roads for hours, hand in hand, with the rain beating in their faces. Later he sat and smoked while she played to him. They read together, discussed, disagreed, laughed and were exultantly happy.

"Such days as these are vouchsafed to few humans, Belovéd," he said to her.

"Whom the gods love——" she sighed.

"Happiness is not destroyed. It is as immortal as the human spirit," he said earnestly.

"Its pleasures and pains are boundless,
And endless its wants and wealth,"

she quoted, smiling.

"Who said that?"

"Tagore."

"I found 'The Gardener' beside your pillow this morning."

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"It's like my Bible these days. He and his race are so sure of the things of the spirit. . . . 'O, Great Beyond, O, the keen call of thy flute.' It has the eternal yearning of the human race *to know*. How do you suppose the immortal hope was planted in all our hearts?"

"We must presuppose a plan. And why not? If the planets move in courses, if the earth turns on an axis? What sort of an ordered universe, if death by accident, by war, by disease can cut short unfulfilled lives? The youth of the whole world swept on to the scrap heap, by this accident of war? No, they must go on. They must finish their work."

"Yes, that's it. We must finish our work," she repeated thoughtfully. "I shall think of you working here, you will think of me working on—somewhere else. Perhaps when you come, I shall know——" but he interrupted her passionately.

"Not now, dear heart of me. The spirit must comfort me later, but not now, while I can hold you, while I can kiss your brow and eyes and lips——"

"Oh, my lover, take me now, all of me and find me sweet, if you can, but don't forget,

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later, that the very essence of me is yours," she answered him with equal passion.

He spoke to her one day of their friends.

"I am very selfish. Shall we have some people here? Cecily perhaps?"

"No. These days belong to us."

As the hours flew by and the time grew short, they were more and more reluctant to be apart. Sleep grew less possible for them both.

"Let us saddle our horses and ride through the dawn," she suggested, their last day but one.

They dressed hurriedly, and she managed some coffee, while he struggled with the saddles. She carried the coffee pot to the stables, and they whispered and laughed over it, and were happy. Then they mounted and rode off, Roberta in the lead.

"We'll ride to the rim of the world where the sun comes up," she called.

The horses ran side by side in the fresh air of the new day. It was a world empty save for them, a day fashioned for their pleasuring. They called a word now and then, exchanged a smile, or a caress of the eyes. Pounding along, blood coursing freely, no thought of any mo-

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ment but the present one came to taunt them. The rays sprayed over the horizon line.

"It will beat us!" cried Roberta, urging her horse. She was off at a gallop, Ashton at her heels.

As the sun-ball shot up over the world's rim she galloped faster.

"You're too late, my love," called Ashton.

"Not yet," she answered, and fled on.

But when the golden circumference was complete against the sky, she let Ashton come abreast.

"I almost made it," she boasted.

"So you did," he smiled. "What is a million miles?"

She laughed and they turned their horses to ride back.

"Doesn't this air taste like pleasant fruit?" she asked him.

"Like trees of frankincense," he nodded.

"Is the air always so sweet in the Golden Age?" she inquired.

"Always."

"Are the days always so full of good gifts in the Golden Age?"

"Always."

"And love so abounding?"

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"And love so abounding."

So, with courage, with hope and with composure, they marched over the brow of the day before the end.

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CHAPTER IV

HUGHIE and old Mallory were at work in the garden. The sun shone and the air was heavy with sweetness. Lady Bobs strolled out aimlessly, waiting for Ashton, and Hughie trotted to meet her.

"Lady dig?" he inquired.

"No, Hughie, not to-day," she smiled.

There was something about the smile that made Hughie feel she needed comfort. He slipped his fat, earth-covered hand into hers, and she clung to it.

Ashton came in search of her presently. He kept in touch with his office by telephone, and every day Roberta dreaded a summons for him.

"All right, lover?" she asked him.

"All right," he reassured her. "Well, Hughie, are you looking after my lady for me?"

"*My* lady!" said Hughie stoutly.

"Wrong, Hughie. I share her with no man."

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"Dear, I wish I had given you a son," Bobs said wistfully.

He made no reply save to draw her hand through his arm. So escorted on either hand, she walked through old Mallory's domain. Hughie was lured away by a golden butterfly which he pursued with invitations:

"Wait, buttyfy. Wait for Hughie."

"There go I, Ashton, with Hughie in pursuit. You remember I said I would slip my past like a cocoon and come here as free as a butterfly? I had no idea that it could really be done. But it has been. What a happy, happy day mine has been!"

"Has it, Belovéd? Have I filled your heart these days?"

"To the brim, my husband."

"My whole life has been lived in these brief days," he said earnestly.

A taxi drove up to the house, and some one stepped out of it.

"Visitors? Oh, let us run, Ashton," Bobs said, for they were in full view of the house.

"Too late. He has seen us——"

The man was approaching them, at the moment.

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"It is——" Ashton broke off with an angry exclamation.

Roberta looked, and stood perfectly still. The man came on, until he was within a few feet of them. He was so changed that he was scarcely recognisable.

"By what right do you intrude here, may I ask?" Ashton demanded.

"By no right at all, except that I am a man in extremity, come to beg Lady Trask for one word——" began Ivan Insull.

"Oh, your poor youth!" exclaimed Roberta, involuntarily.

"Do you wish to speak to this man?" Ashton asked her.

"Yes, dear. We cannot turn him away," she replied.

Ashton bowed and started to leave them, but she halted him.

"Stay with us, please, Ashton."

He made a gesture of protest, but Insull added his request that he stay. So when Roberta led the way to a summer house at the edge of the garden, the two men followed her silently.

Roberta thought to herself that here was the only soul in all the net that entangled them,

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about whom she had let herself feel bitterly. She had driven all memory of the handsome, singing big boy out of her mind forever, and here he was, scarred and aged with his ordeal, come to sue for her pity.

She looked at Ashton, but his face was a white mask, set and graven. She sat down on a bench in the summer house, and indicated chairs for the other two. Ivan began to speak at once. He stood before her and his words rained down upon her.

"I have no right to come here, I know that. But I remembered how kind you were to people, and I thought—I hoped——" he broke off, and then began again. "I could not let you go without saying one word in defence of myself——"

"I beg your pardon, Captain Insull, but Lady Trask has borne a good deal from you. I think she might be spared your defence, don't you?" Ashton asked coldly.

"What is it you want to tell me?" Roberta asked him.

"How I love you, and what the Hell of this week has meant to me!" the boy burst out impetuously.

"Roberta, it is folly to let this go on. We

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are not interested in your emotions——" Ashton broke in.

"Why not? I was serving you," Insull cried.

"Serving me?"

"Certainly. I was doing the dirty business of your country, wasn't I?"

"Ashton, let Captain Insull say what he has come to say, please," Roberta begged him.

"When I was put on your case, Lady Trask, I knew nothing about you. I had only seen you once. I hated the job but I had no choice. I was ordered to shadow you and get evidence."

"Yes?" Roberta said, anxious to help him.

"I made myself agreeable at first to try to make you like me, so you would let me be with you. You were heavenly kind, and I felt surer every day that it was a false scent, that you were all right. But when I got my first actual evidence, that paper that I saw passed between you and Captain O'Toole, in Lady Harrison's garden——" he stopped and wiped his forehead, breathing deeply.

"Yes, I remember."

"I saw that message later. I went into your room at Lady Harrison's, and saw it."

She nodded, frowning.

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"I held up the report for a week, because I discovered that I loved you more than anything in this world——"

"This is impertinence!" cried Ashton.

"My God, aren't we past impertinence? She and you and I in the shadow of death? I can't help it if she is your wife. I love her with every beat of my heart, and I have betrayed her——"

"Ivan, you gave this evidence against me finally."

"My first thought was that I would resign, go away, say there was no evidence. Then I had a call from headquarters, and I found that the suspicion there was almost a certainty. If I got out, they would put some one else in my place, some one who might be brutal, who might make it harder——"

"So you stayed on, trying to help me?"

"Yes. I knew from that moment where we were all going. I looked into the pit of destruction every minute, night and day——"

"Why didn't you tell Lady Trask? Why did you trade on her friendship?" Ashton asked.

"He did tell me in the end, Ashton, only I

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would not see. He begged me to run away just before they arrested me. I refused."

"How could I tell her? The evidence against O'Toole was mounting every minute. There was no chance for her. Even if she went to America, as I urged her to do, she would not have escaped——" he groaned.

"I did not want to escape," she said.

"You say you love her, yet you hounded her to her death!" Ashton challenged him.

"I was under British orders, Sir Ashton, I had no choice in the matter!" Insull answered.

Ashton turned away and looked with unseeing eyes over the garden without. What God of Fury and Unreason twitched the strings which made them all dance in these torturing days?

"Lady Trask, I wanted you to know, that any suffering which has come to you through me, has been nothing to the suffering I have brought upon myself. What you said, that night, about our motive of service being true, no matter what treachery seemed to result, has comforted me a little. It was so fair. I thought that maybe, if you believed that, you might have mercy for me in your heart."

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She caught her breath in a quick stab of pain.

"I know that you do not care anything about me, that you never did. I knew those last days what you were going through, and how it helped you to play with me, and laugh at my foolishness——"

"Yes, it did help me. I'm afraid I never thought what it was doing to you," she admitted.

"I don't count! Why, I'd grind myself up in little pieces, if it would help you. I shall not pay less, Lady Trask, for my duty than you pay," he added solemnly.

Sir Ashton turned swiftly.

"What do you mean by that?

"I mean that life isn't the greatest thing you can give up. You know that."

Roberta went to Ivan and laid her hand on his arm.

"Ivan, let there be no talk of that," she said firmly. "I tried to say at the trial, that each of us had done his best for what we believe in. I found it hardest to forgive you, Ivan, because I had made you so intimate a friend. But I see now that you have paid the ultimate price with the rest of us."

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"I have—by God—I have," he cried.

"I know one thing surely, that our lives, yours and Larry's and mine, cannot be waste. They must fulfil some purpose. Stay on, and make yours count here, Ivan."

"I cannot. Let me go with you," he begged.

"No—a thousand times no! Ashton and you have to help with the mighty task of teaching the new world a better way to use its creatures than in destroying each other."

"You're taking away my hope of peace," he said brokenly.

"I have given you a new one."

"You have been all that I knew you to be."

She offered him her hand.

"I am glad you came, Ivan. I have many things to thank you for."

He almost crushed the hand he held.

"Thank you——"

"Good luck, Ivan. Courage, my friend. That is what the world needs now."

He tried to smile, he pressed her hand again, bowed to Sir Ashton and went quickly away.

"Why did he come here to spoil our perfect day?" Ashton protested.

"Don't begrudge him his hour, dearest. I am truly glad he came. I want to go on with

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my heart sponged clean of hate and misunderstanding. How we are all caught in 'the clutch of circumstance,'" she added with a sigh.

He put his arms about her.

"He has made you sad."

"Do the scales ever balance, do you think? The good you may have done, ever balance the harm?"

"Who knows, Belovéd?"

"What a pity that the reckoning comes at the end."

There was a silence, which he broke with his question.

"Dear, if I asked you what he asked you, would you make me the same answer?"

"You mean?" she said, lifting her face to look at him.

"Let me go, when you go."

"Ashton!"

She clung to him with sudden strength, she kissed him with deep feeling.

"Best beloved,—my dearest!" she cried to him brokenly.

"I may come?" he asked softly.

"No—no—no."

"But you want me."

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"As you want me to stay! But your work is here. England needs you as never before. We cannot both be traitor to her, dear."

"Oh, let me come," he pleaded.

"Must I ask a promise of you, Ashton?"

"Yes, and help me keep it!"

"Promise me that you will finish your work here," she said solemnly. "Dearest, to comfort me," she begged when he was silent.

"I promise I will finish my work here," he said after her.

She freed herself from his arms, with a sigh.

"Now, what shall we do with this day?" she asked him.

"What you will," he answered.

They determined on a horse-back journey to some favourite woods, with luncheon in knapsacks. They did not manage to recapture the same care-free spirit which had been theirs before Ivan Insull's visit, but they found help for the ache he had left with them, in the philosophy of trees, in the eternal fitness of bird songs, and silence.

It was a day full of silent communion. They came back from it, refreshed and renewed in spirit, just as the sun flooded the earth with a

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largesse of colour and of glory. They dined under the sky, and went into the moon-swept garden afterward.

"Moon, ah, moon, of my delight——" began Roberta, but the frantic clutch of his fingers stopped her. In her own heart she finished the couplet:

"How often in this same garden,
Look for me in vain——"

They made the rounds of all the paths, hand in hand. They sat in the midst of the calm beauty, speaking now and then, but knowing a harmony which made words but clumsy counters. It was long after midnight when they went into the house. Only once did they refer to the morrow.

"To-morrow we decide—the way?" he forced himself to ask her.

"Yes, lover, to-morrow."

They made no pretence of sleep. In the early morning he spoke gently:

"Dearest?"

She made no answer, hoping that he would rest. He rose and quietly dressed and went out. She knew that he sought strength for

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this day. She smiled. It was as she would have it.

She lay her cheek for a little in the nest his cheek had made in his pillow. Then close to her heart, where the sight of it might not offend her beloved's eyes, she pinned the little cross. She wrote a line across the page, in a book at her bedside, and she laid it open for him.

There was a sort of transcendent calm in Ashton Trask's face when he came into the room.

"Belovéd," he said to her, and yet again "Belovéd."

He went to her side, and even then he did not know, until he touched her. Beautiful, and calm, and smiling she faced him.

"Roberta," he whispered—then his eye fell on her message.

"Belovéd," he read, "I am racing toward the sun-up, but this day, I shall be on time! I love you with my whole heart and soul. 'Hold thou the lamp!'"

His eye followed to the words she marked:

Peace, my heart, let the time for parting be sweet,
Let it not be a death, but completeness.

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Let love melt into memory, and pain into songs.
Let the flight through the sky end in the folding of
wings over the nest.
Let the last touch of your hands be gentle, like the
flower of the night.
Stand still, O Beautiful End, for a moment, and say
your last words in silence.
I bow to you, and hold up my lamp to light you on
your way.

He did not cry out, he did not flinch. He looked upon her calmly, with a love which equalled her demand of him. He stood above her, so, many minutes, then he whispered:—

"Belovéd, I bow to you and hold up my lamp to light you on your way!"

THE END

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